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***The Organization of Islamic Cooperation
(OIC): Opportunities and Challenges for
Practicing Culturally-Sensitive Mediation in
Intra-Muslim Conflicts***

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is an intergovernmental organization that only comes second to the United Nations in terms of formidability. It comprises 57 member states that span four continents. The uniqueness of the OIC is reflected not only in its quantitative attributes, but also in its qualitative ones, especially since it stands as the only institutionalization of primordial aspirations for pan-Islamic unity.

Setting out the organization's *raison d'être*, the Charter adopts the goal of promoting international peace and harmony among peoples of the world. Paragraph (6) of article (1) is the foundation of the OIC's peace and security structure. It declares the organization's aim to promote inter-state relations based on the principles of justice, mutual respect, and good neighborliness; to ensure global peace, security, and harmony (OIC Charter, 1969). The operational frame of this structure is determined first by the commitment of the Member States to settle their disputes through peaceful means. Second, their abstention from the use, or the threat of use, of force in their relations (OIC Charter, 1969). Furthermore, the OIC charter devotes its entire fifteenth chapter to the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Charter calls upon the Member States to seek solutions to their conflicts through the medium of peaceful means such as "good offices, negotiations, enquiring, mediation, arbitration, conciliation and judicial settlement" (OIC Charter, 1969).

Nevertheless, the OIC region is, in fact, a war-ravaged one that is beset by severe security problems. Sixty percent of conflicts registered worldwide took place in OIC countries in 2016, which accounted for more than eighty percent of combat-related deaths worldwide (Director

General of SESRIC, 2019, P3). Moreover, this region contains many cases of conflict-related forced migration, as two-thirds of the world's refugees originate from OIC countries. In addition, eight out of the ten countries hosting the largest refugee population are OIC Member States (OIC efforts overview, 2020). Thus, the OIC is perceived as a pivotal actor to contain many world crises that originate in the MENA region, and provide the direly needed stability and order in regional and global affairs. Given the omnipresence of armed conflicts across the OIC geography, the importance of mediation as one of the most effective modes of intervention for the peaceful settlement of disputes cannot be overemphasized. Thus, conflict management and resolution should have long been at the top of the OIC's priorities agenda, especially that the economic consequences of conflicts in OIC countries are estimated at hundreds of billions of dollars—money that could have been spent on the deficient economic and social development (Director General of SESRIC, 2019, p3).

On another note, the OIC has a history of peacemaking interventions since its inception in 1969. It has taken up the task of intervening as a mediator in various conflicts, either in member states or in conflict situations where Muslims are a party (SESERIC, 2019). In this vein, it is worth noting that its intervention took various forms. In conflicts like those in Sudan, Chad, Afghanistan, Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Iraq, it successfully played the role of the mediator. Whereas, in Somalia, Mauritania, and Guinea, the OIC supported international efforts to establish peace and security and restore the rule of law.

As an international organization, the OIC subscribes to the same peaceful methods for dispute settlement established by the United Nations. Nonetheless, the many peculiarities that characterize this organization—especially its religious framework—call for an investigation into whether its idiosyncrasy is reflected in its intervention methods and mediation pattern to resolve

disputes. This paper traces how the OIC navigates its mediation mission amid this culturally-particular environment, as an organization that claims to address a particular form of interreligious relations.

1.3. Thesis Statements and Hypotheses

This study proceeds by positing potential hypotheses that may help explain why the peacemaking intervention of the OIC is not conducive to effective management and resolution of its internal conflicts. The main working hypothesis of this study is that the shared faith of Islam can still be a potent factor at play in peacemaking and reconciliation. Akbarzadeh & Zahid Ahmed contend that “common religion can no longer serve as a source of unity, as it has come to be a source of tension, due to sectarian differences among member states.” (Akbarzadeh & Ahmed, 2017, 306). Contrarily, I argue that it is rather the heavy-handed politicization of these minor identities that amplify and radicalize them to forge fractures, in divergence from the characteristic ethos of the Islamic identity, which is the only overarching, egalitarian identifier that unified these multicultural communities into one society.

I contend that the fierce geopolitical struggle that the Organization stands at the center of is a major impediment to any genuine efforts to employ the formative and cohesive potential of the common Islamic faith in service of the organization’s peacemaking mandate. These full-fledged geopolitical struggles involve not only regional but also global power poles such as: the United States, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. The determination of each power center to contain the influence of its rivalries has turned the organization into a battleground for a high-stake power struggle. In their quest to maintain their regional supremacy and stature, OIC key actors headed by Saudi Arabia and Iran continue to employ all possible means to curtail each

other's influence in the region. The OIC forum being a vital part of this strategy, has got its legitimacy as a mediator undermined.

On another level, I observed that despite all the proposals to enhance the organization's mediatory role, OIC's credibility and legitimacy as a mediator in the Muslim world had been factually inoperative. In this thesis, I argue that this has less to do with mediation capacity and more to do with the absence of an ideological compass that guides collective action. I contend that there is a lack of normative descriptors defining the essential characteristics of a member-state that associates itself with Islam, in relation to the other salient identities found within the organization. One demonstration of this ideological deficit is that the actions of the organization and its member states are far from aligned with its identity, which calls into question the credibility of the pronounced identity and objectives. Another observed demonstration is the negligence of the relevance of identity to conflict management and resolution in the Middle East and the Islamic world. This thesis attempts to show how major of a setback this is for the organization's median efforts.

Two main manifestations of such negligence are, the non-legality of mediation, and the non-forcefulness of its outcomes. Al-Ahsan's (2004) empirical study of the OIC's performance in conflict management and resolution shows that one of the main reasons for the failure of its conflict resolution endeavors was not undertaking the job of mediation according to the principle of justice (Al-Ahsan, 2004, 155).

This means that it acts as an arbitrator who judges on intra-Muslim disputes from evidence and fact-finding (Al-Ahsan, 2004, 152). Stepping back from the difficult job of judgment is a stark disregard to resources in Islamic law and traditions that regulate practices of conflict management and reconciliation in Islamic societies. As an organization that claims to owe

allegiance to Islam as an ideological source (Sheikh, 2002, 45), this thesis poses to show how this ideological belief system would infuse the OIC's approach to managing and settling disputes.

From an opposing point of view, a considerable amount of literature posited that the principle of "no-force-based mediation" is an advantageous feature that makes the OIC's mediation approach effective (Sharqieh, 2012, p. 170). This is manifested in the voluntarism to enter mediation, and that mediation occurs outside the legal frame. In addition, even the resolutions are not legally-enforceable. Nevertheless, this thesis contests this premise by arguing that the total absence of any mechanism for compelling the observance of the accepted rules of conduct is a major failure to meet standards of effectiveness and functionality. The consequences of this institutional defect are aggravated in the event of genocides, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity. In such circumstances, the OIC needs to balance the inadmissibility of intervention in states' domestic affairs and allow for a certain degree of supra-nationalism. The effective exercise of a supranational authority is fundamental to:

- deliver the internationally-honored responsibility to protect (R2P)
- enforce the Islam precept of justice
- safeguard Islam's ultimate objectives: "the inviolability of blood" and the sacrosanctity of human life.

On the one hand, commitment to the doctrine of non-interference into the internal affairs of a sovereign member state sounds theoretically well-grounded, and practically legitimate and rational. However, I posit that this doctrine is a mere political expedient designed to be attractive and instrumental rather than serving as a practical operational framework. This is evidenced by

the many breaches that have been committed by the international community, which oversteps this doctrine whenever it is expedient to do so. For instance, the United Nations paid no heed to this precept when it approved the US and its allies' invasion of Afghanistan. Moreover, the United States defiantly transgressed it when it invaded Iraq even without any such approval. In other respects, the European Union got past the phase of stopping at such a roadblock to collective action; by circumscribing national sovereignty, subjugating political autonomy, and bringing about functional integration.

Thus, the following question poses itself: why can the OIC not do the same to investigate who initially acted wrongfully in a conflict? Is it to effectively settle issues that lie at the genesis of this conflict, lest they exacerbate and break ranks? This thesis shows that the reason is not the organization dealing with things based on rigid theoretical considerations, but it is merely harnessing them as a device to attain a specific political end, namely the domestic survival of the ruling regimes of these states. This ambivalence sheds light on another demonstration of the OIC's normative malaise, which is the organization's current institutional structure and operational framework. These structures do not conform to well-defined organizing principles of a specific ideology, such as Islamic political thought, liberalism, not even conservatism, et cetera. I suppose that an operational framework compatible with a coherent set of ideas and guided by the ends of a nuanced political doctrine produces viable norms of collective action. Accordingly, the lack of it is the main reason they have not conducted to policies or regulations that serve to guide and constrain state behavior.

These structural/systemic issues that curtail the power of international organizations, which are associated with international politics being designed around state sovereignty, have been a significant area of interest within the field of international organizations. A considerable amount

of literature on institutional theory and comparative regionalism investigated factors that cause a regional institution to take a particular form rather than others. Additionally, attempts have been made to examine the effects of an institutional design on their efficacy in surmounting cooperation problems. Studies such as that conducted by Barnett and Solingen in the chapter entitled “Designed to fail or failure of designs- The origins and Legacy of the Arab League,” an empirical study that sought to determine the causes of the weak and defective institutional design of the Arab league. Their study confirms the association between the factors of ideology and identity and the design features of international organizations. Furthermore, it gives the reader an incredible grasp of how such resulting design features (as: membership, scope, formal rules, norms, and mandate) influence the efficacy of the regional institution.

On the other hand, the other explanatory factor they deduce is domestic politics (statist interests). They found that “regimes enjoying weak legitimacy fear comprising sovereignty and their own survival through establishing strongly binding regional institutions.” Consequently, they design a status quo organization, whose formal institutional structure and rules serve as an actual brake on any policy convergence and merely promote non-political activities. The secretariat of such organizations had little autonomy and discretion to challenge existing conditions or initiate any change. The findings of this study match my earlier observations about the OIC and corroborate the ideas that:

- I. The OIC’s commitment to state sovereignty is not due to international politics being designed around this legal precept. Instead, the pivotal consideration in the design of this “image-manufacturing organization”, is fortifying the legitimacy and interests of these regimes at home.
- II. The OIC’s structure and framework discredit its identity and cast aspersions on its mandate.

At the same time, this study disagrees with the attitudes expressed by Akbarzadeh & Zahid Ahmed, and Barnett and Solingen that “a shared identity (common religion in the OIC’s case) represented an obstacle to collective action rather than a means of overcoming cooperation problems, and has come to serve as a source of disunity. (Akbarzadeh & Ahmed, 2017, p306). This study aims to demonstrate that, in contrast to earlier conclusions, no evidence of operationalizing what the OIC charter calls “the noble Islamic teachings and values.” However, this result has not previously been described. I assume that an ideologically-principled approach to conflict management and resolution would be correspondent with the collective identity of the OIC’s peoples. In other words, it would be sensitive to the particularities of Islamic societies, will serve their needs and eventually help to rejuvenate the organization.

Furthermore, I propose that such a context-specific approach would avail the organization of identity-relevant norms to regulate and constrain state behavior, without breaching national sovereignty and other principles it commits itself with. Despite the chronic instability of this region’s regimes and borders, the state system is designed to last, having gained the strength and endurance that make its rescission or demise inconceivable in the foreseeable future.

Accordingly, bringing into play the salience of values pertinent to honor and shame would be a rational, nonviolent way to pressure an aggressor, or deter a wrongdoer who threatens to foment inter-sectarian discord. My approach to culture these arguments is to acknowledge the cultural diversity of the OIC region, and the existence of countless subcultures. This makes the classification of those widely varying Muslim societies under a single socio-cultural rubric paradoxical. Withal, there are salient “core themes” in Muslim cultures that are share with Eastern cultures, broadly speaking. These common themes differentiate Muslim societies (and faith-based communities at large) from Western societies’ inherent cultural assumptions.

These themes are as: Social orientation toward collectivism rather than individualism, and prevalence of face concerns (Avruch, 2009, P. 2). Following on from this are distinctions in communication style and social organization (hierarchical/egalitarian) (Avruch, 2009, P. 2). All of which crucially affect aspects of negotiation, trust-building, commitment making, imperatives of justice, requirements for open exchange of information, preference for “insider-partial” or “outsider-neutral” third parties, and lastly, possibilities for enduring reconciliation. Against this backdrop, I suggest that the great weight socially-assigned to norms associated with honor and shame -if utilized- would prevent great atrocities and destruction in the OIC countries without violating the principle of non-interference to which the organization is faithful. This would conduce to honoring the organization’s mandate to guard against the disruption of the security and solidarity of the Islamic states.

The literature has concentrated -as a rule- on the inherent contradiction between the Islamic doctrines and those of the international system. This study explores ways to reconcile this perennial conundrum that occupied researchers and practitioners; so that the OIC can play an impactful role and enact its peculiar resources within the United Nations system.

For long decades, scholars, ideologues, and thinkers concentrated on the inherent contradiction between Islamic principles and the fundamentals of the international system. Thus, article two of the OIC charter, which juxtaposes “the Islamic teachings and values” with international system principles (independence, sovereignty, and non-interference), seems paradoxical. This ideological and operational oxymoron, embedded in the genesis of the OIC, is at the core of its plague. This study’s ultimate contribution is to explore ways to reconcile this perennial conundrum that occupied researchers and practitioners. It suggests the engagement of religious agents as a soft power that can act supranationally to generate positive trends towards

conflict prevention and mechanisms for peacemaking. All while leaving the outer layers of the national systems intact, namely territorial integrity and state regime. Recently the OIC officials and directors have grown aware of the centrality of identity, culture, and norms to peacemaking and conflict resolution. Several conferences, sessions, and resolutions have advocated -what they termed- “culturally-sensitive mediation techniques.” They prescribed building capacity in these techniques to prevent and resolve conflicts (OIC/CFM-47, 2020). This call gained more momentum from the outcomes of the Second OIC Member States Conference on Mediation in Istanbul, which highlighted the changing nature of conflicts.

The conference pointed out that most of the conflicts across the OIC geography are not interstate conflicts, but internationalized internal conflicts (The Second OIC Member States Conference on Mediation, 2018). This kind of disputes tends to mostly be over intangible matters, couched in either religious or ethnic terms, and has to do with identity politics. The “School of Culture of Pau” 2021 report on conflicts, human rights, and peacebuilding corroborated this account as a global trend that continued into 2021. The report characterized this armed conflict trend as “The continuous and organized use of violence, to achieve objectives related to the seizure or administration of territory\resources\policies (Milián et al., 2021, P8).”

For instance:

1. the right to self-determination, autonomy, secession, or identity-related aspirations\claims
2. opposition to the internal or international policies; or to the political, social or ideological state system as a whole which in both triggers (Milián et al., 2021, P. 8-9)

The problem lies in the existing conflict management and resolution mechanisms geared toward addressing interstate conflicts (The Second OIC Member States Conference on

Mediation, 2018). Ironically, however, the summary report of this conference suggests that to match the capacity of the OIC with the reality on the ground, the OIC should make partnerships with regional organizations that have the relevant experience, such as the OSCE (The Second OIC Member States Conference on Mediation, 2018). In contrast, this study assumes that the OIC has assigned greater weight to partnerships with the United Nations—with international organizations generally—in peacemaking efforts. It sought guidance in the internationally-acclaimed frameworks, at the expense of religious traditions and resources for understanding modes of conflict management and reconciliation. Yet, such partnerships with international organizations have not always been fruitful.

1.3. Research Questions

By using the insights of the constructivist and post-structuralist approaches to international relations, this study seeks to analyze the OIC's approach and practice of conflict management and resolution. More specifically, this study aims to investigate two related problems, namely:

1. The first one, with reference to its broad mandate, has the OIC's religious foundation been reflected in its approach to conflict management and resolution?

Other sub-questions to be explored in relation to this issue are:

- A. How is faith-based mediation conceptualized in terms of operations, rubrics, and percepts?

- B. How did the organization outline its context-specific approach to intervention?
Does the organization provide a framework for tackling elements of faith, creed, and spirituality? Does it engage religious actors?
 - C. This research problem is to be investigated by analyzing the recently-developed OIC's *Mediators Guideline "Code of Conduct," Focusing on Culturally Sensitive Mediation Approaches*. This guideline was developed in response to a resolution entitled "Strengthening the Mediation Capacity of the OIC," which was adopted by the latest two sessions of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) (SESRIC, 2019).
2. With reference to the actual performance of the OIC in conflict management and resolution, Do OIC interventions in conflict settings rely explicitly on its moral clout and cultural influence, or do they rest –instead- on more conventional power mechanisms for conflict management and resolution (involving the exercise of political clout and economic pressure)?

Other related sub-questions to be explored in relation to this issue are:

- A. Do the power dynamics of the organization interfere with the dynamics of its mediation process?
- B. What role or set of roles do OIC mediators assume in conflicts with a strong religious component?
- C. How effective have these interventions been, and to what extent can their effectiveness (or lack thereof) be linked to the OIC's reliance on a specific mediation strategy?

1.3. Literature Review

The existing body of literature on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation tends to provide a historical overview of the OIC, its genesis, and its activities. Other works analyze and evaluate cases in which the OIC participated in mediation efforts. This might seem as if the OIC has received much scholarly attention, but the reality is that the OIC remains not adequately studied.

This study aims to contribute to the literature by providing an assessment of the effect of this peculiar organization's salient characteristics on its mediation method and outcome. Although previous research has underlined the importance of context-based mediation and touched upon the advantages of shared identity in mediation situations, the role of Islamic identity, how it is accommodated, and how it plays out in twenty-first-century peacebuilding has not been empirically examined.

A big part of this is due to the absence of religion and religious actors in mainstream politics, in addition to the prevalence of scholarship on its role in igniting violence. The following section will provide definitions of relevant themes and elaborate on their central debates.

What is the OIC?

The organization of Islamic Cooperation, previously known as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, is the second largest intergovernmental organization after the UN. It was founded in 1969, with the membership of 57 member states. It is headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and has regional offices in New York, Geneva, Brussels, Iraq, Kabul, and Indonesia.

The organization proclaims that it is “the collective voice of the Muslim world” and works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international

peace and harmony” (OIC, 1969). The OIC system consists of the following structure: (OIC, 1969)

1. Islamic Summit
2. Council of Foreign Ministers
3. Standing Committees
4. Executive Committee
5. International Islamic Court of Justice
6. Independent Permanent Commission of Human Rights
7. Committee of Permanent Representatives
8. General Secretariat
9. Subsidiary Organs
10. Specialized Institutions
11. Affiliated Institutions

Scholarly literature has approached the Organization of Islamic Cooperation from several angles. To begin with, some literature refers to the primordial yearning for Islamic transnationalism that persisted in religious-political history (Sheikh, 2002, 45) and hail the OIC as the primary institutional form of such global norms (Sheikh, 2002, 45; Kayaoglu, 2015, 12). Speaking of the idiosyncrasies of the OIC, the literature has pointed to both the qualitative and the quantitative peculiarities. Qualitatively, the OIC is distinctive in multiple ways. First, exemplifies a case in which religious identity was used as an organizational principle for international politics. Some scholars, in fact, argued that its form of corporate identity is antithetical to the epistemological foundations of Western modernity (Sheikh, 2003, p. 20). Another distinctive feature is the organization’s position in relation of global governance, as

an organization that spans across four continents it cannot be classified as a regional nor a universal organization either (Sheikh, 2002, 45; Kayaoglu, 2015, 1).

Quantitative parameters highlight other key aspects of the peculiar nature of the OIC. Population estimates from 2011 report by the Washington-based Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life states that the OIC represents 23.4% of the world's total population of 6.9 billion (Hossain, 2012, 294), surpassing the combined populations of Europe, Russia, & North America (Sheikh, 2002, p46) and making it the second largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations (Hossain, 2012, p296). Furthermore, the organization's aggregate domain. It comprises an enormous territory approximated to be quarter of the global landmass (Sheikh, 2002, p46). Also, it controls the strategic waterways and straits in the world, and possesses an aggregate of more than 75% of world oil reserves (Hossain, 2012, p294) All of which give the organization extraordinary political potential.

Apart from its organizational credentials, the OIC has been discussed by several authors from different analytical angles. Naveed Sheikh, for instance, argues that the OIC is an arena rather than a monolith actor in international relations, where the geopolitical interests of member states are cloaked the mantle of Islamic legitimacy, rather than being bound by any "Islamic rationale" (Sheikh, 2003, 129). When it comes to the origin of the organization, different authors stressed different factors. Akbarzadeh notes how the convention of the first OIC summit came as a defensive reaction to the arson attack on Al-Aqsa Mosque, which brought Muslims together in condemnation of this aggression (Akbarzadeh & Connor, 2005, 80).

One the one hand, Kayaoglu holds that the summit achieved success in uniting the Islamic countries despite their deep political, ideological, national, sectarian, and economic cleavages (Kayaoglu, 2015, p15). On the other hand, Naveed Sheikh contends that the

Palestinian cause was not more than a contingent cause that shrouds the intra-Islamic power politics that underlies the *raison d'être* of the OIC. He puts forth a narrative of the first instance of the instrumentalization of Islam as a strategic tool by its member states in the context of what he termed the “inter-Islamic cold war” (Sheikh, 2003, p138). King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, in his rivalry with Nasser’s Egypt, resorted to pan-Islamic ideals as a legitimizing counter-strategy to contain pan-Arab radicalism (Sheikh, 2002, p47).

In both his article and his book, Sheikh argues that the OIC’s appeal to a pan-Islamic rhetoric conceals self-interested agendas. Those who have convened in the first summit in Rabat voiced their will to entrust the organization with achieving unity and enhancing Islamic solidarity. However, they turned their back at any commitment to politico-religious unification and opted for crafting a watered-down, nebulous charter that avoided upholding a principled ideology (Sheikh, 2003, p38). With regards to its role and tasks, Akbarzadeh maintains that the founding of the OIC in response to the Zionist aggression on Al-Aqsa holy site caused the OIC to operate with a defensive mindset in international politics (Akbarzadeh & Connor, 2005, 80). But Ishtiaq Hossainout offers a counter argument claiming that “the OIC demonstrated to the world that its establishment was not merely a defensive reaction on the part of the Islamic countries”. He marks the adoption of Makkah Declaration of 1981 as a turning point having expanded the organization’s activities and underlined its interest in strengthening the economic and commercial cooperation among the member-states. (Hossain, 2012, p294)

However, this expansion of roles remains unsubstantial and the OIC remains “purely a defensive construction” (Sheikh, 2003, p37). In this respect, Naveed Sheikh lists several exogenous and endogenous structural constraints on intra-Islamic integration. Among them is the

American bilateral relations with member states and its deep involvement in the Islamic world, that shape the Muslim polities into a competitive arena and inhibit intra-Islamic cooperation. In addition to the absence of common institutions, common ideology, common interests and influential leadership. The principal policy outcome is what he terms “impolicy” or a “paralysis, mistaken for a policy” (Sheikh, 2003, p104).

International Organizations as Mediators

Literature on international organizations applied several theories to understand the role of IOs as actors in the international system. Abbott & Snidal discuss the reasons why states resort to international organizations as vehicles for cooperation and associate them with these organizations’ “functional features” (Abbott & Snidal, 1998, p4). These features are the centralization of collective activity and the capacity of these organizations to act with a degree - although limited- of autonomy and neutrality. This endows legitimacy upon either collective or individual actions, which in turn increases their effectiveness (Abbott & Snidal, 1998, p4). This then explains why states subordinate their sovereignty and circumscribe their capacity for unilateral action; states as rational actors, that assess their actions according to cost-benefit calculations, would form such organizations when the functional expediency of these organizations surpasses the sovereignty costs they entail.

Sharyn O’Halloran argues along the same line of reasoning, as she elaborates further on the question of why states delegate some of their powers and authority to IOs. She ascribes this to these states’ set goal of moving policy away from the status quo toward some targeted ideal points in some policy spheres or issue areas (O’Halloran, 2008, p81). Keohane, 1984 also refers to IOs function of providing information and lowering transaction costs, while

Risse-Kappen, 1996 highlights how they bring states to socialize, all of which compels interstate cooperation that is the *raison d'être* of international organizations (Shannon, 2009, p148).

On the other hand, Hawkins et al. used the principal-agent (P-A) theory to analyze the agency relationship inherent in the operation of IOs. They expound on how states (as the principals) tend to constrain delegation relationship to international organizations (i.e., the agent); to limit the agency losses they incur from these agents' independent actions (Hawkins et al., 2006). Literature on international organizations exhibits divergent theories about IOs' influence on conflict prevention, management and resolution. Mearsheimer (1995) expounds the realist argument that IOs do not have influence on members' behavior. This argument would resonate powerfully with the case of the OIC as an organization that is replete with inter-members conflicts, fails to produce minimal convergence of interests, or to compel alignment with its rules of and norms.

But Shannon makes a strong case for a positive correlation between IO membership and peaceful conflict management -to say the least. Seeking collective action, IOs have a vested interest in assisting members to settle their disputes peacefully, to avoid the stoppage of production of collective goods (Shannon, 2009, p148). Besides, by encouraging bargaining between their members, IOs transform members' behavior into leaning towards managing their grievances peacefully, likewise. (Shannon, 2009, p148). mandate peaceful relations within their ranks peacefully (Shannon, 2009, p148)

From a game-theory analysis viewpoint, international cooperation is a solution to a prisoner's dilemma. For instance, Robert Keohane perceives IOs as solutions to coordination problems which states are unable to solve by means of bilateral agreements (Keohane, 1984).

As for how international organizations mediate, and mitigate a conflict, one can argue that the organizational attributes of centralization and independence make possible certain functions in the contexts of interstate cooperation and conflict. This is better understood by looking at how Hawking et al. defined the attribute of agent's autonomy, as the potential independent actions the agent can take contrary to the principal's interests, after the principal has put in place mechanisms to control the agent's behavior (Hawkins et al., 2006, p8).

This margin of independence that allows IO to pursue its own interests contrary to the principal's; entails IOs' capacity to operate as a neutral party in managing interstate disputes and conflict (Abbott & Snidal, 1998, p5). It gives IOs the legitimacy to mediate among states in contested interactions, and to undertake specific functions from fact-finding and other forms of preventive diplomacy, through dispute resolution and peacekeeping to securing post-conflict stability (Abbott & Snidal, 1998, p19).

Another advantage of IOs in managing intrastate affairs (in both their cooperative or conflictual patterns) is the centralization benefits they provide. An established organizational structure provides a stable negotiating forum, and support for direct state interaction. While a centralized administrative system can render collective activities more efficient (Abbott & Snidal, 1998, p10). Moreover, an established organization gives IOs the capacity to function on short notice in a fast response to sudden and urgent developments (Abbott & Snidal, 1998, p10). Against this background, it becomes possible to conceptualize the link between mediation and international organizations. When it comes to the role of IOs as mediators, these actors' capacity to employ and perform different modes of intervention than state mediators is a highlight. Intervention methods include the facilitative kind of intervention, an IO operates as an "honest

broker”, proposes terms of settlement, and provides services of good offices, mediation, conciliation, and fact-finding to resolve interstate disputes (Abbott & Snidal, 1998, p22).

In addition to the binding style of intervention, in which IOs act in their capacity to issue legally-binding decisions to bring parties to the negotiating tables and make their bargaining positions more reasonable. An exemplary mechanism of this type of intervention is arbitration (Abbott & Snidal, 1998, p22). In her investigation of the relationship between international organizations and peaceful conflict management, Shannon draws an important link between the type of the international organization and their capacity to mitigate the chances of conflict and to compel peaceful settlement of disputes among its members. She argues that purely functional organizations whose role is the facilitation of cooperation in particular areas, are not likely to enforce the management of rarely-negotiated, intractable grievances, as territorial disputes. She attributes this to their area of activity being “low politics”; as opposed to matters of national and international security (Shannon, 2009, p148).

Therefore, this makes us question what kind of conflicts the OIC is better equipped to meddle in? As a functional organization that still mandates the peaceful settlement of conflicts in its Charter, is it equipped to mediate territorial disputes, secessionist armed insurgencies, ethnic/civil strives, incited violence by external spoilers, or legal disputes (as in disputes over the uses of international watercourses, diplomatic protection, treaty obligations), ... so forth. Samuel Amoo and William Zartman add to this another quintessential aspect to be considered when approaching the case of mediation by an international organization (Shannon, 2009, p150). These organizations are a conglomeration of sovereign states, which puts them in a difficult, sensitive position with respect to mediating inter-member state conflicts.

It faces many complicated questions whether reconciling parties to a conflict is worth the risk. Whether to mediate or to take sides? Whether to sit in neutrality or to take up an active mediatory role?. When it comes to decision-making, it is not an actor called the organization that has made the decision, but the organization's sovereign member states (Bercovitch et al., 1992, p131). Here appears the non-altruistic motives of these organization, as "the decision made by these organizations will be based on the sum of the members' self-interests combined with their judgment between two conflicting interests for the self-preservation of the organization". Mediation takes place when member states see it in their interest to do so rather than taking sides or staying neutral Regional organizations undertake to mediate when they see it in their interest to do so rather than taking sides or staying neutral (Bercovitch et al., 1992, p132). These self-interested mediation calculations made by these organizations give rise to a potentially divisive political agenda. It also makes mediation decisions up to the changes in the alignment of forces within the organization. The main question here is, can the common Islamic values serve as a viable foundation to unite the OIC members as a norm of operation rather than the divisive self-interests?

Multiparty Mediation

Intervention in contemporary intractable conflicts involve multiple third party actors of different types and characters – ranging from states to intergovernmental organizations (international and regional) as well as non-governmental entities. Scholarly literature has paid specific attention to this phenomenon, as the overlap of third-party intervention endeavors can make or break the peacemaking process. Crocker et al. tackles the issue of multilaterality of mediation on a theoretical and conceptual level, examining the assets and liabilities that determine the success or failure of multilateral conflict resolution efforts. Pinfari casts a spotlight

on multilateral mediation activities at a regional level. assessing the role of interregional coordination and competition in conflict resolution (Pinfari, 2013; p84). The unsuccessful cases of multiparty mediation in Fuchinoue's study (Former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Somalia) along with (the case of the peace process in Somalia and the conflict in Darfur) in Pinfari's study both show the negative impact of non-cooperative patterns of conflict resolution activities.

Despite the assertion in the literature on the need for stronger coordination to enhance the elaborates further on this assertion, effective multiparty intervention is not a matter of merely institutional frameworks. Coordinating an effective multiparty mediation is not achieved by figuring common positions or forming joint missions. On the contrary, a coherent political strategy must be actively built (Crocker et al., 2001, p65). The observations that Pinfari makes in his study concerning the case of Afro-Arab cooperation supports this line of argument. Despite having an organizational framework for cooperation in place, and the availability of political will for coordination, the emergent institutional framework was weak (Pinfari, 2013; p95).

The AU and the AL engaged in explicit “formalized coordination” of mediation efforts as in the cases of Comoros (1997), Ethiopia-Somalia (2006), and Darfur (2003) (Pinfari, 2013; p91,93) . However such concerted effort did not yield categorical diplomatic success. At best, it limited the forum shopping behavior, and partly provided a propitious environment for furthering the peacemaking activities. According to Crocker et al., What was missing was building a coherent political strategy – a strategy that builds support, mobilizes persuasive and dissuasive resources, and diminishes the possibility that other stakeholders and outsiders will undermine the peace process in service of their agendas (Crocker et al., 2001, p65). Such a strategy will eventually converge warring parties and other third parties, all around a shared vision of life after a political settlement (Crocker et al., 2001, p65).

Modes of Mediation:

Kolb (1983) defined mediation strategy as the mediator's overall plan to manage the case, the issue, and the parties to achieve a specific end or outcome (Kolb, 1983, P. 249). Bercovich (1992) contends that mediation strategy is the one aspect of mediation that must be grasped if effectiveness is to be enhanced.

In the modern world, actors who are in the position to get involved in dispute resolution activities are various; nevertheless, they all operate within a system of interaction and influence (Bercovich & Rubin, 1992, p. 18). This system does not take place in abstraction but rather- in a medium of interests and resources, perceptions, and (ex)implicit rules and norms, that can be colligated under mediation determinants.

Mediators, be they state or non-state actors, unitary or composite, work to influence, change or modify these system parameters (Bercovich & Rubin, 1992, P.15). In this sense, the first step to making sense of mediation modes, is to understand that mediation is not an arbitrary endeavor; merely a function of the mediator's personality, resources, or communication style. The practice of mediation is a subject of systematic approaches.

Lanz et al. subsumed the main modes of mediation into three broad strategies that operate according to different concepts, with a view to divergent goals (Lanz et al., 2008. P.7): power-based, interest-based, and transformative mediation. These above-mentioned approaches display the strategic aspect of mediation; they are one prong of mediation conduct.

The other prong is the mediator's behavior and tactics. Kolb describes tactics as: the behavioral specifics of strategy (Kolb, 1983, P. 249). So, mediation strategies are consistent overall patterns, but differences still emerge and can be observed in the implementation; due to variations in how different mediators conduct themselves (Bercovich & Lee, 2001). This implies

that the mediation procedure and practice are largely influenced by mediators' discretion regarding how to approach the specific conflict context and navigate the process; in other words, their choice of strategic behavior (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000, P.174).

The proliferation of actors in the international arena has engendered greater and greater variability of political actors capable of undertaking mediation efforts. Each type of actor may embark on multiple styles and activities, which gives a wide range of mediation behavior. Many scholars have taken up the daunting endeavor to create taxonomies for the various styles in which mediators operate when they get involved in a conflict. This essential part of the literature was the steppingstone toward analyzing how different patterns of intervention behavior lead to divergent outcomes.

The most useful kind of taxonomy for intervention behavior is the one that can be found in (Bercovitch 1992; Bercovitch & Houston, 2000; Wall & Lynn, 1993; Bercovitch & Lee, 2001) It comprises the full inventory of mediation behavior in three fundamental mediator tactics, in ascending order of the intensity of third-party involvement: communication-facilitative, formulation-procedural, and manipulation-directive strategies.

There is a contention in the literature regarding the best way to ensure a peace deal. This debate split scholars into a binary: one sees that this calls for employing more coercive strategies, and the other sees a need to, essentially, cultivate the parties' ownership of the peace agreement. Burton and Dukes (1990) are advocates of "pure mediation"; they argue against the use of leverage and coercion by mediators; in opposition, Touval (1982) and Carnevale (2002) advocate the term "power mediation," to which leverage and coercion are central concepts (Eriksson, 2019, P. 389).

Remarkably, the third group of scholars exhibited a middle line of thought, arguing for the divergent sources of power and influence, by which a mediator can leverage disputants in different contexts. Those scholars include Rubin (1992), Touval and Zartman (2001), as well as Heemsbergen and Siniver (2011), who maintain that the dichotomy mentioned above obscures a host of power types in mediation (Eriksson, 2019, P. 390). This later squad agrees with power mediation advocates on the need for exercising -some sort of- power as an integral part of the mediation practice; they redefine power and clout withal.

Rubin maintains that effective intervention hinges on the successful exercise of influence, which is contingent on “the judicious application of some kind of interpersonal power.” (Rubin, 1992, P. 254) This approach seems most cogent; rather than speaking about power in absolute terms, it is rather oriented toward influence, the efficient and judicious deployment of –a suitable form of- power.

The third group’s approach to mediation is based on assumptions derived from French and Raven’s (1959) taxonomy of social power, where they conceptualize it on a continuum from the material to the socio-psychological (Eriksson, 2019, P. 390). That framework lists six different resources of interpersonal power that influence the behavior of others: reward, coercion, expertise, legitimacy, reference (mediator’s valuable relationship vis-a-vis the recipients, linked to charisma, prestige, status, et cetera.), and information. (Rubin, 1992, P. 255; Carnevale, 2002, p.28; Touval and Zartman, 1985).

With reference to the three main mediation models that Lanz et al. classified, each of them makes use of a different kind of power and behavioral tactic. If mediation is about changing or influencing a dispute or the disputants - which of course, it is - then the possession and use of

different resources can be postulated to account for the differences in mediation behavior we find below.

In a power-based, deal-brokering mediation strategy, mediators deploy hard power, e.g., coercive power, and reward power (Carnevale, 2002, p. 28; Touval and Zartman, 1985) as a carrot and a stick to coerce the parties to make a deal. Mediators in this strategy aim to effect a change in the parties' behavior and to provide input into an appropriate settlement (Bercovich, 1992, P. 22); consequently, they direct the process resolutely and use manipulative tactics.

In interest-based, problem-solving mediation, mediators are concerned with the quality of interaction. They aim to be instrumental in improving the atmosphere of negotiations, and promote ownership of the process by the parties -as a basis for conflict resolution (Lanz et al., 2008, P.10). Thus, they employ a more communicational-facilitative behavioral tactic, which helps the parties generate creative options for a settlement, that satisfy their underlying interests. (Lanz et al., 2008, P.10)

Transformative, long-term mediation. In this model, mediators seek to transform, amend, or restore the relationship between the parties. They intervene on multiple levels to change the adversaries' perceptions of themselves and each other. According to this logic, conflict resolution is a long-term process of relationship building, strengthening the social fabric, restoration/transformation of social capital, and cultivating creative pathways to peaceful change (Cullen & Forman, 1998, P. 8).

There is extensive controversy in the literature over how to increasing social cohesion and trust amid adverse conditions in conflict-torn societies, which issues are most critical for civil society (human rights, transitional justice, health, politico-economic reform or else), the empowerment and recognition of which actors, in addition to the nature of this process.

Overall, mediators adopting this approach employ tactics rooted in cognitive psychology (Lanz et al., 2008, P.10), assuming that the deficit of social capital is rooted in the psychological profile of the society (Cullen & Forman, 1998, P. 9). Carnevale (2002) lists some tactics relevant to this kind of strategy, as image tactics, momentum tactics, and relational tactics (Vukovic, 2014, P. 8).

Be that as it may, the choice of either mode of intervention needs to be concomitant with an equally well-thought choice of the timing of that intervention. While the literature on peaceful settlement of disputes accords considerable weight to the choice of strategic mediation behavior, the relevant literature also shows that another equally requisite key is the time for resolution efforts (Zartman, 2000, P. 8). Time is a concept of absolute essentiality for diplomacy at large (Zartman, 2000, P. 8).

The main theories of conflict intervention postulate that conflicts have their own cycle, and that bringing the parties voluntarily to the mediation process with a high potential for success, is realized at “a time of ripeness.” This concept is decided by the parties' perception of a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS) (Zartman, 2001, 228). This perception is associated with an imminent, dreaded catastrophe (Touval and Zartman, 1985, P. 258-60), and pathways to achieving unilateral gains are blocked. The situation then constitutes an uncomfortable and costly predicament (Zartman, 2001, 8)

Notwithstanding, many studies offer considerable evidence that a host of other conditions can compel the parties in a conflict to accept mediation, which does not involve conventional material interests. For instance, the appeal and acceptability of the mediator, the shared acknowledgment of a particular form of power (moral, ideological, ideational, religious, social)

affords the mediator legitimacy, credibility, and various bases of influence on the disputing parties' decisions.

Insights from such studies suggest that a third-party's perceived neutrality and resolution to bring about inclusive justice and peace, can encourage the contenders to come to the table and express their grievances. In this case, his stature and weight in conflict societies can guarantee his capability to persuade the parties with the interdependency of their goals and fate. These factors can also guarantee the intervenor's ability to sustain the process, and hold the parties accountable concerning their promises.

The following sections explore different bases for such influence.

The function of Identity in Mediation

Siniša Malešević conceptualizes identity as “the collective expression of group sameness.” This conceptualization closely captures what identity represents in Islamic communities with their collectivistic -rather than individualistic- culture (Malešević, 2013, p2). In the context of this study, this definition is in a complementary relationship with the conception of ideology as “a system of beliefs which comprise a distinct worldview, decisive in the creation and preservation of specific collective identities” (Malešević 2011; 2006; Barker 2001; Garry 1992; Malešević, 2013, 2). In these definitions, ideology and collective identity are conceived as “powerful social forces” able to shape the behavior of individuals and instill an inclination in them to act in favor of the collective set of values, in a departure from the pragmatic, utilitarian, self-interested rational dominant in individualistic cultures.

Religion is intertwined with people's identity, and is a constituent agent of "their sense of who they are" (Greil & Davidman, 2007, 534). Greeley (1972) and McGuire (1992) attribute to religion the function of the "provision of meaning and belonging" (Greil & Davidman, 2007, 534). Similarly, in his "Sociology of Religion," Durkheim assigns to identity the role of shaping communal ritual (Greil & Davidmwan, 2007, 534). This is particularly true and manifest in the Muslim case. Mohammad Asad attests to Muslims' feeling of a common identity and the sense of allegiance to the Islamic Ummah among different peoples. He claims that, in contrast to racial, ethnic, and national affiliations, "we Muslims regard an ideological community – a community of people having a definite outlook on life and definite scale of moral values in common – as the highest form of nationhood to which man can aspire" (ASad, 1961, 96)

As far as this thesis is concerned, "identity" is approached primarily as a tool at play in so-called *faith-based* peace processes, in which religion is utilized as an instrument to resolve conflicts. This study operationalizes faith-based peace processes as resting on any of the following activities:

- Applying religious principles (e.g. prescriptions and teachings) to conflict resolution;
- Deploying religious actors (individuals, leaders, or faith-based organizations) who work under religious guidance;
- Incorporating religious, (e.g. Islamic) cultural practices, customs and traditions in peacemaking;
- Disseminating knowledge and experiences of religious and customary conflict resolution and reconciliation in religious contexts

Bakaki et al. identify a shared identity in mediation situations as based on "common norms, expectations and values", that form a connection between the parties; which makes it more likely that they agree on a common norm of conflict resolution" (Bakaki et al., 2015m p495). They cite

Hopmann's (1996) assertion on the existence of cultural heritage (i.e. values and beliefs) that inform all aspects of negotiations and shape nations' conception of resolution processes (Bakaki et al., 2015m p. 495).

Another role of identity in the mediation process is that it either facilitates or hampers the coordination between antagonists, as a shared identity between belligerents means similar conflict styles, similar negotiation styles, and similar perceptions of interests. All of which make it easier to find common ground (Bakaki et al., 2015m p495). This increases the likelihood that the parties communicate, negotiate, and agree on some standards, such as the norm of conflict resolution or who is the third-party that they consent to his intervention.

From another angle, common identity between the belligerents and the mediator lessens chances of misunderstanding as well as the coordination costs. Actors, then, are more able to negotiate terms of a peace agreement; increasing the chances of successful negotiation outcomes (Bakaki et al., 2015m p 493). Bercovitch and Kadayifci supports the argument by Bakaki et al by focusing on the relevance of mediator identity for the mediation process. They study the involvement of a particular type of mediators they term, "faith-based actors", focusing on the unique characteristics, resources, and strategies they bring to the table (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, p).

In an earlier study, Bercovich had found that effective mediation requires consent, high motivation, and active participation (Bercovitch 2007, p172). Whereas in his joint study with Kadayifci, Bercovitch expounded a powerful argument on how faith-based mediators check these boxes. They acknowledge the impact of faith-based actors in mediation, mediating between conflicting parties, mobilizing people; changing attitudes and negative stereotypes; challenging

traditional structures that perpetuate structural violence; and re-humanizing the “enemy” using religious values like justice for all, forgiveness, harmony, human dignity. (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, p187). Furthermore, Bercovitch (1992) suggests that the choice of strategies by the different mediators in different conflicts is associated with two major factors: the nature of the conflict and the resources and interests of the mediator (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000, p174)

When it comes to the nature of the conflict, the importance of the identity element becomes more prominent against the backdrop of the proliferation of ethno-religious conflicts in the OIC countries, which necessitates further study on the role of identity in peacemaking. SESERIC 2019 report illustrates that the overall majority of conflicts recorded in OIC countries were:

1. internationalized internal armed conflict – occurring between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) with intervention from other states (secondary parties) on one or both sides (either directly or by proxy)
2. internal conflicts, in which armed groups engaged in a violent struggle to bring about a change to the system. The distinct motivation of the armed groups’ active in OIC countries, that tends to distinguish them from those active elsewhere in the world, is that they are largely motivated by the desire to establish a new political system based on their distinctive understanding of Islam. (Farasin, 2019, p25)

Bercovitch & Houston affirms the fact of the preponderance of internationalized conflicts and attest to its applicability on the scale of international system (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000, p177). In contrast to interstate conflicts, what characterizes this kind of conflicts, is the core

issues around which they revolve. In this case, the matters at stake in a dispute are more of a subjective and emotional nature such as identity and ethnicity, as opposed to conflicts over tangible issues like territory, independence, or resources that can be purchased or divided between the parties (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000, p177). The conflict behavior of the disputants herein is defined with the arousal of sentiments of resent, and distrust. Added to the denial of the legitimacy of the other party in the dispute, all of this renders negotiation and mediation especially difficult (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000, p177).

Thus, the mostly subjective nature of the points of contention in the disputes ravaging the OIC countries, is very telling of what mediator belligerents are likely to accept. What do they expect from intervention? What kind of intervention behavior parties to such conflicts might expect? This is what Bercovitch & Houston tackle in another worthwhile study, in which they examine the questions of how best to mediate or which factors affect the choice of mediator and the choice of a mediation strategy (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000). They argue that the above considerations are what must guide the mediation behavior. In such conflicts, the mediator must be opting for strategies that build confidence between the parties to bring about some degree of mutual recognition and convergence of interests. (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000, p). This begs the question of how could the OIC mediate this wide-spread pattern of internal conflicts, without investigation to find out who initiated the conflict by transgressing or misbehaving? How could a benign atmosphere of mutual trust and respect be built without excluding spoilers and holding the aggressor to account?

Assumably, the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of a country should not obstruct a diplomatic measure like fact-finding, nor the pursuit of arbitration. Likewise, fully utilizing the moral power that the OIC possesses is, the least, to force the implementation of

resolutions. An enactment of the Quranic principle of justice and equity is probably what member countries appeal for in the OIC's mediation. For instance, the Iranian demand for investigation into the conflict with Iraq in 1991 (Al-Ahsan, 2004, p 152) could be interpreted as an example of a conflict party's expectations from an Islamic self-proclaimed organization; a normative/legalistic mediation that reflects Islamic norms. Failure to deliver on this mandate as an intervenor features as a strong reason for the decline in the degree of trust, credibility, and legitimacy Muslim disputing parties - and common Muslims- have come to place in the ability of the OIC to intervene. Therefore, Bercovitch and Kadayifci considers mediation strategies (in particular mediator behavior and performance) as the determining factors for the success of mediation efforts. In turn, these also tend to be a specific asset of religious actors (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, p182).

Motivated and guided by their spiritual and religious traditions, principles, and values, religious leaders often undertake peace work, incorporating religious texts, rituals, and customs as strategies of mediation (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, p185). The authors hail faith-based actors' capacity to approach mediation holistically, combining the three mediation strategies. Their approach is also a comprehensive approach that recognizes the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of the parties, and addresses them along with the material needs. By integrating religious and spiritual instruments they are able to resolve root causes of conflicts by means of creating empathy, forgiveness and understanding between the conflicting parties to transform and repair conflictual relationships. This motivates parties towards an agreement (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, p192).

Another attribute the authors point to is legitimacy. A legitimate mediator differs from a conflict situation to another. What gives the mediator more credibility and legitimacy is

determined by who the parties are, the contested issues (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, p186). They contend that religious actors are often considered trustworthy actors by the parties. They are cultural-insider mediators equipped with better understanding of the disputants' conceptions of reality and how they think. Besides, they have knowledge of the history and the traditions of the parties, in addition to their awareness with the material and emotional needs of their communities. Added to being held in high regard, this endows them with moral and spiritual legitimacy to affect public opinion (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009, p187). Johnstone & Svensson highlight another advantageous important aspect of religion, as a tool in the conflict resolution kit; that is its transnationality. Religion -in contrast to nationalism- serves to connect different peoples beyond national boundaries. Many faith-based actors\ institutions have an international character, which increases their opportunities to get a preferential access to belligerents in conflicts. (Johnstone & Svensson, 2013, p561).

Thomas Princen, on another hand, brings up a counter argument when he analyses mediation cases by the Vatican. He argues that Pope's capacity to influence state leaders has nothing to do with neither Catholicism nor the states leaders' religious loyalties (Bercovitch et al., 1992, p150). In his pursuit to corroborate this argument he investigates why the Pope's intervention succeeded in halting Argentina and Chile's slide toward war in 1978 and failed to do so in the Falklands / Malvinas crisis between Argentina and Great Britain? (Bercovitch et al., 1992, p157). He contends that moral authority is no adequate explanation of his ability to stop a war or to influence states' leaders. Otherwise, Popes' letters urging a peaceful resolution of the Beagle Channel dispute, and the Pope's mediation proposal would not have been outrightly ignored. To explain the failure of these interventions he resorts to assessing them according to Neustadt's five factors that produce self-executing orders. Then, he deduces that the Pope's

capacity to intervene successfully is correlated with how well-met the conditions for a successful command are (Bercovitch et al., 1992, p160).

Nevertheless, Johnstone & Svensson's cross-country - and cross-faith- analysis of operational religious peacemaking enable them to take notice of "significant differences" between the organization of faith-based mediation in the Christian and the Islamic contexts (Johnstone & Svensson, 2013, p557). They highlight how faith-based mediation plays out differently in the Christian and the Islamic contexts. Whereas Christian faith-based mediation is mainly executed by NGOs, an intergovernmental organization –i.e. the OIC- dominates the Islamic mediation realm (Johnstone & Svensson, 2013, p559). Putting this into a broader perspective begs the question of how Islamic mediation plays out differently when conducted by IGOs vis-à-vis NGOs or non-state actors? In Islam there is no ecumenical body per se as in Christianity, yet there are formal and informal sprawling religious organizations whose global reach and stature give them the potential to play the role of a mediator.

Would faith-based mediation -in general- play out differently when conducted by governmental and non-governmental actors? Sydney Bailey's analysis of the Quakers' non-official mediation work answers this question. The Quaker's involvement stands as another example where the mediator's religious identity had a significant impact on the mediation process (Bercovich and Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). Bailey argues that an essential quality that sets those unofficial intermediaries apart from official actors, is their altruism, confidentiality. A non-official mediator's sole concern is for peace and justice and well-being of the parties, without ulterior motives nor agendas. Unlike intermediaries who are members of governments or IGOs who can never totally disregard considerations of national interests (Bailey, 1985, p210). Moreover, the confidentiality with which they conduct their mediation efforts is another unique

quality that characterizes this type of mediators. Their work is mainly behind the scenes and not usually reported, unlike official mediators' peace efforts that are extensively trailed and publicized. This protects parties from loss of face before their constituencies when making concessions, thus encouraging them to compromise without fear of backlash (Bailey, 1985, p212).

Johnstone & Svensson go along the same line of reasoning, maintaining that the nonpolitical nature of religious, transnational actors gives them an advantage over state actors and IGOs in transforming internal armed conflicts. The reason for that is that their intervention does not confer any political legitimacy or imply recognition of the sovereignty of insurgent factions (Johnstone & Svensson, 2013, p561). Overall, there is almost consensus in the literature on the particular qualities of faith-based actors, and the unique bases and means of influence they bring to the table. Either by alluding to religious leaders' reputation for integrity that earned them an unparalleled legitimacy and credibility (Johnstone & Svensson, 2013, p559). Or by identifying trustworthiness as their biggest asset, being a mediator without further agenda or a chance for personal gain (Helm, 2015, p56). Even Princen, with his purely positivist point of view, attests to the neutrality those actors' moral authority affords them, and their ability to keep a secret (Bercovitch et al., 1992, p150). There is an agreement among scholars that this gives faith-based mediators an advantage that sets them apart from other intermediaries in conflicts.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

A constructivist frame of reference equips with a broader analytical toolset for studying human phenomena, society, and social relationships. By not stopping at the analysis of the physical and the observable, constructivism looks further than the materialistic limits of realism and its variants, by addressing the ideational factors and the psychological dimensions.

This study is exposed to questions of what is power? What type of power can be exercised in the context of conflict management and resolution? What constitutes leverage in inter and intra-national relations? Can they be reduced to states' materialistic capabilities? Why do conflicts arise? Do conflicts exhibit only material\ tangible aspects? Do conflicts revolve around materialistic interests? Consequently, a constructive theoretical lens offers a broader perspective for more adequate answers to these questions. These queries would give insight into how to bring about durable peace?

Judging from a perception that reality is composed of multiple layers: the actual (it is invariable and exists as one, such as: social relations); the empirical (which may vary, and is represented by what we observe from our standpoints, how we attribute meanings to social events, interactions, policies, institutions, and the structure) (Joseph & Wight, 1970, P. 13). By virtue of the place they occupy within the society and in social relations; these layers are socially constructed as a function of peoples' minds (intellectual activity, beliefs, and frames of reference) (Joseph & Wight, 1970, P. 13)

How people sense these elements of reality and how they give meanings to their existence, is what constructs them. This is referred to as discursive articulation (Joseph & Wight, 1970, P.11). Therefore, mediation cannot be conducted according to ready-made templates or with a one-size-fits-all method, as the effect of each tool in the mediator's toolbox and its repercussions are nuanced by the social context of the targeted constituency.

J. Joseph and C. Wight posit that the materialization -or expressions- of social constructs (like: events, ideas, policies, institutions, and social structures) vary as a product of the power exerted on them. This power is exerted by economic, political, and ideological superstructures" (Joseph & Wight, 1970, P. 14). That being the ontology, and in correspondence to this

multi-layered reality; a post-positivist epistemology, that departs from the sheer rationality of positivist theories, is needed.

These theories absolute confidence in scientific experiments, observation, and application, engenders secular, materialistic worldviews and discourses. A case in point is the liberal internationalist approach to peacekeeping, which presents democratization, open economy, and neoliberal forms of governance in general, to conflict-torn societies as a panacea for all ills (Sandal, 2017, p3).

After the end of the Cold War, skepticism has risen about the universality of secular ideologies and their capacity to address societies' socio-psychological needs. A 1998 study by the World Bank inferred that the international order had constantly failed to achieve sustained peace and cooperation in post-war societies; due to their erroneous assumption that post-conflict reconstruction is about politico-economic restructure towards liberalization (Cullen & Forman, 1998, P. 8). Instead of explaining conflict and cooperation as driven by power and interests, it explains conflict as a deficit in social capital. Thus, the study concludes that, for sustained peace beyond the end of hostilities, post-war construction must aim at rebuilding the social fabric of trust, cohesion, and mutual understanding through the (restoration) building of social assets, and collective consciousness (Cullen & Forman, 1998, P. 8).

In parallel with this development of the field, an intellectual evolution in the field of peacemaking brought about strategic peacebuilding approaches that advocate the idea of context specificity and take cultural elements (such as: identity, norms, religion) rather seriously. The salient role of religion in the political discourse in the post-Arab Spring political scene invokes this thread of scholarship.

Thus, contemporary practitioners of conflict management and resolution tend to accord more credence to faith-based peacebuilding; and context-specific mediation- in the general sense- in transforming conflict societies toward a durable peace. This peacemaking thought sheds light on the agency of cultural identity, and recognizes religion as a substantial cognitive category. Moreover, it acknowledges religious actors as important agents who could contribute to devising “solutions” that meet people’s particular needs and expectations.

The evolution in the field of political science produced approaches that deviate away from neorealists’ absorption in security, and neoliberalism’s emphasis on economic interaction. There emerged constructivism, recognizing the role of norms -not as a mere intermediary variable, nor as a product (output) of power practices- but as a determining factor of the interests and the behavior of the powerful.

As per constructivist postulations, everything in the social world is an intersubjective structure, subject to constant change and (de)construction by the agency of individuals, including identities, relationships, interests, and structures. This study makes a substantive contribution by proposing that change in conflict settings take place by operating on norms. The mechanism suggested for this purpose is the engagement of religious agents as a soft power that can act across- national borders and exercise a transnational normative authority. By this means, religious agents are gentle forces for change. The enactment of norms – by religious leaders- can enact change on different levels:

- Starting from the bottom, by enacting the code of conduct of the already-constituted Islamic identity (inculcating norms of Islamic tolerance, justice, and non-aggression in the collective consciousness)

- By enacting norms of unification, they can serve as agents for multilateralism and create cultural unity at the grassroots level where forces for change often take root.
- The internalization and acceptance of the norm on the grassroots level, would eventually constitute state policies and inform behaviors at the intergovernmental level.

1.4. Methodology:

This research analyzes two cases to study the OIC's 'operational 'culturally-sensitive mediation, and how this faith-based institution intervenes in intra-Muslim conflicts on the ground.

With regards to the rationale of the case selection, focusing on "intra-Muslim" conflicts, this research excludes other mediation interventions across religious divides, which the OIC had undertaken throughout its history (Such as in Thailand, Philippines ... et cetera.). Besides, an overview of the record of the OIC shows that it intervened in an extremely limited number of Intra-Muslim conflicts, but also that, overall, very few of these interventions were successful.

Conflict	Intervention
PLO—Jordan Conflict in 1970	No intervention but endorsed the successful efforts of capable leaders
Bangladesh—Pakistan Conflict in 1971	Intervention did not succeed, but the OIC played as an effective platform for bringing convergence and mutual recognition.
The Iran-Iraq War 1980-88	Failed intervention
The Civil War in Somalia 1991-2008	Successful humanitarian and mediatory intervention that rested on its perceived legitimacy and religious clout vis a vis the disputants, resulted in the signing of the Djibouti agreement of 2008
The Civil war in Iraq in 2006	An effective mediation intervention and a tentative success

Based on this, the first case study selected is the OIC’s involvement in the conflict in Yemen during the period from 2011-2020. This conflict is one of the region’s most recent and ongoing unresolved conflicts. It was mainly selected because – in terms of the chronology of events, it included strong OIC positions, hectic endeavors, and active responses to the conflict, subsequent to the OIC-initiated attempt to develop a Mediators Guideline “Code of Conduct,” Focusing on Culturally Sensitive Mediation Approaches.

So this provides an opportunity to examine whether the organization managed to implement the proposed guidelines. Did the discourse reflect –in any manner- on the OIC’s framework or vision for handling the conflict? Or Did the praxeology remain remote from the code of conduct the discourse had delineated? In such a case, why so? Additionally, that conflict involved a direct confrontation between two Muslim poles and camps, not only within the Islamic organization and in the international arena, but in intra-Muslim military combat that went beyond the Yemeni territory.

The second case study is the Iraqi civil war which features a somewhat different mode of intervention. This case is precedent to the development of a Guideline on culturally-sensitive mediation approaches, although, it is probably the most congruent intervention with the proposed approach in the discourse. More intriguingly, it features a divergent outcome from that of the first case. Hence, this latter case study offers insights into the pattern of religious-based intervention performed by this governmental organization in intra-Muslim conflicts, in comparison to non-governmental faith-based actors.

The discussion around the analyzed case study will apply Interpretive reflection, and hermeneutics, as an approach to social explanation. The goal of this human scientific enterprise is not to generate generalizations, nor to develop a theory; but rather more of an ideographic goal, which **is** to reflect on such conflict instances and intermediary undertakings in this particular area of the world, trying to have a comprehensive understanding of mediation within this context, that is socially and culturally rooted in religious tradition.

The conflicts in both cases are local conflicts \ civil strifes that have a religious, sectarian angle that is sustained by foreign intervention and geopolitical rivalry. The conflicts in both cases are local conflicts \ civil strifes that have a religious, sectarian angle, sustained by foreign

intervention. The causes of these conflicts are rooted in a range of common causes among OIC countries, such as: weak\failed statehood, political marginalization, economic inequalities, social exclusion, and other intercommunal historical grievances.

Yet, the involvement of regional and international powers that deliberately politicize religion and instrumentalize doctrinal differences, make local conflicts emerge into sectarian antagonism (Farasin, 2019, P.). Especially as the contending forces in the Middle East region tend to leverage the tremendous mobilizing effect of sectarian narratives for their strategic goals, to gain traction and consolidate their grip on power.

On another note, the variation between the two case studies might be in the involvement scale and sequence. The Conflict in Yemen is a local conflict that turned into an overt proxy war between two regional powers who have jumped on the trail of the popular revolt to steer the conflict in line with their geopolitical competition. The Sunni-Shiite civil strife was rather subsequent to the US-led coalition invasion and the dismantling of the Saddam Hussein regime. The result was a quagmire of further external involvement by an array of different regional, international, state, and non-state actors; some of whom engaged directly with their own troops (like the coalition forces), whereas others did through the agency of proxies (like, Iran).

Sectarian tension has been the dominant theme in regional politics and conflicts throughout the past four decades, making the most discernible rationale is, attempts to expand and counter-attempts to frustrate the Iranian scheme of exporting Shiite Revolutionism (Nasr, 2006, P.141) to the region. Against this background, both conflicts are -or have developed to be – a geopolitical competition for regional power. Moreover, despite the political, and socio-economic issues in dispute, both conflicts translated into identity-based animosity.

Be that as it may, it is not within the scope of this paper to explore these conflicts' dynamics. However, I marginally spoke of them to denote that these comparable factors and conditions (issues in dispute, involvement of regional powers, the nature, and scope of the conflict) are probably uncorrelated to the divergent outcomes of peacemaking intervention. Thus, they will be isolated to investigate how the different approaches to conflict management and resolution (including peacemaking agents and actors) play out in internal OIC conflicts.

In this study, qualitative analysis methods are to be harnessed to interpret data collected from the literature review and the case studies. Still, a major challenge remains to define what are the criteria by which we may determine the success of mediation. There is a substantial variation of the meanings associated with success in the literature on international mediation.

In the context of this study, the impact of mediation -broadly speaking- is the subject of assessment. Efficiency herein is defined by the standard criterion Bercovich refers to, mediation's ability to change, affect, or influence one of the following parameters: (a) the nature of a dispute, (b) the way how parties interact, in this case, the achievement of a satisfactory outcome of some sort is discerned (Bercovich, 1992, 22). Hence side effects of mediation, such as, cease-fires, creating a dialogue, reduction of mistrust, confidence-building, or the creation of an environment that denounces violence in favor of reconciliation, are considered indicators of the effectiveness of the intervention.

I will use primary resources like interviews conducted with OIC officials and diplomats who have provided first-hand knowledge or experience of OIC efforts, as well as videos of the actual conferences held on relevant topics. Another primary resource is books written by such personalities, like *The Islamic world in the new century: the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, 1969-2009*, by Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the former Secretary-General of the OIC,

which provides an insider's first-hand account of events. Besides, first-hand transcriptions of streaming videos of conferences and events.

These will be used along with a host of various secondary resources like:

- Commentaries from other researchers (in journal articles, reviews, and systematic studies)
- Written records that provide second-hand information, reported statements, and reports on meetings (found in national news agencies and media news)
- The documents, news releases, official statements, and reports of events that are available on the websites of OIC, and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations(UNAOC).
- Qualitative and statistical research on the websites of the Statistical, Economic, and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).
- Synopses of events by the concerned and affiliated institutions, like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, and the Istanbul Conference on Mediation (istanbulmediation.org), will be harnessed as well.

I also use Arabic materials for statements and records of events during important times.

In this respect, obstacles and problems were faced accessing secondary material on leading news websites that the Egyptian state has and continue to keep blocked, like: Al Jazeera, the United States-based Al Hurra, and the independent newspaper of Al-Quds Al-Arabi. These materials were necessary in presenting my cases, though I managed to find these materials on the websites of other major Arab newspapers, like the Saudi newspaper *Al-Riadh*, The Kuwaiti *Al-Jarida*, The Bahraini *Al-Ra'i*, and The Jordanian *Al-Wasat*.

Finally, an overview of the chapters ahead. This study begins with a preface that outlines the notion of cultural-sensitivity in mediation practice, and overviews the OIC's experience, conceptualizing and operationalizing it. Then, the study goes ahead by introducing two chapters of the two cases outlined above. The case studies are structured around: an outline of the conflict, then a section on OIC involvement in it, then a section on assessment of its intervention.

At the end of each chapter is a section on generalizable findings emerging from each case. Specifically, these findings have to do with the structural make-up and the operation of this organization: its institutional structure, its functions, and its underlying dynamic, how these play out to diminish its capacity to exercise an active role in its area; and how certain aspects of them can be harnessed to enable the organization a margin of constructive role against all odds. Lastly, there is the conclusion in which I summarize, draw on lessons, highlight the main contributions this thesis makes, and identify areas for further research.

Chapter 2 A Prologue to the Concept of Culturally-Sensitive Mediation and the OIC's Engagement with it

As discussed above, some OIC officials have broached the idea of developing a Mediators Guideline "Code of Conduct," focusing on culturally-sensitive mediation approaches. In this connection, it is useful to begin with an introductory section that aims to ascertain the characteristics of such a mediation approach in the broad literature first, then within the ambit of this organization.

Furthermore, this section offers a critical analysis of the OIC's conception of "culturally sensitive mediation approaches," which is an essential prelude to the empirical analysis of how it actually practices

conflict management and resolution. Ultimately, this gives an insight into whether the capacity-building scheme had reflected -in any way- on the OIC's modus operandi, or do other ulterior principles and underlying mechanisms overrule? Another contribution of this is to present a valuable endeavor linking theoretical knowledge to the empirical realities of the OIC societies, and conduce to devising more efficient security tools and approaches

Culturally-Sensitive Mediation:

Gender, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status are all salient factors that make up cultural identity. They give rise to variant cultural practices and differing social mores, all of which make up the socio-cultural context in which a conflict occurs. Carnevale defines Culture as the “human-made component of the environment, which exhibits subjective aspect (i.e., the common perceptions of the social environment) (Carnevale & Choi, 2000). According to Bercovich and Rubin, a mediation system comprises three components: parties, a mediator, a process of mediation, and the context of mediation (Bercovitch & Rubin, 1992, P.7). The interplay among these variables shapes the nature of any form of mediation (Bercovitch & Rubin, 1992, P.7).

Hence, cross-cultural differences in the context of peacemaking processes are insidious forces at work that profoundly affect interactions, understandings and, subsequently, the trajectory of the process. Sonia Shah-Kazemi contends that culture shapes how disputants perceive the conflict issue, their outlook on the process, and the options for resolution (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, p310). Carnevale explains this impact of culture on international diplomacy, as it prescribes behavioral (norms) for members of the culture, ascribes (roles) for individuals in the social structure, defines the goals and principles in the person's life (values), and determines evaluation criteria (Carnevale & Choi, 2000, 106).

Consequently, a mediator who is aware of these subtle intricacies and is sensitive enough to act in view of them, is presumed to be more likely to succeed in helping parties with cultural differences to settle their disputes (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, p 321). On that account, a failure to observe issues of culture and diversity, seriously jeopardizes parties' chances at equal access to mediation, which could lead to withdrawal from the process. Tony Watling touches on this point as he posits that the mediator and the parties around the table could be conversing in a common spoken language, yet speaking from substantially different cultural standpoints, which renders communication akin to speaking in different tongues (Whatling, 2016, p398).

What Watling suggests resonates with the UN's Guidance for Effective Mediation, which calls for cultivating national ownership of the mediation process among those whose ownership is essential. This enables their effective participation in the process and engagement on complex issues. The more inclusive the process is, the deeper parties' sense of ownership grows, which directly impacts conflict parties' -and the broader society's- commitment to the process, its product, and implementation (A/66/811, P.27).

In this context, the UN guidance, besides the General Assembly resolution entitled "Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention, and resolution," emphatically assert the need for adjusting mediation processes to conform to local cultures and prevailing social norms (A/66/811, P.27). They maintain that awareness of cultural aspects is a mediator's most potent resource (A/66/811, P.42).

Therefore, to "restore the locus of control to the disputants," Kazemi sees it as a requirement to ensure that extrinsic value systems do not hold sway over conflict management processes in minority communities (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, P. 321). Otherwise, This certainly

would undermine fairness, and the production of an effective solution, since such communities have their own intrinsic values.

On another level, Shah-Kazemi argues for the susceptibility of peace processes to “the specter of cultural hegemony.” This proposition, in turn, calls for discussion of two approaches to dispute settlement: the physical imposition of terms of settlement (through coercion and leverage) vis-à-vis the employment of the power of ideas and norms to set interparty standards, and shape the conscientiousness of power recipients. What environment is more receptive to which mode of operation? At what stage in the process using a specific mode can be counterproductive?

Gulliver (1979) posited “the importance of understanding the normative framework within which the dispute is situated” (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, P.311), this framework defines the dispute, and the accepted normative terms that both parties invoke, are liable to, and thus, constrain them in the conflict situation. Furthermore, it affects their expectations (Gulliver, 1979, P. 193). Kazemi states that the cultural identity of the disputants is what determines this normative framework, and it stems from, inter alia, gender, ethnicity, religion, geographic background, generational outlook, or socio-economic positioning (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, P.311).

She also added a telling observation showing deep ethnographic understanding, suggesting that the parties' adherence to a worldview, religious norms, or community values is an instrument for measuring the impact of cultural identity in a conflict situation (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, P.311). Against this background, Kazemi establishes the centrality of religion in minority ethnic communities, and deduces that a mediation process insensitive to the “cultural identities” of the parties is short-sighted (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, P.311).

The literature and practice on mediation present a variety of mediation models. David Shimoni, the director of Goshrim Mediation Center in the Palestinian occupied territories, identifies three basic frameworks within which mediation in special cultural contexts occurs (Shimoni, 2014, P.99)

1- Standard mediation: based on the assumption that conflicts have universal characteristics.

The idea of standard mediation has produced a variety of mediation models, such as interest-based mediation

2- Culturally-sensitive Mediation

3- Mediation by trained indigenous conflict resolvers

The Modern practice of mediation is mainly governed by a Western form of dispute resolution, which is facilitative mediation as per the Harvard Program on Negotiation's (PON) model of interest-based negotiation (Avruch, 2009, p.1). In contrast, he defines culture-sensitive mediation as premised on the notion that mediating in different cultures necessitates some adaptation in the conduct and process of mediation (Shimoni, 2014, P.100). In support of this line of thought, Shimoni evokes the remarkable work done by Joel Lee and Teh Hwee (2009) in Singapore to adapt interest-based mediation to the Asian context (Shimoni, 2014, p.100).

Lee and Hwee make an intriguing cogent argument by differentiating between the functional and operational aspects of the model of interest-based negotiation. They affirm that the functional aspects of that model of mediation are relevant and effective in other cultural settings. Though, for the actual practice of mediation to be successful in Asian context, they contend that significant modifications are needed at the operational level of the standard Western practice (Avruch, 2009, p.2).

For instance, in Western mediation models, mediator neutrality is an overriding percept, that even when the dispute arises over a violation of common behavioral norms or ethical framework, value judgments about the contentious actions are not voiced (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, P.319). Kazemi contends that adherence to ‘neutrality’, even when that dismisses the common normative framework invoked by the disputants, comes at the expense of genuine community reconciliation (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, P.319). Thus, adjustments are needed to allow mediation involvement that is voluntary and sensitive to the interests, needs, and also cultural preferences of the disputants.

In a similar sense, Sarafia Ahlstrom makes a case for integrating cultural aspects into interest-based process to make it more culturally appropriate, such as: opening and closing ceremonies for the discussions, prayer, community representation, and role for clan and family members (Ahlstrom, 2014, P. 2). In this spirit, attention is due to be paid to Shimoni’s worthwhile endeavor to design a hybrid mediation model, sensitive to values, traditions, social institutions and cultural characteristics of the Jewish Bukharian Community. His claim that the ideas and practices presented in his study can be applied to many other traditional cultures or groups (Shimoni, 2014. P. 97) makes an area for further research that touches on the contours of his design.

The third model Shimoni prescribes for mediation in peculiar cultural contexts is mediation by trained indigenous intermediaries or conciliators. In Sarafia Ahlstrom’s study of sampled immigrant communities in Canada, to survey their preferences for third-party mediation in their disputes, respondents defined a traditional dispute resolution process as: one in which a conflict was taken to the local Elder or community leader who would listen to the information presented on the dispute, then try to settle it using conventional wisdom, experience,

locally-accepted norms of conduct, and traditional values, to prescribe an effective solution (Ahlstrom, 2014, P.11).

Ahlstrom's study proves that traditional groups adhere to their customary conflict resolution mechanisms. The above arguments give ground for the assessment that, at times of disagreement (in sentiments, opinions, and interests), **the coherence of social groups heavily depends on the assimilation of a common normative framework** (Shah-Kazemi, 2000, P. 319) **not only on the acknowledgment of common interests**. In such traditional societies, the conflict increases the conceived value of belonging to a certain value system; the perceived importance of referring to a supreme frame of reference is amplified.

Likewise, Shimoni asserts the significant weight social values and norms bear in the emergence of interests stage. He contends that **attention must be paid to soft aspects of the conflict as much as the hard aspects of it** (Shimoni, 2014, P. 109). Alongside the materialistic issues of the conflict (like: the damages, decisions about assets, property, resources, and territory), there are also soft aspects of the disputes that the parties can try to circumvent (like the conduct of behavior, strong need to restore one's honor (Shimoni, 2014, P.110).

This means that introducing all aspects of interests gives more possibilities for appeasement beyond material compensations, to include gestures that restore honor, such as good apologies (Shimoni, 2014, P.110). Thus, in his design of mediation strategy, the author considers whether community members tend to leave "soft aspects" vague to avoid escalation and disruption of harmony, or do they elaborate on them so that their interests emerge and become clear – to themselves and others?

Shimoni touches on the group's commitment to strict codes of honor in his group discussions with community members. Consequently, he infers how much of a central position honor holds in Bukharian society (Shimoni, 2014, P.105m 106). This can be dragged upon tribal communities in general, in which people are ultra-sensitive about their social image, loss of face, shame, loss of authority, and questioned manhood (chivalry, virtue, or integrity), especially in the context of their families, kins and the wider community.

This explains why conflict situations involving issues of honor are exceptionally thorny in nature. Accordingly, Shimoni suggests that the mediation process be introduced to parties as an honor-building process (Shimoni, 2014, P.105m 106). All of the above beg an important question, do traditional societies of conventional cultures and morality tend to favor a mediation process that makes value-oriented rulings and assessments? Do they expect the peace process to help parties assess the legal merits of their arguments and make fairness determinations? Does this mediation style enjoy more legitimacy than the interest-based, pragmatic mediation that focuses primarily on the underlying interests of the parties involved?

Harvard Law School Program on Negotiation asserts the variety of mediation styles available at the mediator's disposal, corresponding to the diversity of mediation processes. Mediators pursue different approaches depending on the type of conflict at hand. Facilitative mediation is the all-too-common type of mediation, in which a mediator aids parties in exploring and identifying each other's deep interests, while keeping his own views on the dispute to himself (Shonk, 2022).

In contrast, there is an approach to mediation called evaluative mediation. In this type, a mediator is more open to expressing opinions and making input in the form of recommendations and suggestions (Shonk, 2022). This type of mediation tends -or attempts- to establish norms, by

way of prescription and enforcement of rules; in a manner that reflects the assumption of such a norm, or serves to establish it (Shonk, 2022).

In general, all of the literature on culturally-sensitive mediation proceeds from skepticism about the compatibility of Western mediation paradigms to particular cultural contexts. The underlying assumption is that conflict resolution is sensitive to its cultural, social, and historical setting. The studies reviewed above introduced the concept of hybrid models, which offer adjustments to Western mediation models before being introduced into traditional contexts.

This study is set to benefit from these insights, supported by the belief that understanding the culturally-sensitive approach to mediation can take mediation efforts to a whole new level of relevance and efficiency when addressing the OIC conflict quandaries.

The literature on identity, culture, religion, and peacemaking tends to be focused largely on case studies of successful interventions by Christian peacemakers, Western religious actors, and culturally-sensitive models in extrinsic cultural contexts to the Islamic context. Little attention and fleeting analysis tackled faith-based mediation in non-Christian and non-Western traditions. Little research has moved beyond studying cases of faith-based mediation and mediation by faith-based actors in the Western world.

A literature review of the field has underlined the need to broaden this analysis, which this study is poised to meet by casting light on culturally-sensitive mediation by Islamic faith-based actors. Not only that, but it also expands to conduct a systematic comparison of mediation conducted by Islamic inter-governmental actor VS Islamic track II actors, drawing on a successful and an unsuccessful case. Thus it offers a more systematic knowledge about how faith-based mediation works in this particular part of the world.

Furthermore, this study contributes by deviating from the tendency to rely solely on case studies, as it conducts a discourse analysis of the OIC attempt to operationalize culturally-sensitive mediation. Analyzing this post-secularist discourse is fundamental for reaching a more comprehensive understanding of mediation in this specific cultural context, characterized by the centrality of religion and a degree of conservatism.

The significance of this discourse analysis is amplified by the fact that, it represents a post-secular discourse conducted -not only by scholars but, most importantly- by official negotiators and veteran diplomats. Those who have internalized the epistemological molds that bound their study and experience of international affairs. Officials who have been operating within the limitations of the nation-state system (its secularistic outlook and realpolitik rationale). Moreover, they are officials operating in a region shaped by cultural colonialism.

The OIC-conducted Discourse on Developing a Mediators Guideline “Code of Conduct,” Focusing on Culturally Sensitive Mediation Approaches.

In order to research the OIC’s conception of culturally-sensitive mediation methods and their role in enhancing mediation effectiveness, this paper employs discourse analysis. An interpretive approach is used in analyzing the following primary and secondary resources:

- I. Synopsis of the presentations delivered at the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) ’s Brainstorming Session on Developing a Mediators Guideline’ Code of Conduct’ Focusing on Culturally Sensitive Mediation Approaches
- II. First-hand transcription of the streaming video, and summary reports of the 3rd OIC Member States Conference on Mediation, entitled “Exploring Effective Mediation: The Role of Culturally Sensitive Mediation,” in Istanbul on November 1st, 2019.

In view of the grievous proliferation of conflicts in the OIC geography, and in line with the OIC mission of promoting Islamic solidarity among member states; the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), in its 46th session, requested the General Secretariat to prepare a Code of Conduct for Mediators, focusing on culturally sensitive mediation approaches.

Heeding the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation, and the OIC-2025 Programme of Action, which lists among its goals the enhancement of OIC's role in conflict prevention and peaceful resolution

Upon that request, a brainstorming session on developing a Mediators Guideline for that 'Code of Conduct' was organized at SESRIC Headquarters in Ankara on September 13th, 2019. Scholars, international experts, and practitioners from the OIC Contact Group of Friends of Mediation and other international organizations took part in the session to share their experience and expertise on the topic of culturally-sensitive mediation (SESRIC.org, 2019)

The session comprised three presentations by specialized academics and veteran international organizations' practitioners of conflict management and resolution. However, the predominant characteristic of presenters was objectivity. This characteristic produced an elaborate introduction of the main themes and concepts, and a scientific-information-oriented treatment of the topic.

Starting from what is culture? How do cultural representations\ agents manifest themselves in the context of conflicts and the resolution process? The presenters emphasized that culture in the form of norms, beliefs, and values forms the middle base of a portrayed "cultural iceberg," which is more challenging to observe since "We are aware of them, we act by them, but usually habitually, not necessarily consciously" (SESRIC.org, 2019). They constitute the non-observable

aspects of culture like high/low power distances among society members, the concept of time, and their approach to it (SESRIC.org, 2019).

The presenters also took account of the strong presence of cultural representations, encodings, and symbols in the context of conflicts. Being internalized by people, these representations are usually associated with strong emotions and diverse attitudes. In addition, they can also instigate behavior by composing desires and goals (SESRIC.org, 2019). Also, they shape the collective's perception of rights and wrongs and how people process information, which engenders unconscious bias. By this rationale, the presenter emphasized the cognitive power of culture, its role in shaping what he termed "the collective cognitive scheme" (SESRIC.org, 2019).

One demonstration of this is its agency in :

- Shaping the perception: of what is normal and what constitutes a conflict/crisis
- Inspiring different conflict strategies
- Affecting the perception of the other (whom to trust, how others' actions, gestures, and even how intentions are evaluated)
- The perception and conduct of the negotiation process (interpretation of the manner of proceedings, the design preference, presumptions about what is to compromise, as opposed to what is unnegotiable) (SESRIC.org, 2019).

The note was taken of the core cultural themes such as individualism vis-à-vis collectivism and how this dichotomy reflects in the decision-making processes in the negotiations (SESRIC.org, 2019). Nevertheless, the presenter referred to such core differentiating themes without attributing them to specific contexts (like the Western and Eastern dichotomy -although

this is one core distinction between them) without positioning any images. This pattern of communicating themes and concepts demonstrates the rigorous scientific treatment of themes, which reflects in the presenter's caution not to recall widely-held oversimplified images and ideas of a particular type of culture.

He also marked the consequential distinction that ensues from the individualist/collectivism dichotomy, like high\low context communication styles, high \low power-distance, and hierarchical/egalitarian orientations to social status. All of these manifest themselves in the adopted value system, which in turn informs a party's negotiation strategy and approach.

Based on this, cultural considerations in a conflict setting must shape the style in which mediators \ and negotiators communicate information and conduct. Ultimately the process becomes “culturally comfortable.” Otherwise, disregarding them would affect the building of trust and credibility, and the development of the relationship between parties. The result would be process losses during the negotiations and, finally, a suboptimal outcome at best.

As the preceding analysis shows, the brainstorming session at SESIRIC was an information activity. The discourse or the rhetoric has been largely academic, to rationalize culture's relevance to conflict management and resolution; and ultimately inform policy and diplomacy. Thus, it is evident that the rhetoric targeted an elite audience, not the masses. The output of that brainstorming session was meant to guide the team working on developing the Mediators Guideline Code of Conduct.

That developmental endeavor took place during the Third OIC Member States Conference on Mediation. That conference, entitled “Exploring Effective Mediation: The Role of Culturally Sensitive Mediation,” was held in Istanbul on November 1st, 2019. Two hundred and fifty

participants attended the conference, which brought together high-level officials from several countries, the OIC General Secretariat, representatives from diplomatic and consular missions, conflict resolution and mediation experts, scholars, and students (istanbulmediation.org, 2021).

The conference subject of research was live-streamed and available for direct access on the official Youtube channel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey (@TCDisisleri) (istanbulmediation.org, 2021). This part of the paper analyzes the discourse during it, using a first-hand transcript of the conference and its proceedings. Besides, it incorporates secondary sources, like the data on the official websites for the OIC conference and the participant organizations, in addition to the press reports.

The units of meaning to be coded are words, words' frequency, and phrases in speeches. Analysis of the meanings of these units will help better understand the intentions and targets of different speakers. It will also conduce to inferring correlations and patterns in how they communicated concepts.

Starting with the characteristics of people who appeared in that conference session: moderating the discussion was Mr. Erdoğan İřcan, a retired ambassador, and the incumbent Member of the United Nations Committee against Torture (UNCAT) for the term of 2020-2023 (Istanbulmediation, 2019). Then, the keynote speaker is the High Representative, Mr. Miguel Moratinos, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General holding the high representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations(UNAOC). Moratinos is a veteran diplomat who has a distinguished political career. He presided over the UN Security Council in 2004, and held the chairmanship in the office of the organization for security and cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the council of Europe in Strasbourg, and the council of the European Union (istanbulmediation.org, 2021).

The main subject of analysis in this CDA is rhetoric and dialectic in the form of spoken presentation, spoken interactions, and written news reports, documents, or news releases by the concerned organizations. Through those resources, differing discourses and ideologies will be traced; taking note that in a diplomatic setting like this conference, discourses are not contending and struggling for dominance, but they take the form of logical argumentation and deliberative discussion over the topic at issue.

At the opening of the discussion, the Moderator set the tone for the entire session by stating its purpose; “we are not here to settle all the disputes, but to underline the crucial role of dialogue and mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes” (TCDisisleri, 2019).

Outlining main themes and exploring discursive strategies deployed:

The discourse topic in the case of this study is culturally-sensitive mediation. The discourse that took place revolved around these salient themes:

**1- A DIFFERENT WORLD OF EXCEPTIONALLY COMPLEX
NATURE**

The rapporteur of the session introduced the logic behind the pursuit of a culturally-sensitive approach to mediation and the motive for convening that conference; the current global system is determined by free movement and increased mobility. It has been witnessing an unprecedented degree of intercultural exchange, which brings growing awareness of cultural differences. Quote, “Although, perception of difference is not supposed to be a direct cause of disputation in its own right, but the exploitation of this diversity in power struggles for political gains is seen as one of the primary drivers of conflicts.” (TCDisisleri, 2019)

High Representative Moratinos gave a presentation in which he discussed the above-delineated misuse of the cultural aspect. He elaborated on addressing and reversing its pernicious influences through “effective mediation.” Compared to the brainstorming session in which scholars and international experts have theoretically dwelled on cultural sensitivity, the practicing diplomats’ rhetoric at the conference was vivid and offered many challenges, practical examples, and real-world situations.

Diplomats’ rhetoric cared less about rigorous definitions and was rather oriented toward the general tenor of the debate. Moratinos and the other discussants used the notions of **cultural, religious, spiritual, civilizational, and social dimensions** interchangeably under the heading of “culture.”

Moratinos noted. “the complexity of today’s world sometimes paralyzes us, i.e., diplomats, because we happen to be in very complex situations that we do not know what to do. But we have to be extremely aware to really address this complexity” (TCDDisisleri, 2019).

In the presentation of this theme, there was a repetition of the vocabulary of change and complexity, as in: changed, different nature, a different reality, complex world, complexity, globalized, and uncertain. The ways discussants used language built a sense of the fast-paced developments and created a sense of urgency when it comes to the need to change and adapt.

2- THE SALIENCE OF IDENTITY IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS; COMPELS THE ADAPTATION OF TOOLS

Moratinos emphasized the importance of understanding “what kind of conflicts we have today? As they are multiplying and becoming more complex” (@TCDDisisleri, 2019). It is at the

heart of this analysis to note how reality was defined and co-created by the keynote speaker and the interlocutors, to make a strong case for promoting a particular systematic approach.

“Conflicts are multiplying and are becoming more complex,” Moratinos stated, augmenting this statement by grounding it in the following present-day realities:

1. Bigotry and prejudice against people on the basis of their ethnic, religious, and cultural affiliation
2. Online hate speech and the associated hate crimes in the real world (rising anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and attacks on Christians)
3. The resurgence of racism and xenophobia against refugees and immigrants on a grassroots level
4. The wave of populism and the resurrection of far-rightist groups among the elite political circles, both in Europe and the United States

He contended that: “Polarization of the past was largely based on issues of conflicting national goals, colonialism or opposite political views and ideologies. Today, however, the angry tone in the political discourse is often attributed to differences in identity whether defined by religion, ethnicity or culture.” And here appears the centrality of the notion of identity and its components (religion, race, social background) to the political discourse and the consequent struggles and conflicts.

The implications of the above include a “broader spectrum of tensions” to be addressed, and “the changing nature of the threats to peace.” A case in point is “the internal conflicts that often have come to take regional and transnational dimensions. Therefore, diplomats cannot continue doing business or mediation as usual when addressing such conflicts. A new holistic approach

that is, (a) inclusive and (b) based on complementarity, is critical to successful mediation.”
(@TCDisisleri, 2019)

Strong support for Moratinos' prognosis of the situation was made and iterated by the different interlocutors throughout the discourse. This is observed from the usage of strong phrases of agreement, like: entirely of your opinion. In addition to the frequent use of terms of change like: (the past – today's world – today's challenges – the 21st century-new challenges). A due note to be taken is the common recourse to modals of strong obligation, in the suggestion of this approach (you have to - we must adapt to – we have to face), which connotes a shared sense of necessity.

4- POST-SECULARISM TO RECTIFY GLOBALIZATION'S

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Noteworthy, in his talk about culture, Moratinos used a rather non-Western-centric conception of culture. Supposing that Western-centric cultural thought tends towards identifying culture with elements like: ethnicity, race, nationality, hierarchies in the world order, roles, spatial relations, individualistic and materialistic values, material advancements, and territorial possessions acquired by a group of people.

In contrast, Moratinos acknowledged the validity of non-secular elements of culture (like religion, spirituality, and collective social norms) in politics, studies of armed conflict, international relations, peacemaking, and foreign policy. These realms have long discarded any religious or spiritual basis for their scholarship and practice. Thus he opened the space and minds to the relevance of ethical values, traditional customs, belief systems, and faith-based political identities, all of which govern and move the public sphere.

Despite that religion has always influenced the international sphere, addressing its influence and the role of religious actors in IR have been overlooked; due to the predominance of secularist-oriented theoretical paradigms (Johnstone & Svensson, 2013, p557). May et al. identify this “secular bias” as “the unquestioned acceptance of the secularist imperative of separating between religion and politics.” (May et al., 2014, p. 1)

The discussion at the OIC’s Third Conference on Mediation is an example of how the prevalence of this secularist bias is being increasingly challenged. It is compelling herein to look into the argumentative means employed in the representation of this subject: namely, “the renewed significance of religion and spirituality in the twenty-first century.” How was it justified, legitimized, and naturalized in the discourse?

a. Supporting examples of historical experiences:

Moratinos -leading this discourse- gave an example of the Camp David talks. He narrated a personal experience from a “first-person” point of view, with an insider’s perspective about the events, including what happened behind closed doors and off the record. “I was personally involved in my capacity as the EU Peace envoy. At that time, the European Union's Special Envoy to the Middle East peace process was not on the table. But I was in the surrounding trying to help they close the door I open a window you know”. Moratinos told the audience. “I had the chance to meet President Arafat half our after the failure of the talks. The international community put the responsibility on the Palestinian party. I will tell you the truth of what happened there, which is related to today’s speech about the relationship of spirituality element in negotiation.”

“Arafat said to me: the American and Israelis present me a resolution on Jerusalem that I cannot accept as the President of Palestine. How will I accept that Jerusalem becomes under the Israeli flag when I have the capacity to negotiate this religious component? “Moratinos went on saying, “then I understood at that moment, after years of diplomacy, including my own mediation, I did not apply the religious and spiritual element.”

b. Rhetorical question; implying invalidation

Moratinos resorted to rhetorical question; he posed a compelling question that implies negation rather than interrogation per se, “How can you sort the issue of Jerusalem when you don't talk to the Catholic Church and community, the Jewish establishment? “That is a metaphorical question that effectually implies negation and invalidation, meaning you cannot.

Later Moratinos annotates: “I get the sense that spirituality is back in the world today. They have always talked about the West, mainly in Europe during the last century, as secular societies, saying that God is dead. Well, today, France can claim to be a secular state, but you cannot ignore that you have seven million Muslims in France. So, I understood that the reality of today’s world makes the religious and spiritual elements important. If you want to succeed in this mediation effort, you cannot ignore a part of reality that is influencing the world.”

(@TCDisisleri, 2019)

By analyzing the deliberation of this argument among the Keynote presenter and the discussants, we can note that:

First, Moratinos mainly used language to construct religion as a matter of fact or reality that is unavoidable (reality - the reality of today’s world - a part of reality - influencing the world – cannot ignore). In addition, he used the dichotomy of past and present to imply that traditional

diplomacy, concerned with only the political, is outdated and inadequate. Hence, it has to be superseded, which he assumed to involve putting up with today's reality, which he considered to comprise religious and cultural elements at play.

This discourse stirred debate at the conference. The audience replied to this argument mostly with responses that reflected that it had resonated with the realities amidst which they work, but it also induced several opposing responses by discussants who stood to challenge it.

- **Responses supporting the resurgence of “ identity-based conflicts.”**

The responses of those who have assented to the agency of religion in conflicts varied between corroborating the argument with real-world examples of ongoing disputes, and asking questions to solicit more insight or elaboration. Likewise Moratinos, they resorted to the duality of the traditional and the modern modes of mediation, using phrases like: (the past – today - today's world – today's challenges – the 21st century - do mediation as usual - old mediation– traditional diplomacy – the traditional way). In comparison, the approach proposed by Moratinos was linguistically referred to as (good mediation – a good mediator – a great mediator - the new methodology of meditation- much more creative).

The argument that the nature of conflicts and threats have differed was used, supporting Moratinos's idea. With language employed to demonstrate that difference, like (classical political conflicts between States – conflicting national goals - colonialism - opposing political views) VS (differences in identity – religion - ethnicity – culture - identity-based political settings - angry, populist - religious overtones -angry tone)

The Pakistani diplomat supported the argument of “the relevance of the cultural /religious /spiritual dimensions to mediation efforts, as he referred to the phenomenal resurgence of

populism. In arguing so, he attributed traits such as (angry, suspicion, populist, and wrong neighbors) to depict the frame of thought and emotions that underlie peoples' actions and appear to move them.

Giving an example of the Pakistani-Indian dispute over Kashmir, where he claimed “the classical political conflicts between States, such as the Kashmir conflict, has now moved into a more populist, angrier religious overtones. Also, the rise of populism everywhere to the extent that we have been witnessing people in that part of the world - in our neighborhood- arousing conflicts linchpinned on the mere suspicion of having the wrong mate in their vicinity”

(@TCDisisleri, 2019)

An interlocutor, who introduced himself as a former negotiator from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, similarly supported Moratinos' call for incorporating the cultural\religious\social\civilizational dimension. He gave a real example from the case of Cyprus. Remarkably though, he seemed to justify the approach proposed by Moratinos, by virtue of being a needful “mindset change” to address the kind of mentality that fuels and feeds some conflicts in today's world. He invoked the intellectual aspect of such ravaging conflicts. He frequently used vocabulary like: (mindset- change of mindset - outside the box - a strong influence on the negotiations – creativity – new ideas).

Most importantly, he highlighted the attention-worthy phenomena of harnessing religious characters, and religious sermons. Not only does this happen in religious institutions, but even by state institutions that resort to instrumentalizing education in the conflict, through the depiction of the other in the minds of their constituencies: (**archbishop – preaching enmity – the Greek Orthodox church – education – textbooks - environment - a cultural, spiritual environment**)

He said, and I quote: “I fully agree with you. We are almost at the end of this second decade of the 21st century; we need that mindset change. Again, I refer to the issue of Cyprus, and you mentioned -yourself- that we need to think outside the box, be creative, and bring in - you know- new ideas. In the context of the spiritualism, religion, culture, and all these elements you talked about, which have a powerful influence on the negotiations for a settlement, I must say that we have a huge problem in Cyprus, in the person of the current archbishop. I do not want to accuse him personally, but you know the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus is constantly preaching enmity towards the Turkish Cypriots.” He then posed a compelling question, “Now, how do you change this mindset, not specifically for Cyprus; Cyprus is just an example. However, we face this all the time and face it in textbooks. In the textbooks, always we are depicted, and turkey is depicted as an enemy”.

He then posed the compelling question of, “how do you propose that we change this kind of mindset? One obvious answer would be education. But when education itself appears to be an impediment, in the form of textbooks, then, sir, how do you propose that we change this mindset to create an environment -a cultural, spiritual environment -conducive to a settlement in Cypress or anywhere else” unquote.

Answering to this question, Moratinos suggested: an all-encompassing dialogue that engages all stakeholders across the spectrum of society. He clarified that including religious leaders “is not a sufficient condition for a peaceful agreement.” Moratinos stated: We have been witnessing more and more conferences of religious leaders every year. You meet the Orthodox Patriarch, the rabbi from Jerusalem, the archbishop of Canterbury Bishop from Nigeria; they are well-dressed, beautiful statements about how we are all from God, we love each other, respect every religion, and we are all similar. Then we take some pictures, and then they go back to their constituencies.

As you say, that is what we have to correct. That is the role of the action plan to safeguard religious sites, which the secretary-general has mandated at the AOC, and I intend -myself- to put into action. Moratinos referred to the above-mentioned action plan. And his plan is to put it into action by establishing a kind of dialogue that does not only include religious and political leaders.

- **Arguments challenging the resurgence of identity politics discourse**

- a. A depoliticizing discourse.

Along with the support and corroboration this thread of argument has received from the audience, there were challenging positions. An Egyptian diplomat challenged it, arguing for politicization rather than depoliticized ascriptions of politico-ideological violence. The diplomat contended, "Everything goes back to politics and economics, but unfortunately, we always blame it on religion, on culture, whereas it is all in the politician's hands."

He invoked the Canadian society as an example, claiming that "There is peaceful coexistence, although they come from all over the world. However, there are no such issues as what we are talking about in our countries, which might not have that many cultural differences, let alone religious differences." The Egyptian diplomat cogently posited, "It goes back to politics and how to ensure politics does not affect religion. Unfortunately, religion, culture, or ethnicity are portrayed as the reasons for the crisis in the world."

- **Defense and Explanation: A fundamental aspect of the political phenomena, but not the decisive one (A complementary role)**

Moratinos addressed the "depoliticization counterargument" by explaining that religion is an integral part of political dilemmas. But giving it the significance of a decisive factor in the

equation does not mean that it is the determining factor that if negotiators address, first and foremost, reaching a final settlement is guaranteed.

Moratinos agreed with the Egyptian diplomat saying, “You are right; it goes back to politics and political capital. Some people speak of religion as an element that will solve everything; in the face of those who use religion to deconstruct what politicians are trying to do. My call for recognizing the elements of religion, culture, and social dimension is because you cannot ignore reality. But at the same time, this does not mean giving religion the upper element; that is politics, with the capital. So, at the end of the day, a great mediator has to use the complementary role of all these different components, including the socio-religious element.

Here, Morstinios again broached the idea of a holistic approach to mediation, which treats all the complementary factors at play in the political game. Religion -and culture broadly speaking- are complementary to traditional diplomacy. They complement, catalyze, and consolidate the political resolution, as he had earlier suggested.

He then emphasized, “But you are absolutely right; in claiming it is the politician, the one who takes decisions, the one who has all elements to make such proposals, and who can achieve that for the future.”

5- **THE RATIONALE FOR INCORPORATING THE
RELIGIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION IN MEDIATION: ADDED
VALUE AND OUT-OF-THE-BOX CONTRIBUTION**

In this argument, ideas like: (out of the box – creative – added value- complement – complementary role) were used to describe the culturally-sensitive approach to mediation.

a. The capacity to serve a fundamental function in each phase of the conflict

Moratinos claimed that incorporating the religio-cultural dimension serves a different fundamental purpose in each of the three phases of the conflict cycle. Moratinos explained, “To begin with, on the level of preventive Mediation, in the pre-conflict phase when parties are not yet in war, traditional mediation does not have much to do”; Moratinos suggested that in this phase, addressing the situation from that approach helps de-escalate, defuse, and create an environment that is favorable of the values of peace. “Religious leaders and faith actors have the capacity to set the stage for the start of the mediation process through confidence-building measures. That is what the prevention of violence has to do, which is part of our role in the United Nations Alliance for Civilization,” Moratinos Noted.

Then, amidst the conflict with the heightened emotions of frustration, horror, and terror during the confrontation, addressing these dimensions serves to prevent people's radicalization and polarization from continuing.

Later on, in the post-conflict phase, where faith actors can fill the gap that diplomats fail to fill, the follow-up after the signing of the agreement. Moratinos argued for the necessity of this condition and claimed that failure to follow-up is the tragedy of diplomacy, and the reasons why people don't trust diplomacy's intervention. “Religious, social actors can consolidate the process, can be the glue that catalyzes the result of a successful mediation process. On this level, the UNAOC can play a valuable role by tapping into the mobilizing capacity of faith actors to bring reconciliation which complements mediation”.

The discussants used vocabulary that implied the incredible mobilizing capacity of these sensitive dimensions. Their remarks underlined how this capacity is manipulated by those

engaged with politics (acting as rabble-rousers or agent-provocateurs) and how it is repurposed in the right direction by diplomats (serving as problem-solvers/ peace mongers).

Also, the language depicted reality as an arena with intentions and inclinations to agitate the emotions of the masses, by appealing to the prejudices of ordinary people, which created a culture of dogmatism and fanaticism (polarization, angry tones, frustration, horror, terror, confrontation, radicalization).

Whereas vocabulary of rational argument is employed to refer to diplomats' role in reversing this (facilitate, intercultural, interreligious, empathy, understanding, dialogue, compromise - mobilization). Likewise, similar connotations are made when referring to the role of faith actors: (mobilizing capacity- bring reconciliation -complements mediation- glue)

b. Catalyzing decision-making when the Zero-sum rationale and self-interest calculations impede politicians from doing their jobs; conducting to a stalemate.

Moratinos elaborated on another rationale for including the religious, and cultural aspect in mediation, when he responded to the Egyptian diplomat's argument about attributing events to politics and the capacity to influence politicians, instead to religion. "So it is politics, but you know what is "politics"? It is to make decisions, and to want to make decisions.

The problem today is that we find ourselves with people who do not want to make decisions. They are not politicians because they are not making decisions. So, we have to -again- increase the role of politicians so that finally, politics be the one that succeeds."

In facilitating intercultural and interreligious dialogue within identity-based conflict settings, inclusivity is key to the operationalization of this approach. Moratinos repeatedly stated, “The space for mediation should expand to include a wide range of actors, like: civil society, women-led organizations, religious leaders, and youth leaders.” Moratinos reckoned that “working at the local and community levels to build peace from the ground up.” is the modus operandi of this approach to mediation. He also raised a point that “the inclusion of stakeholders, such as women and youth in mediation processes, would help in promoting the culture of mediation at the societal level, fostering it to be an everyday practice.”

This was heard in his answer to the Turkish-Cypriot negotiator about how to reverse the religious leaders’ potential negative role in the context of conflicts. Moratinos proposed, “We have to start to engage those leaders, with the civil Society, with the media, with the private entities.”

“So again, we have to start to work at different levels, with different stakeholders. Because we always claim to take care of the youth, but they are not participating. We say that NGOs are key social actors, but we do not confer any responsibility to them or the media.” Moratinos went on asserting that Member States’ governments cannot do it alone, nor can religious leaders do. Technically, working with multiple stakeholders is more responsive to the needs and exigencies of the situation on the ground.

**7- OVEREMPHASIS ON THE ELEMENT OF RELIGION AND THE
ROLE OF RELIGIOUS ACTORS VIS-À-VIS OTHER SOCIAL
AND CULTURAL AGENTS**

Despite that Moratinos made clear that his mediation approach aims at inclusivity of all potential active players; one can easily note Moratinos overemphasized the element of religion and the role of religious actors vis-à-vis other social and cultural agents. This can be observed by counting the frequency of usage of words as: (Religious institutions – Religious leaders – faith actors). These words were associated with language that implies efficiency and manifold utility, such as : (significant – functioning – present - preemptive – reconciliation frameworks - set the stage - stop conflict becoming violent – returning to violence - confidence-building measures - consolidate the process, catalyze the result).

In comparison, references to (women-civil society- youth – women leader – Youth leaders - media) were less frequent. Moratinos justified this particular emphasis on the grounds of the following: quote, “There is no doubt that the role religious institutions play is significant, as they are

- 1- The only functioning institutions in a fragile or pre-conflict situation are the religious institutions
- 2- The only constant amidst all the variables and developments in volatile situations. Religious institutions maintain a stable, strong presence before, during and after conflict.
- 3- They provide early warning for signs of conflict in their communities
- 4- The most prospective partner to work with, to provide ‘pre-emptive’ reconciliation frameworks that can stop conflict from becoming violent, or relapsing into violence. They can set the course of the process on a different path.
- 5- “Their work is done by young and old, by women and men, by rich and poor. It seeks peoples’ peace.”

**8- FAILURE OF MEDIATION: WHO WIELDS THE POWER TO
MAKE MEDIATION SUCCESSFUL: [GOVERNMENTAL OR
SOCIETAL ACTORS] – [TRADITIONAL DIPLOMACY VS
INNOVATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS]**

A common theme of the dialectic is the expressed disappointment at the outcomes of mediation in some of the world's protracted conflicts. The Pakistani ambassador to Turkey asked, "Why has mediation so far not worked well?" The interlocutor referred to the dispute over Kashmir "How do we deal with this problem, if in this conflict one party- namely Pakistan- is ready for mediation while the other is not? If one party refuses mediation and the humanitarian and security repercussions are undeniable. For the sake of the region and the world, what can the United Nations and the international community do, to bring a certain degree of automaticity that circumscribes the disputants' discretion in deciding -amongst themselves- whether or not to seek a diplomatic solution?"

The ambassador of Cameroon in Saudi Arabia, Dr. Iya Tidjani drew on discussions at the General Assembly and even at the level of the Security Council, to augment the question of his Pakistani counterpart. He raised a similar concern asking: "If the two parties do not agree to sit around the table, we cannot talk about mediation. It is necessary that the two parties come to an understanding". Tidjani repeated Moratinos and Syrus Sajjad's claim that "there is anger."

The Cameroonian diplomat had a reservation about Moratinos's call for creativity in mediation. He commented that "there is a discouragement to be creative after so many years in mediation. If there is a party who wants to negotiate and another party who does not; I do not see what civil society can do with realpolitik vis-a-vis decision-makers in this region?", "It is not

civil society that will decide on dialogue; it is the two governments that can at a given moment come to the table. So, when you say creativity, I believe that it has been years and years that we try, though we do not move forward,” Tidjani objected

Also, the ambassador of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus followed up by giving another exemplary case of “situations where mediation fails for an extended period repeatedly, despite that all instruments of mediation have been tried. “The UN, good offices mission, had been engaged and had tried every single method of mediation since 1968.” The Ambassador introduced himself as a behavioral scientist to posit -from a scholarly, objective position - that “the reason for the failure is the institutional obstacles in the equation; which prevent the achievement of a political settlement on the basis of political equality of the two consecutive parties of Cyprus.”

He claimed “one party is provided with the authority and legitimacy to represent the whole of Cyprus, whereas the other party -which under international treaties is an equal party- has been deprived of its constitutional rights, its international status, and the right to pursue a political settlement based on political equivalency.

The arguments mentioned above brought forth three common reasons for world conflicts that have been directly leading to mediation failure:

- a) The two parties do not agree to resolve the dispute through negotiations
- b) An institutional imbalance authorized by the international third parties, whose intervention was supposed to be impartial to redress any imbalance impeding a diplomatic solution
- c) Realist-inspired politicians disposed to deal with disputes as a Zero-sum game.

To these dilemmas, Moratinos responded to the above empirical questions directed at his rhetoric, by offering the following argumentative schemes:

a. Emphasizing the indispensability of traditional diplomacy, and the importance of maintaining multiple tracks of diplomacy in parallel.

According to him, this serves two targets: building momentum and creating a favorable environment receptive to peaceful solutions. Simultaneousness, persistence, and creativity of efforts are key and must be observed all along. The main idea that Moratinos proposed in all his answers, is always “maintain the traditional way” while simultaneously working on the grassroots level. Seeking creativity in all pursuits.

The outlines of Moratinos’s holistic approach were more complete in his response on the issue of Cyprus. Answering the Northern-Cypriot diplomat’s question about “the responsibilities of mediators to prepare the ground, so that the kind of objective said and agreed by the parties can be achieved.” Moratinos responded, “So, what a good mediator should do? Number two, we have to create the conditions in societies to be ready to move towards an agreement.

But it is very difficult to pave the way for a peaceful agreement if you don’t work on your constituency. If you work only with the other -as they said- there will never be an agreement. People will get used to that, and there will never be an agreement. So, the way is to really create the atmosphere. The environment for the deal has to be taken into account.” (@TCDisisleri, 2019)

Then, Moratinos pointed out that creativity is not limited to integrating the cultural/social/religious/civilizational dimension. “By tapping into the mobilizing capacity of faith actors to bring reconciliation that complements mediation throughout the whole conflict

cycle.” He clarified that creativity is also requisite when conducting traditional diplomacy among the official milieus.

“Number three, you have to come up with something, I would say, like Anglo Saxon says, something out of the box.” Ok. What can you present out of the box now in Cyprus? I wrote an article 5 years ago, getting inspiration from the European Union, the agreement between Germany and France after the Second World War. What did France and Germany in 1950 do? They say let us go and create a higher authority to conduct stealing and coal production. Instead of competing as rivals, let’s go together.

“Well, my dear friend, you have the chance now in this part of the Mediterranean; you have oil and gas. Why you do not create a higher authority to share the resources of oil and gas between you, it then will not be only the Cyprus issue; it will be Palestinian, it will be Lebanese, it will be Egyptian, it will be Turkey of course. Moreover, you start to create common solidarity between the parties. I think that that could be an element that can facilitate certain joint responsibility. And then you will go to the traditional difficulties about co-sovereignty and this kind of things.”

The same message was asserted in his precedent answer to the Pakistani discussant’s question on Kashmir. “Traditional mediation started to move to handle the situation, as well as Pakistan and the international community in parallel. They all tried but did not produce results.” Moratinos Affirmed. He proposed, “Taking into account the three cycles of conflict, supposing that Kashmir was still -at that time- in the pre-conflict, Moratinos addressed The Pakistani discussant proposing, “ You have to really start to work so that the actual mediation could start. I think it is through civil society and the population that you could create the need for it.”

“At the same time, at the level of traditional diplomacy, you have to work to mobilize the international community as you have already been doing as Pakistan in Security Council and the UN and the other regional fora. We must understand today that we have to work much more in multiple fora. Maybe traditional diplomacy will not succeed at this stage, but you have to continue. I said several times, accompanying traditional diplomacy with other moves that have not been used until now.”

“I think there is anger and fury at the level of civil society and population; they're not accepting what is happening worldwide today. Everybody is on the street because they feel that their mother-home is not protected, so there is a lack of trust in the institution, you know, among people. So, you have to invest in these new ways, not that it will guarantee that you will succeed but to try to create momentum.”

“Of course, you have to maintain a dialogue between communities with different approaches to religion and nationalism; to consolidate and try to build up an acceptance of living together. I mean, you have to try, you have to continue, you have to maintain the traditional way, but we cannot only rely on the traditional way; you have to be much more creative today to resolve the complex challenge that we are confronting” unquote

b. Putting the agreed framework into practice compels a follow-up mechanism, maintaining a consistent, genuine effort in the post-conflict phase—treatment conflict resolution and peacemaking as cumulative endeavors.

In the case of Cyprus, Moratinos suggested, “What a good mediator should do? We have to go past failures and try to maintain the main agreement we have achieved to not start from the beginning. You and all of us have been in this difficult situation while negotiating, and you get stuck. There is the stubbornness of one party or the other party. It is very easy to point fingers at

one party or the other. In the end, of course, you have your argument and the other party have theirs.

So, what a good mediator should do? Number one is, as I said, to build on what has been already practically agreed. Moratinos answered to the Northern-Cyprian diplomat, “Ok I think we -all of us- are concerned by the remaining of several, I will not say many, but several, historical disputes that continue not to be solved. As you have mentioned, Cyprus is one of those, and my understanding after many years in diplomacy is that you should start to think that failures should not be considered the end of the game. Failures should allow us to understand and review why at the last moment, when everybody was very close to an agreement, they changed their minds. Two years ago -meaning in 2017, with the secretary-general and the two parties disputing the case of Cyprus, they had a final round, and practically the agreement was announced, then at the last minute it became a failure.

If you go back to the document, you see that what changed between the parties was practically a common understanding of how there will be any kind of agreement in the future. So, again, my conviction as to these failures, is that there is no follow-up to signing an agreement. Even when you reach an agreement, you still can practically fail at the last minute. And then when you start, you start from square one, which is a disaster. Because of the logic that nothing is agreed before everything is agreed, you know this motto.

I remember my modest contribution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue with the Taba document when I decided with the agreement of the Israeli and Palestinian to write what they had agreed in 2001. Except for Jerusalem, I have the written-down notes on territory, security, and refugees. There is a very advanced agreement between Palestine and Israel in the document. Nevertheless,

if now they go back to the negotiations, they will say: start from square one.” (@TCDisisleri, 2019) unquote.

c. There is no alternative for decision-makers and international institutions assuming their responsibilities and doing their jobs.

Moratinos replied to the Cameroonian interlocutor by clarifying, “To appeal to creativity is not a reason for us to be relieved. Those who must facilitate the solution of problems of this kind should not abdicate their responsibility. We must maintain the homework we must maintain the official traditional political task to move the party that does not want to negotiate.

How to do it there are many ways, obviously. To put pressure and find a framework of understanding to move forward in the first place. For that purpose, we have to work bilaterally; we must perhaps find a mediator who is respected. Also, the Security Council and the others must take up their responsibilities” (@TCDisisleri, 2019).

9- THE REALPOLITIK OF STATESMANSHIP VS WIN-WIN

CIVISM

One of the focal points of contention that were hotly debated at the conference was realpolitik's primacy and prepotency. Interlocutors frequently objected to Moratinos' argument about the importance of cultivating civicism, and establishing a discursive space where society engages in critical public debate. Several discussants contended that power politics wields greater power and influence on the political realm; it governs based on realist-inspired considerations and material factors while disregarding ideals, ethical responsibility, and ideological concerns.

According to the interlocutors, this manifests itself in the following aspects:

1. Unequal treatment of state disputants that are supposedly equal before international law
2. Having no immediate interest in exerting pressure or providing a catalyst to promote peace
3. Governed by realpolitik calculations of power, the international system tends to subdue the role -and obstruct the right- of regional organizations to manage the affairs of their own peoples, which is acknowledged and prescribed by the UN guidance.

The Ambassador of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus made a strong case on how the “embedded injustice” of the international institutions, in their treatment of supposedly equivalent conflict parties, is a primary cause of mediation failure.

In the context of Moratinos' talk about the importance of contriving new techniques and creative approaches to break stalemates, the Turkish-Cypriot ambassador objected. He argued that in the case of the conflict over Northern Cyprus, the International Community itself (meaning the EU and the United Nations) missed the opportunities to use new techniques for breaking the stalemate, one after the other.

“New techniques could have been used, for example, on the EU membership issue in 2004. The EU could have introduced conditionality on the two parties (Cyprus and Turkey) to settle the Cyprus issue first before becoming a member. On the hydrocarbons issue, the International Community could have said this resource has two co-owners; they have to agree first. One side cannot act unilaterally on this issue. This would have been a catalyst; a new technique used by mediation.” the ambassador protested.

However, the international community failed to undertake such opportunities to provide a catalyst. On account of such failure, the interlocutor argued that “it is now an obligation on the

parties themselves to find catalysts to break the stalemate on the island, and that is why Turkey has started their own hydrocarbon exploration in order to break the stalemate to achieve a settlement.”.

These remarks drew attention to how the international community's failure to deliver on its responsibility to approach conflict parties based on “political equivalency”; puts the burden back over the shoulders of the disputants to break the stalemate their own way. That includes the imposition of force and domination by taking unilateral action. This approach further reinforces the Darwinian logic of survival of the fittest as the ruling rationale of international relations, instead of the logic of diplomacy and peaceful negotiations.

The Libyan diplomat also raised his country’s concerns about the role of international institutions in generating oppression and inflicting disadvantages on some conflict-torn countries. With the world's government lying in the hands of a few, some conflict situations are dangerously mishandled for the advantage of that few, rather than for the best interest of the afflicted nations, who do not have the upper hand in managing their conflicts.

The diplomat projected on the UN role in the political conflict in Libya, quote, “I see the United Nations roles in Libya. In the last seven years, we have had four representatives so far. They have not been able to accomplish anything to bring both parties of the conflict to the table. I think the greatest obstacle the whole world faces now when it comes to mediation is the Security Council. The Security Council is held by five countries that can veto it at any time. Recently there has been a request from the three African countries that represent Africa in the security council, seeking a greater role for the African Union in resolving the problems of Africa. Still, some other countries in the Security Council would reject it.”

The diplomat posed a question about the future prospects for an effective solution to such conflicts without reforming this structure and the grievances it is engendering. “ If we do not see any restructure of the security council, that they let other countries have a role in making decisions, no success would be made. So my question to you is, where are we going from there? Do we just keep negotiating, like Syria, for so many years? Like Afghanistan for so many years, like Palestine and Cyprus? How and what will be next?”

Moratinos responded, “The problem always is when something starts badly (i.e., conflict management), it gets worse and worse, and I think that is the problem with the Libyan issue; they started badly. I agree with the comments that the African Union should have participated from the beginning, and this was the beginning of the chaotic situation. From the beginning, it was badly handled, and when it starts bad, it will only be worse. The same happened with Syria; we started badly, and, of course, it will take a long time to repair the situation.

Moratinos endorsed the claim of the Libyan ambassador by stating, “The only element of novelty that could be added is the incorporation of the African Union; so that it can bring some “African solution,” to help and assist the effort of the UN’s envoy. If the African Union had taken care of Libya from the beginning, we would not have the situation as it is today.” But that is the past. The question now is how you can mobilize other actors to be complementary to the action of the UN itself.

10- FEATURES OF THE DIPLOMATS’ RHETORIC CRITICIZING

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

we saw that the issue of Security Council reform continues to be very sensitive. Noteworthy, the Libyan diplomat uttered that bold empirical question with a mitigated tone. In referring to the

composition of the Security Council and the little voice non-permanent members have, the Libyan diplomat left several assumptions merely inferable. Like the oppressive nature of international institutions, the structural inequalities, and injustice intrinsic to them. He did not explicitly make accusations of double-standardism, oppression of less-developed countries, and exploitation of conflicts to dispossess them. Instead, the diplomat depicted the institutional undertakings in bare terms without speaking of the kind of approach assumed and its repercussions.

This can be explained by his attempt as an official diplomat of his country to avoid evoking propaganda that would be interpreted as threatening the hegemonic interests of states. Clashing with these states would jeopardize the national interests of his own country with these hegemons. Diplomatic rhetoric always abides by the rules of power relations. Likewise, Moratinos's response tried to extenuate the dialectic even more by associating himself with the UN special envoys to Libya and taking a moment to pay tribute to them. "I know they tried their best to find a comprehensive solution," Moratinos stated.

As a veteran diplomat Moratinos appears to be using rhetoric in addressing the public globally, to persuade them to endorse diplomacy and diplomatic efforts in the settlement and prevention of disputes. As per the goals of the conference and the Organization's objectives, he aimed to influence people's values, attitudes, and perceptions (Ozyalmaz, 2014, P. 219) toward believing in the credibility and the vitality of its role vis a vis the use of force in the conduct of international relations.

Moratinos went on, "I think we should continue to support Ghassan Salami. Because I know and have been in touch with him, I know how much he is involved and committed. But of course, if the international community does not support him, if the neighboring countries are

playing games against each other, it is very difficult. So that is the tragedy for the people on the ground and countries like Libya.

Here he drew upon the structural obstacles and systemic drawbacks that mediators face on the ground from the different levels of the international order:

- 1- The inter-state politics in the background of the peace process, hampers progress towards a peaceful settlement.
- 2- The international community; having divergent agendas, either shirks its responsibility to support mediators, or monopolizes intervention in conflicts (through enforcement missions or unilateral involvements by big powers) that scourge and oppress the actual shareholders in the dispute). This agenda-driven conduct of conflict management drifts away from rectifying the causes of disputation, and further undermines peaceful settlement.

Moratinos identified this as the tragedy of practicing diplomats and the afflicted societies. It is observable how Moratinos kept heedful of the messages and meanings he was sending to the public while criticizing the imbalances in the international system. He focused on cultivating public attitudes that enable, not inhibit, diplomatic intervention and the whole structure within which they operate, as peoples' attitudes and values are essential for effective conduct and execution of such interventions (Ozyalmaz, 2014, P.214).

- a. **Embracing realpolitik as the inevitable, acknowledging its adverse effects as well as its positive ones.**

Moratinos acknowledged, "We know realpolitik is necessary; states have vital capacities. As I said, we (i.e., diplomats) must maintain the homework; we must maintain the official traditional

political task to move the party that does not want to negotiate. We know real politics; nothing can be done to change it; realpolitik is too powerful.

What is implied from Moratinos's talk is that the role of realpolitik is indispensable, especially in exercising Political pressure and leverage, which often has astounding efficiency. However, since divergent national agendas of major world powers pose barriers to a joint, principled response to conflicts; Moratinos suggests the following; as adaptive strategies for the realpolitik governing the operation of conflict management:

1. Mobilizing all levels and different actors against violence serves a complementary and catalyzing role for international institutions
2. Because the role of the third party is needed, but it is not enough, Moratinos calls for enlarging the capacity of the negotiation process. It is needful that it involves multiple parties and work on various levels: (e.g., international, regional, and local civil society)
3. Tapping into innovative sources of leverage, pressure, and unconventional sources of power (employing social media in the promotion of values of peace was propounded)

11- CULTIVATING FAITH IN THE NECESSITY OF UTILIZING MEDIATION THROUGHOUT THE CONFLICT CYCLE

Against this backdrop, Moratinos argued for the importance of diplomacy and dialogue across religions and cultures to achieve peace in this globalized world cannot be overemphasized. Especially at a time when some politicians and extremists are disposed to exploit cultural and religious differences (TCDsisleri, 2019).

Consequently, he raised the point of the “choice of a mediator” as a critical determinant of the process's effectiveness. The former Chairman of the OSCE asserted that it is crucial -at the outset- to choose a character that believes in the primacy of diplomacy and negotiation, and appeals to reason before deciding on intervention. He emphasized maintaining this diplomatic approach throughout the conflict cycle to prevent, resolve, and sustain the peaceful settlement (TCDisisleri, 2019), which entails a follow-up mechanism as an imperative.

With a view to persuading the audience with the growing unanimity among the international community on the need to develop diplomatic, and mediatory tools, Moratinos utilized “interdiscursivity.” The UN Under-Secretary-General made a few references to similarly concerned fora working in parallel with the conference under study. The Alicante first Meeting on Preventive Diplomacy in the Mediterranean (2016), the Las Palmas International Conferences on preventive diplomacy for Sub-Saharan Africa (2017), and the Istanbul Conference on Mediation.

He also specifically referenced the remarks made in the later conference by the United Nations Secretary-General and the Foreign Minister of Turkey. He marked how these discursive practices are all connected with the discourses made in the subject OIC Conference, in terms of their agreement on the changing nature of today’s conflicts, and that they drew from one another in making a case for the need to adapt diplomatic tools to the changing reality. Hence, he suggested the compelling need to follow up on the results of those conferences.

Chapter 3 The OIC’s Conduct of Mediation in Practice: A Case Study of The Conflict in Yemen.

The OIC was supposed to be the best-positioned actor to have intervened in the internationalized civil war in Yemen, based on the premise of its comparative advantages -over other international organizations- within the conflict's local context, as well as its geopolitical extension. In addition to its clout, legitimacy, and affinity with the parties involved. Besides the immediate threat that conflict constitutes to peace among its member states, their territorial integrity, and regional security. Against this backdrop, this chapter assesses the OIC's intervention in the Yemeni civil conflict in the period from 2011 to 2015.

A Background to the Yemeni Conflict and the main mediation initiatives

The most recent episode of the conflict in Yemen has taken place in the context of the so-called Arab Spring - the popular pro-democracy protests that erupted in late 2010 against long-entrenched authoritarian regimes in the Arab World. These regime-shaking demonstrations have resulted in overthrowing the established governments in Tunisia and Egypt, whereas in other parts of the Arab world, they have either been contained with brute force or degenerated into civil wars (Akbarzadeh & Ahmed, 2017, p. 299).

These protests have initially broken out against many socioeconomic and political problems that had been building up for years and were felt across the social spectrum. People from various religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds rallied together against those political systems, in the early days of the revolts. Chants of unity and solidarity were continuously shouted in unison by the crowds, to show that the unity of the opposition was above any (sectarian or ethnic) divide.

However, the positioning of this sweeping movement at the center of fierce geopolitical rivalries -that instrumentalize sectarian divisions to buttress leadership credentials and

legitimacy-derailed the movement. The strategic environment gradually caused Sunni-Shia sectarianism to emerge as a salient feature of post-Arab Spring strives.

Yemen was a volatile mixture of proxy-sectarian war, and long-simmering factional grievances that had historically been the wellspring of secessionist impulses. This is how Yemen has turned into another regional conflict hotspot after the ousting of President Abd-Rabbuh Mansour Hadi. The 2011 Yemeni popular uprising diverted into minor factional conflicts. In this study, two main violent conflicts are identified: the government-Houthi conflict and the secessionist movement in Southern Yemen.

In the period from 2011 to 2015, three mediators got involved in the Yemeni conflict. They all aimed to negotiate a peaceful transition of power from former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and to establish a unity government. First of those was the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose initiative set out the overall framework for all the subsequent mediation endeavors. Later, there was the UN, in addition to the EU (Palik & Rustad, 2019).

The main OIC responses to the conflict were limited to appeals to stakeholders for restraint, launching calls for dialogue, in addition to sponsorship and alignment with different initiatives and interventions by various actors. The conflict management interventions it subscribed to were arguably five covering the period between April 2011 and January 2020, including two military interventions. Other than that, no conflict management initiative by the OIC -itself- were made.

At the beginning of the uprising, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) envisioned a plan in April 2011. That plan proposed Ali Abdullah Saleh's resignation from office after charging the Prime Minister to establish a transitional national unity government, that would include members of the Saleh-led General People's Congress (GPC) side by side with the opposition parties. The

plan also involved that Saleh's concession of power would be in exchange for a guarantee of immunity from prosecution for him and his associates (Hatem & Carey, 2011). Moreover, the resignation would be followed 30 days later by a presidential election. Noticeably, the GCC initiative targeted finding a solution to the elite struggle of power in Sanaa between the pro-Saleh elite and the opposition, while it had neglected the other drivers of the revolt.

The earliest response from the OIC to the crisis in Yemen came from its Secretary-General at that time, Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu of Turkey. Ihsanoglu declared the organization's support for the GCC initiative as a way to create necessary conditions to preserve Yemen's unity and territorial integrity. He urged all Yemeni parties to respond positively to this initiative (OIC, 2011).

Upon the escalation of violence in late May 2011, the Secretary-General came out in an official diplomatic statement calling upon the Yemeni authorities and all factions of the Yemeni society, including the tribal leaders, to show restraint, refrain from using force, and resort to dialogue to resolve the crisis (OIC, 2011).

The first take on this official response is its sensitive insight into the society it is addressing, as –initially- manifested by the recognition of the tribal leaders as an important component in the vanguard of the Yemeni society's fabric. The statement of the Secretary-General continued, warning against the potential danger of reaching a point of no return in the country and stressed the need to resolve issues through dialogue and understanding for the best interests and stability of Yemen (OIC, 2011).

A second note to be taken is that the organization's Chief Administrative Officer delivered the due function of an early warning system, alluding to the gravity and volatility of the situation,

and the looming potential of reaching a point of no return. This warning was supposed to inform the crisis management decision-making. Conflict prevention (through preventive diplomacy, dialogue, mediation, and promotion of friendship and understanding) in the Islamic world is a strategic goal and function of the OIC. The Peace, Security, and Conflict Resolution Unit (PSCU) is the unit within the OIC in charge of carrying out the three primary functions of: mediation, preventive diplomacy, and counter-terrorism (Farasin, 2019, p.90).

In the meanwhile, Saudi Arabia was closely watching developments in Yemen and facilitated the mediation via GCC in the period following the 2011 Yemeni uprising (Rieger 2017, p. 4).

Despite the plan being approved by the Yemeni opposition, Saleh's repeated withdrawal and accession from the agreement, caused the GCC to suspend its efforts at mediation. The more remote the chances of a settlement seemed, the more violent clashes between supporters and opposers of Saleh's regime grew. Yemen seemed to stand on the verge of a civil war as fighting intensified in late May and early June; though the OIC's involvement in the conflict largely remained static.

In November 2011, an internationally mediated agreement under the aegis of the UN emerged, mapping out the implementation mechanism for the GCC initiative's transition process (United Nations Peacemaker, 2011). This plan did not differ significantly from that of the GCC, as it involved the transfer of power to Vice President Abd-Rabbuh Mansur Hadi in exchange for immunization against prosecution (Palik & Rustad, 2019). Hadi would then serve a two-year term as president, directing the writing of a new constitution.

Up to this point, these mediated settlements had dealt with the symptoms and expressions of the real problems, corresponding to the immediate demands of the people, so as to placate the

protesters on the streets. However, the internationally-brokered settlement did not stop there but went a little further to include measures on security-sector reform, transitional justice, and -most significantly- a call for Yemenis to convene the National Dialogue Conference (NDC).

A year into Hadi's tenure, divisions were deepening, economic circumstances were worsening, and the social and human toll were mounting, making the country boil on a hot stove. This has aggravated the challenges posed by Houthi rebels in the North. Simultaneously dissatisfaction led to a resurgence of secessionist impulses in southern areas. The National Dialogue Conference began in late March 2013, tasked with reaching a national consensus on a new political system for Yemen, by including all previously marginalized groups, such as the Houthis, the Southern Movement, women, youth, and civil society (Palik & Rustad, 2019).

Despite the boycott of the talks by some southern secessionist groups, they continued after their deadline (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2021). The NDC talks concluded in January 2014 with the completion of a document meant to guide the drafting of a new constitution (Palik & Rustad, 2019). Despite the ostensible unprecedented inclusivity of the NDC, the transitional government remained a narrow elite-level compact to the exclusion of the Houthis and Southern Movement (Palik & Rustad, 2019). This presumably reveals the international mediators' ineptitude and the national dialogue's sheer dysfunctionality in performing its core function, i.e. building national ownership of the peace process and the political transition process, among the active societal actors.

This unexpected outcome calls into question whether these efforts were conscious of the sociocultural situation in which the conflict arose. This involves: power relations, differential qualifications for an active engagement in such a process, intergroup dynamics, generations-long grievances and the divides they created (e.g., tribal\urban, Northern\Southern, elite/marginalized

... et cetera). Also, whether they had taken due account of the particular communication styles of this context in designing the dialogue and the negotiation process?

The key players in the local context who are in touch with the affected communities and have relative legitimacy with the wider public, needed capacity-building to be active in the dialogue. Building the capacity of those stakeholders could have broadened the scope of participation and input beyond the futile political wrangling between the entrenched elite and the armed parties.

These key players include tribal leaders, social movements, and youth-led civil society, who rightfully demanded a greater voice in the political transition process in the context of the Arab Spring. The lack of necessary empowerment of these players explains the disputed legitimacy of the national dialogue, eventually hampering it from coming to fruition.

Outlines of OIC's role in the Yemeni Conflict:

1- Support of UN (futile) efforts:

The NDC's failure to redress genuine grievances, exacerbated by controversial politico-economic decisions, set off an escalating series of violent clashes in September 2014. This turning point provoked Houthi tribesmen to take up arms, take over Sanaa and seize key government buildings, allying with Ali Abdullah Saleh.

At this juncture, the UN (led by Special Envoy Jamal Benomar) brokered the Peace and National Partnership Agreement between Hadi and the Houthis, under the terms of which Muhammad Baswindah-led government was replaced by one that included Houthi representatives (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2021).

The OIC welcomed the step, too, calling on all Yemeni parties to duly implement the NPA's provisions (OIC, 2014). However, this new agreement- like its precedent- was never

implemented; due to Houthi fighters' refusal to withdraw from Sanaa Unless Hadi) appointed a prime minister whom they found acceptable.

This time, the conflict was inviting for more other factions to get involved, e.g., the confrontation between the Houthis and the AQAP. At that time in late 2014, when Yemen plunged into a full-fledged civil war, there was very little Iranian involvement (Gardner, 2019).

On February 6, 2015, the Houthis formalized their seizure of power, taking over the capital, running over the presidential palace, dissolving parliament, and installing an interim authority, which remains unrecognized by the international community to date. By this point, the stalemated mediation efforts were obviously getting more and more hurtful to one side; namely Hadi's government and its international and regional allies.

Although it became evident – but that time- that none of the NDC outcomes would be implemented, the UN Security Council issued a resolution condemning the Houthis' actions and urging them to return to the political transition process established by the National Dialogue Conference (United Nations, 2015).

2- ***Deliberate replication of failed parameters***

At this critical stage, the peace process witnessed a couple of movements; the first was by the OIC.

- 1- OIC Secretary General condemned what he called the “Houthis’ coup and infringement of constitutional legitimacy in Yemen” (OIC, 2015).
- 2- The organization insisted on the call for the implementation of UNSC resolution 2140 (2014), the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, and the resumption of the political process in conformity with:

- a) The terms of reference of the GCC Initiative and its implementation mechanisms
- b) The outputs of the national dialogue

The OIC instated these frameworks as “the only way to meet the aspirations of the Yemeni people for a peaceful transition of power, the realization of security, stability, development and social peace” (OIC, 2015).

The other move was made by the recognized Yemeni President at the beginning of March 2015. Hadi called for another round of the national dialogue conference. Much to the dismay and astonishment of the invitees, he called for the new round to be held in the Saudi capital of Riyadh.

The OIC expressed its support for Hadi’s call; it called upon “all parties in Yemen, particularly the Houthis, to accept the Council’s invitation for the conference in Riyadh to supplement the United Nations-brokered negotiations.”

As the OIC convicted the Houthis of “imposing a fait accompli policy on factions in the Yemeni crisis by force, " it has not wavered in imposing not only the framework and the terms of the settlement, but also imposing Saudi Arabia as a key player in the conflict resolution process.

Incontrovertibly, attempts to impose the terms of negotiations (the design and the framework of the peace process) continued without consultation with the conflict parties. They demonstrated neglect for relevance and legitimacy requirements pertaining to the proposed terms and setting. As a result, those efforts ran starkly counter to the UN guidance on effective mediation. They ignored the build-up expertise of international organizations in the field of strengthening mediation capacity and, obviously, were foredoomed to futility. To sum up, they represented a stark disregard for minimum standards of functionality.

On a different level, in April 2015, the UN appointed Ismail Weld Cheikh Ahmed to replace Benomar as its Special Envoy. Weld Sheikh took a leading role and facilitated the conclusion of UN Resolution 2216. The resolution recognized Hadi's government as legitimate, despite the initial UN roadmap, which included Hadi only serving a two-year term as president to direct the writing of a new constitution, in which Hadi had failed. Moreover, the resolution called for the Houthis to unconditionally withdraw from government and security institutions. It also established an unenforced arms embargo on the Houthis and Saleh loyalists, and required the conflict parties to resume the political process (Palik & Rustad, 2019). The question remained why would they unconditionally withdraw while the conflict was stuck at a relatively favorable position for them?! There was no mutually-hurting stalemate, and therefore, there was no space for mediation in the first place.

The paradox remained that Weld Sheik was attempting to convince the conflict parties to resume the political process as per the GCC Initiative and the NDC outcomes; the very same political processes that the Houthis had already rejected in 2014. Thus, all these unworkable conditions for the operation of the resolution process substantially limited the room for the mediator to make a breakthrough, as they appeared to be a fiasco at delivering a considerate mediation process. International peace mediation had again reached a stalemate.

This deliberate failure of international peacemaking efforts to correspond to the exigencies of the situation until the end of 2016, and to create a stalemate that is mutually hurting, got the Houthis to refuse to engage in any subsequent mediation efforts for the subsequent two years.

3- OIC's departure from its commitment to peaceful settlement of the dispute

On 25 March 2015, Saudi Arabia spearheaded nine Arab States to crush Houthi rebels, which the Saudis claimed were sponsored by Iran. All GCC members, including UAE, Bahrain,

Kuwait, and Qatar, duly joined the coalition (Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, p. 300). Just then, Iran stepped up its support. A study by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reports that Iran's support included the supply of advanced weaponry as part of its pursuit to fend off its strategic rival Saudi Arabia"(Gardner, 2019).

The Saudi-led air campaign was extremely violent; not only had it exacerbated violence and wreaked destruction, but it brought about full-scale security and humanitarian tragedy. The once dubbed "Arabia Felix," for its marked fertility and foliage, turned to be barren and desolate. Although this military intervention plunged Yemen into everything the OIC cautioned against, for the subsequent years, the OIC and its Secretary General adopted a non-yielding position "backing the step taken by the states supporting constitutional legitimacy in Yemen" (OIC, 2015)

4- Sponsoring excess use of coercive and punitive action:

Nine months after the launch of its coordinated military campaign against the Houthi Shi'ite militias -on December 15th of the same year- Saudi Arabia established the so-called Islamic Military Alliance Against Terrorism amidst the war it was waging in Yemen (Al-Ghafli-2017, p.5). The establishment of that alliance did not involve any formal founding treaty among member states. An official announcement by Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015 stated that 34 countries (later grew to 41) had formed the alliance, alleging that this action is in accord with Islamic faith teachings, and in correspondence with international laws, the United Nations Charter and the Charter of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Al-Ghafli-2017, P. 162).

OIC Secretary General then Iyad Ameen Madani came out in a statement on the same day, assuring support and solidarity with the alliance, which brought together several OIC Member States. Madani legitimized the alliance formation on the grounds of alignment with the OIC legal

instruments (the OIC Charter, particularly the Code of Conduct on Combating Terrorism adopted in 1994; the OIC Convention to Combat Terrorism adopted in 1999; the resolutions adopted by Islamic summits, Council of Foreign Ministers and the ministerial level Executive Committee) (OIC, 2015)

The OIC chief urged all Member States to “have joint cooperation in combating terrorism”, hailing this as an imperative, on the grounds of the “historic responsibility” conferred upon the Member States, which happen to be among the countries most affected by terrorism, besides the rise of Islamophobic ultra-right ideologues (OIC, 2015).

Even further, in January 2020, the OIC signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Islamic Military Alliance to Combat Terrorism. As declared, that strategic partnership aimed to contribute to international efforts to maintain peace and security and combat all forms of terrorism and extremism, as well as their financing (Arab News, 2020).

In an appraisal of the OIC’s resort to the sponsorship of deterrence and coercion diplomacy, it showed no efficient or judicious deployment of the reward and punishment approach, as a persuasive measure to entice conflict parties to move forward. It exhibited blunt usage of punitive and coercion devices in a coarsely offensive manner.

A military joint action is supposed to enhance the credibility of threats through the application of deterrence and coercion diplomacy (Al-Ghafli-2017, p. 165). In the case of the IMAFT, its deployment of this instrument failed to influence the bargaining behavior of Iran and the Houthis. If the idea was to isolate and pressure Iran and its proxies – including the Houthis- by designating them terrorist groups, then it did not work either. Iran managed to simply

denounce it as a violation of the OIC Charter's article on non-interference in members' internal affairs. Houthis continued to enjoy unabated aid of Iran.

The OIC established itself on the inviolability of state sovereignty, which governed the operational frame of its median role. Throughout its history, it took this norm as a pretext to not act as an arbitrator (or deliver a normative, evaluative mediation) in intra-Muslim conflict even when a conflict party made a plea for it, as did Iran in the course of the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88). Nonetheless, the organization overtly sponsored and advocated Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen. The self-contradictory, double-standard position diminished its weight in the conflict, and emptied its posture of any impacts.

Additionally, the formation of that coalition left many ambiguities undetermined. To begin with, the objectives were far from clear-cut and measurable to most of the members, and the mechanisms for achievement were not outlined. The essence and structure of the coalition itself were up to question: was it a collective defense treaty (as the NATO), was it a collective security system (like the UN), or was it a system for cooperation and coordination on common security issues (As the EU) (Indian Council of World Affairs, 2022).

Making this alliance all the more problematic is the member states nonagreement on what constitutes the terrorism they would fight, in the first place (Indian Council of World Affairs, 2022). This made IMAFT seem as a concerted -yet disoriented- military effort. For example, while Muslim countries consider Daesh and al Qaeda as terrorist organizations, some Muslim states refuse to include other organizations such as Muslim Brotherhood and Palestinian Hamas in this category.

Therefore, the resulting failure to deter and curtail their ability to carry out attacks can be attributed to the alliance's perceived in-credibility in the eyes of their targeted foes, and their distrust of its resolve and security mandate.

Another problematic aspect of the OIC's responses to the Yemeni conflict is its insistence on labeling such conflicts as terrorism-related rather than recognizing sectarianism within the Muslim world. Accordingly, treating the phenomena through war instead by means of intra-OIC constructive dialogue. This reflects persistence -on the part of the organization- to intentionally hide behind a sham, anti-wake posturing with respect to its problems. The organization signaling out the Saudi-led military intervention and IMAFT's claimed role for laudation, elides the truth of the destruction wreaked by the war on Yemen, tempting people to believe that war is to save the Yemenis, when it is a mere contest for power.

Iyad Madani determined the organization's guiding aim in Yemen, i.e., "addressing the situation in a way that will preserve legitimacy and constitutional institutions in the country" (OIC, 2015). If we conduct a result-based assessment of the OIC's management of the conflict against this very benchmark, we find that it was the perfect unviable course of action.

The failure of efforts to establish a credible peace process that draws the energies and mobilizes society's key players; contributed to the conflict lingering. Thus, it was inevitable that it advanced toward a downward spiral of violence, full-scale chaos, and -ultimately- drifted away from restoring order and constitutional institutions.

Secondly, as to the question of the alliance's Islamic credentials, several features disclaim any pretense to such. The estrangement of two Muslim countries with Shiite-majority populations, namely: Iran and Iraq, leaving it exclusively Sunni, sends a message that IMAFT

has a sectarian, divisive raison d'être. It demonstrates that it is merely a strategic tool for Saudi Arabia in its rivalry with Iran, taking the whole Islamic world as its battlefield.

Not only was this an intentionally schismatic policy by the OIC, that had directly deepened the ideological and religious rift, but it was outright escalatory. The outcomes invoked were strategic tit-for-tat between two Muslim camps at the state level, and further inflammatory quarrels on the grassroots level. Thirdly, the OIC's departure from its charter-enshrined commitment to peacefully settle disputes, by adopting such a military approach -immediately- disqualified the OIC of its status as a mediator. In the end, it discarded any prospect of the OIC working to help bridge the gap between Saudi Arabia and Iran or warring Muslim communities.

Noteworthy, the establishment of IMAFT indicates that the Saudis have made headway in the protracted pursuit of regional dominance in the OIC. Its (dis) incentives might have succeeded in dragging OIC states into conflicts against their respective national interests, in service of Saudi and Emirati- foreign disputes, and their endeavor to become a military power in the region. Still, that carrot and stick approach vis-a-vis Muslim countries was not as successful in eliminating cohesion concerns within that alliance, and guaranteeing their adherence to real security or military commitments.

Assessment of the OIC's approach and responses:

To evaluate the OIC's role in Yemen, a number of notes can be taken from the way the OIC dealt with the Yemeni crisis. To begin with, the OIC's role has been bound by endorsing three tracks for the Yemeni conflict management and resolution:

1. Support for the constitutional legitimacy in Yemen, represented by H.E. President Abd-Rabuh Mansour Hadi, and for his national efforts to achieve security and political and economic stability in Yemen (OIC/SUM-14/2019/FC/FINAL, 2019)
2. The full implementation of the GCC initiative as the basis for the resumption of the political process towards a political settlement (OIC/SUM-14/2019/FC/FINAL, 2019)
3. Any solution should rely on international legitimacy resolutions, particularly UN Security Resolution 2216 (2015), which governs the GCC initiative implementation mechanism and the outcomes of the Yemeni national dialogue (The OIC Contact Group On The Situation In Yemen, 2018 - 2019)
4. support for the UN resuming the political process towards a political solution based on the full implementation of the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and its Implementation Mechanism and the outputs of the Yemeni National Dialogue Conference, consistent with international legitimacy resolutions, particularly UN Security Council Resolution No. 2216 (2015). (OIC/SUM-14/2019/FC/FINAL, 2019)

First, the OIC's vision for the management and resolution of this conflict fails to identify the gains and the advances that the Houthis have made on the ground. A viable framework for negotiations needs to address these realities in a way that does not make the Houthis perceive negotiation as a setback. This is one thing the peace initiative based on UN SCR 2216 turns a blind eye to.

Second, the UN envoys themselves proved epically un-proficient in applying the UN guidance, to adapt to the complexity and evolution of the conflict at stake. The conflict management and resolution efforts failed to meet the most basic standards of functional mediation, both during the design and implementation of the process. Those include flexibility to

adapt to the changing dynamics of the conflict at the given moment. Ownership of the process starkly lied in the hands of the mediators rather than the parties of the conflicts, not with the mediator.

Third, the evolving complexity of the conflict as it lingered, might have necessitated the pursuit of several tracks of mediation. However, the multiplicity of mediation tracks in this case did not add any value, as it remained limited to governmental organizations (international and regional) or states that interfered independently. The range of actors involved did not widen to include civil society groups or non-governmental organizations. Also, this multiplicity had not met requirements of: utilizing different skills, varying levels of formality or diplomatic tracks.

Fourth, efforts seemed to either lack or disregard knowledge of the country where mediation is taking place, in terms of its political history, topography of the political scene, culture, and social structure. Taking aim at Houthis and reducing the Yemeni crisis to them, elides the situation on the ground and even the history leading to it.

Making the conflict seem like a war against outlaws versus a de facto legitimate authority, stifled debate over the substantial grievances at issue. Consequently, they did not introduce a framework that addresses many compelling issues, first of which, is the fragmented nature of the Yemeni Civil War. Even if the Government-Houthi conflict is resolved, there will be a need to recognize and address the myriad of conflicts between other armed non-state actors, either in the South, in the Sunni tribal governorates and even the infighting among parties inside the Saudi-led coalition that broke out over Aden, in January 2018 (namely, between Hadi's troops and the Southern Transitional Council).

Fifth, peace efforts did not act on a sound understanding of the motivations and interests of the parties that mediation speaks to, nor the political topography of the situation. All international actors, fell short of dealing with the necessity to recognize that Hadi's legitimacy is only externally-recognized and on paper. Injudicious imposition of Hadi -personally- resulted in him designating oneself above the mediation process, refusing the then-US Secretary of State John Kerry's plan for fears being politically side-lined. Continuing international recognition of this spoiler actor withal, gave him sufficient power to derail the process.

Sixth, in such a conflict involving sectarian fault lines there was no division of labor between the OIC and the other Muslim organizations involved, namely: the GCC. In conflicts of this nature, there used to be such coordinated division of efforts between implicated Muslim organizations and the OIC on these common matters of concern to prevent conflict escalation. For instance: The League of Arab States usually tackle the political dimension, while the OIC takes charge of treating the religious aspects of the conflict at hand (OSCE, 2016).

A structured process, co-chaired by the OIC and the GCC, in the frame of a coordination mechanism -as the one above-referred to, tailored to the specific context, by taking into account the different mediation actors involved and the issues at hand; would have made all the difference in the Yemeni conflict. But there was no framework to ensure complementarity of efforts and coordination of capacities. This clarifies that the lessons-learned from the experiences of cooperating with the UN and regional organizations in mediation contexts, were not taken into account. Nothing but mutual support was delivered.

Seventh, the OIC had chosen to endorse international multi-party mediation as their *modus operandi*, without any inquiry into whether their approach was particularly sensitive to the

Yemeni conflict. Whether mediation setup is tailor-made to their conceptions, normative practices, and their preferences for third party engagement.

Do they plea for Western models of mediation, or do they tend to adhere to customary conflict resolution mechanisms? Do they prefer community dignitaries such as Sheikhs, tribal leaders, wealthy influential elites, or senior politicians, rather than foreign intervenors? How does the presence of many differently-constituted communities/factions with varying value systems inform the design of the mediation; the knowledge of which is needful to respond to their diverse needs from the process?

They might be tending to adhere to their original cultures by preferring a normative mediation that refers to the established customs and norms in their community. However, at the same time, they could be favoring the Western characteristic of a mediator who is uninvolved, unprejudiced, and objective.

The Director of International Peace Institution in the Middle East & North Africa, Nejjib Friji, told an audience at the first OIC Member States Conference on Mediation, that “Muslim countries need to engage in a culture of mediation at the domestic level to prevent civil strife and reinforce social unity.” (IPI-Mena, 2017). This raises the point of the potentiality of Islamic values and norms to provide an overarching system or a common ground that cultivates cross-cultural understanding, creates an atmosphere of equality, and builds an inclusive process.

A mediator like the OIC could have added value by being a creative sponsor of the peace process. By delivering on three parallel tracks of peacemaking:

- a) Taking up the specific task of providing good offices at the Islamic state-level, to neutralize the influence of conflict parties’ external linkages. This would have spared

any need for the military involvement of neighboring countries that became unrestrained in their exploits and excesses. Additionally, this would have constrained regional invisible forces whom the perceived actors represent (A/66/811 106), who retain sufficient influence on the development of the process.

- b) Co-opting different mediators in the process- other than the high-level personalities involved- such as NGOs, and tribal/religious sects' leaders. The integration of whom would improve efficiency in building confidence, by ensuring the prevalence of values and attitudes toward peace.
- c) Enabling entities with a contested status to participate in the talks within a flexible format (OSCE, 2016). By designing a modicum where dialogue on technical issues (humanitarian, security, etc.) can be maintained regardless of disagreements on core political issues, and divisive affiliations (OSCE, 2016). For example, making sure each participant is present in one's personal capacity, without any nameplates or placards designating ethnicity, geographical affiliation, political party, ... or any such

This would have been an out-of-the-box contribution. In contrast to this potential, this conflict saw different international weighing in, offering mediation services, except for the OIC.

In sum, other than the epithet of the military alliance's intervention, nothing about the OIC's conflict management and resolution approach in Yemen exuded cultural identity. Despite the organization's awareness of the powerful influence of religious identity on the collective consciousness and its continuing relevance in the Islamic social context.

The process of adjudicating conflict in the OIC: Politics of Conflict Management and

Resolution:

The Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) is the main decision-making organ in the OIC that plays the central role in dealing with specific matters of concern to the organization. It is the organ in charge of adopting decisions and resolutions on any issue affecting one or more Member States. It does so in light of policy decisions and guidance provided by the Islamic Summit which –as specified by the organization’s charter- determines policies on all issues of concern to the Member States and the Ummah (OIC Charter, 1969).

In this study, the OIC’s positions on the Yemeni conflict were gleaned from the reading of

- 1- The texts of the resolutions that the ICFM ended up to, either in its pertinent annual meetings or in its extraordinary sessions, which can be convened to take appropriate measures on an issue of vital importance to the Ummah.
Such convention takes place at the request of any member state or of the OIC’s Secretary-General, on a condition that such a request is approved by a simple majority of the member states (OIC Charter, 1969).
- 2- The decisions and resolutions adopted at The Islamic Summit of Kings and Heads of States and Governments, which is the organization's supreme authority (OIC Charter, 1969). Be such decisions taken in its triennial meetings or its extraordinary summits –if any-.
- 3- The official statements of the General Secretariat, who is the Chief Administrative Officer of the organization, either to the media, during the organization’s meetings and summits, or in the competent international forums.

Decisions in the OIC require unanimous support, or a two-thirds majority of members present and voting; in case obtaining consensus fails (OIC Charter, 1969). There is equal distribution of the shares of the total number of votes among the member states (OIC Charter,

1969), which indicates a demanding decision rule that sheds doubt over the efficiency of the decision-making process. Surprisingly though, despite the equal distribution of votes among members, this has not –in effect- shut the door in the face of state control over the organization.

This becomes quite comprehensible by reading the third article of the eighteenth chapter of the OIC charter. That clue links Member States' fulfilment of their financial contributions to the Organization with their eligibility to vote in the Council of Foreign Ministers. While it reserves the Council the discretion to accept such a member state's vote; in case it sees that the failure to pay is due to conditions beyond the member's control (OIC Charter, 1969). Although not uttered, but such a rule signifies the differential weight and influence member states wield on the decision-making process, as per their financial wealth and capacities.

In theory, the demanding decision rule compounds the adverse effects of the high-level conflict of preferences and orientations, which is exacerbated by the large number of member states. This makes up a perfectly paradoxical strategic setting conducive to the OIC being least capable of delivering effective decision-making.

It is profoundly intriguing and confounding, though, to observe how output resolutions are produced quickly; no state, and often no coalition of a small subset of states membership, tried to block decisions, despite the growing heterogeneity of member state interests. Contemplating things in practice reveals that this is attributed to the high-stake politicization of the OIC, which drastically shifts the expected outcome of such decision-making environment.

The influence of power states and mainly the major power –in this case, the Saudi Kingdom- on the organization's members are pivotal intervening factors. The organization is evidently susceptible to shifts in the positions of power states, with observable effects on its stances and

adopted decisions. This is how Saudi Arabia manages to secure a considerable scope of agreement in favor of its agenda and orientations.

The organization enabled Saudi Arabia to deploy its Islamic credentials and to present itself as an Islamic Hegemon that no other member state seems willing to challenge its respected standing among the Ummah. With the exception of the other ideological pole of Iran after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Akbarzadeh and Ahmed expound on the mechanisms through which the Kingdom gets to exert its authority over the Muslim world. The result is the majority of the OIC member states act submissive, providing the Kingdom free reign to lead the organization in the direction of its strategic interest (Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, p.302). They contend that A'l-Sa'oud's Kingdom exercises three kinds of hegemony over the OIC:

- a) intermediate hegemonic strategy exemplified by direct material support, either in the form of economic aid or military support that it provides to Muslim majority states (Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, p.299)
- b) benevolent hegemony: a form of philanthropy, an act of international benevolence — as a response to a humanitarian crisis; in an effort to relieve human suffering and save lives (Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, p.303)
- c) hard hegemony: stance by employing means such as sanctions, threats, and political pressure to ensure compliance (Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, p.304)

First, the Kingdom carved out an institutionalized leadership role for itself within the governing structure of the OIC. The OIC's institutional structure provides the kingdom of Al-Sa'oud a leadership position, this is instantiated by hosting the General Secretariat

headquarters, and several other OIC subsidiaries. This includes housing the International Islamic Fiqh Academy in the city of Jeddah, a subsidiary OIC organ that is supposed to represent the OIC's religious frame of reference. It ascribes itself as a universal reference to Islamic Sharia, entrusted with "elucidating the jurisprudential rulings, positions, and provisions of Shariah on issues of concern to Muslims globally" (International Islamic Fiqh Academy, 2021). So, the presence of such a universal institution in Saudi Arabia reinforces its legitimacy vis-à-vis the Islamic world.

Furthermore, the Kingdom hosts the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). The bank that had USD\$2 billion in the capital in 2008, had received half the worth of this capital back in 2006 from the Saudi government, directed to its poverty alleviation program (Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, p.298). This demonstrates that Saudi Arabia holds the largest share of the Bank's capital stock, an economic power that no other member state can match. Furthermore, it hosts the headquarters of the Islamic Solidarity Fund, which is responsible for emergency relief. All of which provide avenues for the Kingdom to allocate funds to promote its foreign policy goals and strategic interests.

Saudi Arabia has been one of the biggest sources of funding, through both formal and informal channels, to Sunni-majority Muslim countries, which Riyadh views as its sphere of influence (Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, p.303), for example, Egypt, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Pakistan. All of the foregoing is a substantial lever of Saudi influence and reach.

In political terms, operationally speaking, Saudi Arabia's role as the organization's financier is explicitly read in myriad OIC statements. As there is a consistent expression of "thanks and gratitude of the OIC to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for hosting meetings and sessions, and for the possibilities and facilities allocated for holding such meetings." (OIC, 2016)

Acknowledgment is also constantly extended “to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, speaking of which, a self-proclaimed title King Fahd has carved for the ruler of the Sa’oud dynasty in 1986 (Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, p.302); in an initiative to buttress the Kingdom’s Islamic leadership qualities.

Regularly, OIC’s officials’ statements involve extending appreciation for the persona of the custodian, for “his continuous and comprehensive patronage to the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation and its objectives, and for his attention and care and ongoing support for the OIC and its activities” (OIC, 2016).

With the appointment of Saudi nationals as OIC Secretary Generals, the organization becomes totally Saudi controlled. This is especially evident in the Yemeni conflict. Instantiated by the appointment of Iyad Madani in 2014, who was succeeded by yet another Saudi, Youssef bin Al-Ottaimeen in 2016, the period during which the Yemeni conflict took place and witnessed all the conflicts critical junctures. Saudi bias and domination were nothing short of obvious in the General Secretariats' information, statements, reports, and stances. These biases have undermined rational decision-making processes within the OIC

Here it becomes evident how Saudi Arabia exercises its dominance via the OIC and its organs, which are heavily reliant on its funding. This was the decisive factor in the course of Saudi Arabia’s competition with Iran in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia launched a diplomatic campaign to isolate Iran using its political influence (Akbarzadeh & Ahmed, 2017, p 307). First, it succeeded in creating an anti-Iran lobby through the OIC, GCC, as well as the Arab League. This was on account of threatening regional security

by pursuing regional dominance, arousing sectarian terrorism, and destructively meddling in the domestic affairs of Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

By deploying carrot and stick tactics against member states, using mainly its financial lever, Saudi Arabia ensured their adoption of its position against Tehran, even those who were not directly affected by Iran's practices, and those who had historical and future strategic interests with Iran (such as, Pakistan). Somalia, neighboring Bahrain, Sudan, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon are all long-time close allies and recipients of Saudi largesse. They were given pledges of economic aid from the kingdom the day they severed ties with Iran over the Iranian protesters' attack on the Saudi embassy in 2016 (Akbarzadeh & Ahmed, 2017, p).

Simultaneously, Riyadh cut its financial aid to Lebanon, which did not conform to the Saudi-initiated, anti-Iranian resolution. Gulf countries -first and foremost Saudi Arabia and the UAE- are primary sources of economic aid, development projects, and business investments. All aid recipients within the OIC have aligned themselves with their foreign policies.

Rendered almost friendless in the Middle East, Tehran appealed for Kuwait to mediate between it and the GCC countries, in an attempt to bridge the gap. But its appeal for Kuwaiti mediation between Iran and Riyadh was turned down in 2016 (Akbarzadeh & Ahmed, 2017, p). The Iranian quest for convergence and friendly relations was a historic opportunity for the OIC to take charge of regulating the differences between the two key actors who are directly influencing the conflict, and bringing about some convergence of causes between them. However, the OIC remained inoperative in this regard.

Lots of the summits and sessions in which Saudi Arabia tried to push its strict agenda against Iran and its allies and proxies are either hosted in Riyadh, Meccah, or Jeddah. In other cases, the

preparatory meetings, whose work informs the tone of the debate at the summits\ sessions that are held thereupon. On top of that, they are either chaired by Saudi Arabia's representative, or an allied official who heaps praise and gratitude on the Kingdom's every action and pronouncement.

Further, they are attended by an overwhelming majority of Sunni-majority states, and states that owe a debt of allegiance and duty to Saudi largesse. Iran is almost the only state actor representing the pronounced ideological variation. Thus, Iran's president or delegation being the only attendee to object to decisions, appears to be the norm at the OIC. This is well-instantiated by many resolutions on political affairs adopted by sessions of the Council of Foreign Ministers in recent history, in which the Saudi regime successfully induced general agreement with its anti-Iranian agenda:

- i. The Iranian delegation rejection of the text of resolution No. 16/46 – POL (adopted by the 46th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers) on the 'solidarity with Yemen' on the grounds of being an un-objective reflection of the realities on the ground (OIC/47-CFM/2020/REPORT/FINAL, 2020).
- ii. Iranian foreign ministry condemnation of the outcome of the 13th OIC summit held in Istanbul in April 2016, whereof the main agenda item was a discussion of Iran's role vis-à-vis the internal affairs of Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and Somalia (Akbarzadeh & Ahmed, 2017, p 307)

The summit, urgently called for by Riyadh, had the groundwork for it done at an earlier meeting of OIC foreign ministers in Jeddah, in February (Akbarzadeh and Ahmed, p.308). The thirty-seven attendant foreign ministers flayed Iran for its role in fostering terrorism and turmoil in the Middle East (OIC, 2016).

Iran's Foreign Ministry protested the OIC's decision alleging that "the organization had, in effect, put itself at the service of the objectives of a single country" (Akbarzadeh & Ahmed, 2017, p 307), alluding to Saudi Arabia.

The above unequivocally demonstrates how the decision-making process in the OIC never leads to deadlock; despite:

- the presence of competing major powers among the organization's members
- the presumed heterogeneity of member state interests, ideological and geopolitical alignments
- the demanding decision rule

By exercising hegemony, Saudi Arabia manages to affect the scope for agreement within the organization and maintain its decision-making capacity (Sommerer & Tallberg, 2016, p.11) in service of its agenda.

Decision rules yielded the following consequences:

1. Saudi-Arabia's control over the organization
2. Shallow Cooperation
3. No significant adjustment of states' behavior
4. The resolutions' adoption criteria are only the calculations of political dividends obtained through maintaining close associations with the hegemon state, i.e., A'l-Sa'oud's Kingdom. Instead of compliance with the organization's norms.

Chapter 4 A Case Study of the OIC Intervention in the Iraqi Civil War.

This case study looks into the OIC's role in managing and resolving the civil war in Iraq.

A Background to the outbreak of the civil war in Iraq

The US-led invasion of Iraq led to sectarian violence and persistent insurgency in the country (Patterson, 2013, P. 4) due to the failure to establish political order, the ensuing lack of communal security, social cohesion, and the dire economic conditions. After the United States and the coalition had demolished the structures of Saddam Hussein's regime, they assumed the authority to implement their vision of "creating a model secular democracy in the Middle East" (Steele, 2008, P. 2).

The political landscape was finally up for redefinition before the competing currents that had long been repressed during the reign of the Ba'ath party. As the contending societal forces seized the moment, the political scene had come to be ruled by inter -and Intra- sectarian competition and violence, historical grievances, stereotypes, and fear. Under pressure from the increasingly influential Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani—the most senior spiritual leader of Iraqi Shi'as—the Coalition Provisional Authority handed over power to an interim Iraqi government led by the exile, secular Shiite leader Iyad Allawy in 2004 (Patterson, 2013, P. 6). This provoked fears of domination and exclusion (Steele, 2008, P. 2), especially that Shiite elements in the antecedent US-appointed Governing Council were averse to sharing power with Sunnis and Kurds (Patterson, 2013, P. 6).

On another level, the fact that the government still reflected the U.S. exile-oriented, generally secularist approach to post-Saddam Iraq (Patterson, 2013, P. 5) provoked a violent backlash from local religious leaders and transnational networks (like Al-Qaeda, and Iranian-style political groupings). All of the aforementioned, in addition to the interim government's failure to restore the rule of law and public order, gave rise to several insurgent groups among both Sunnis and

Shiites, many of which were religious-inspired and expressly used religious themes and symbols (Patterson, 2013, P. 6).

Numerous Iran-tied, radical Shi'a groups organized as political groupings, like the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and the Islamic Dawa party that rose to power after the invasion and the followers of Al-Sistani (Patterson, 2013, P. 6,11). Others maintained armed militias that operated independently of government control, like the Mahdi Army led by the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr; hence, the leadership over the Iraqi Shiite community was fiercely disputed among those various groups (Patterson, 2013, P. 6).

A similar dynamic played out among the Sunni community, who widely rejected the government's legitimacy, and abstained from the political process. Instead, many Sunnis had recourse to the various Sunni radical groups which carried out attacks against Coalition forces and the government. Both Sunnis and Shiites were caught in an accelerating cycle of virulent violence, in which attacks against religious leaders and political figures were reciprocated. Civilian targets like residential localities and holy shrines were also the main targets of suicidal attacks and reprisals. (Patterson, 2013, P.6).

Sectarian violence peaked in February 2006 upon the attack on the golden-domed Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra—one of Shiites' holiest sites—which essentially sparked a fully-fledged civil war between them and Sunnis (Steele, 2008, P. 2). Shiite militias and extremists launched a systematic campaign of violence, and Sunni insurgents fought back. The security picture was grim with the Iraqi security forces' lack of capacity and will to deter violence duly (Steele, 2008, P. 2). The number of kidnappings, acts of torture, executions, and suicide bombings, and efforts at "sectarian cleansing" of neighborhoods increased alarmingly.

OIC's involvement in the Iraqi civil war

OIC had been intensely engaged with the Iraqi case, which has been full of events with undeniable repercussions for the various aspects of international life. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the then Secretary-General of the Organization, gave a first-person account of how he worked to step up the OIC's role and approach to the complex situation in Iraq upon assuming office.

At first, the OIC involvement was focused on addressing the political and security crisis at the state and the international diplomatic level. The organization closely followed the political transition process and supported it; It established contacts with state officials in Iraq. In addition, the OIC dispatched a political mission to hold direct consultations on all aspects of the conflict (İhsanoğlu, 2010, P. 122), the mission held various meetings to bring back normalcy to the situation by supporting the completion of the political transition process; the convention of the Parliament, the appointment of the President and Prime Minister, and the formation of a sustainable Iraqi Government) (OIC, 2005).

Furthermore, the OIC General Secretariat set up an OIC Contact Group on Iraq and mandated it to cater for the OIC engagement with the Iraqi affairs and look into the possibility of opening an OIC Office in Baghdad. Concurrently, the organization dispatched a fact-finding delegation to Iraq in July 2006. Upon the reporting of that fact-finding mission, the OIC decided to put a system for monitoring and evaluation in place, by opening an office in Baghdad. That step was intended to provide direct communication channels with all Iraqi stakeholders in the crisis, monitor the situation on the ground, coordinate efforts, and study cooperation opportunities between the organization and the new Iraqi Government (İhsanoğlu, 2010, P. 122).

Simultaneously, the organization started talks with Western powers who had a vested interest in the developments in Iraq, those who contributed with the majority of military troops in the

Multinational Forces that invaded Iraq in 2003: (the U.S., the U.K., and the European Union). In an effort to push the course of events in the direction of restoring full sovereignty to the Iraqi people, safeguarding Iraq's national unity and territorial integrity, as well as realizing the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Iraqi soil (OIC, 2006).

On the same level, the organization took part in Iraq's neighbors' meeting in Tehran. Tehran had invited the neighboring countries of Iraq, besides Egypt, the Arab League, and the OIC's Secretary Generals, for a meeting to help Iraq regain security and stability (KUNA, 2006). It is evident that, by calling for and hosting such talks, Iran was assertively posing as a key actor in the region and the affairs of Iraq. However, for the OIC's mediation efforts, Iran's cooperation and support were deemed essential for reaching a settlement to the crisis and avoiding its spoiler effect. Hence, such a meeting still allowed for constructive engagement toward building a common ground between those impactful contributors.

The discourse around Iraq between Iran and its OIC counterparts during Iraq's neighbors' meetings was highly divisive, as the parties split into two camps. On the one hand, the Arab Sunni camp, including Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia (RFE/RL, 2005), blamed Iran for undermining Iraq's stability and national unity. On the other hand, Iran and its proponents denied the allegations and emphasized Iran's willingness to exercise a positive role in Iraq. Assertion of the Arab identity is a constant, prominent feature of that discourse on Iraq's situation, which is another one of many manifestations of the dominance of Arab culture in the organization. It is yet another example of how the leaders of supposedly Muslim OIC member-states insist on promoting and upholding Arabhood to override the Islamic identity in the political and ideological consciousness.

Several Arab diplomats stated that “the meeting would stress Iraq’s “Arabism” (RFR/RL, 2005), which is more disruptive of any efforts to reconcile Intra-Muslim differences and forge unity. Officials of several Arab countries accosted accusations at the Islamic republic for attempting to interfere in the Iraqi elections (RFE/RL, 2005). Several Arab diplomats unreservedly spoke of the Iraqi elections as a Sunni-Shiite issue. Furthermore, they carried out a campaign to boost Sunni turnout in the elections to prevent Shiites from assuming Iraq’s leadership (RFE/RL, 2005). This further cultivated the seeds of polarization and sectarian animosity among Iraqis. Remarkably, it did nothing but further undermine a popular, fair political process in favor of chaos and Iraqi infighting. Iran, in turn, rejected the accusations and pointed its fingers at Arab parties for meddling in the Iraqi vote.

Sunni Arab countries were managing the Iraqi situation driven by fear for their own regimes’ stability, or the fear that the Shiite rise to power could spill over among their Shiite constituency. Iran was driven by aspirations for its Shiite revolutionary model to gain regional ground, and fears of Iraq posing a military threat like what happened in the near past. It continued to provide logistical, financial, and political support for some of Iraq’s armed Shiite militias, and political groupings, in addition to the presence of Iranian paramilitary units in different parts of Iraq (Behner, 2006).

Under the backdrop of conflicting interests and views of Iraq’s future, several meetings of Iraq’s neighbors had been convened since 2003. The meeting that was held in July 2006, with the participation of Egypt, the Secretary Generals of the OIC and the Arab League, heralded the OIC’s evolving transition from a political and security approach to a more conflict-sensitive one in managing the crisis.

Until that moment, the OIC third-party intervention to manage the conflict was in the form of fact-finding, good offices, and facilitation. At that meeting, it was suggested to hold a reconciliation meeting between the Sunni and Shiite leaders in the holy city of Makkah; more importantly, it was proposed to be held under the auspices of the OIC Fiqh Academy (İhsanoğlu, 2010, P. 123). İhsanoglu recounts in his book that the deteriorating sectarian violence subsequent to the bombing of the Al-Askari mosque necessitated establishing contacts with religious leaders of various sects and lobbying them to reach a religious accord that lays the ground for a political solution (İhsanoğlu, 2010, P. 123).

Intense deliberation and preparations between the representatives of the two sects preceded (İhsanoğlu, 2010, P. 124) because engaging in activities that bring conflicting groups together without appropriate preparation could be counterproductive (UNHCR Iraq Operations, 2007, P.35). On 7-8 October 2006, which coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, two groups of Iraqi religious scholars met at the headquarters of the Islamic Fiqh Academy in Jeddah. They prepared a document in which they expounded the principles of Islamic tolerance, freedom of belief, and non-use of force in religious matters (İhsanoğlu, 2010, P. 124).

The two sects' religious authorities discussed precepts from the holy Quran and the Prophetic tradition that prohibits bloodshed and violence and establishes the notion of the inviolability of blood and human life. Finally, they reached some conclusions and adopted a declaration that unfounded any claim of violence based on religious differences, and laid the foundation for the unity of ranks and harmony among the entirety of Muslims (İhsanoğlu, 2010, P. 124).

The organization's spokesperson (then Mr. Ata'a Al-Mannan) came out to the media to explain the scope of this endeavor and its set goals. He stated that this was an initiative limited to a specific aspect of the conflict, which is “sectarian conflict,”; aiming to put out its ember.

“Considering that this conflict, with its religious backgrounds, is usually the bloodiest and most violent type of conflict” (اللهيبي et al., 2006). Mr. Ata’a Al-Mannan added in a statement posted on the organization’s website, “It is not an initiative for reconciliation between the two parties, and it is not a conference, symposium, discussion, debate, or negotiations. Rather, its issue area is about stopping sectarian fighting among Iraqis, based on a unified Islamic view.” he proclaimed (اللهيبي et al., 2006). He added, "It is a special occasion that differs from everything else, during which the most senior religious authorities and scholars announce these constant religious tenets and rules that are collective." The spokesman explained that the Mecca Document was to be distributed on the largest possible scale in Iraq, so that settles in the peoples’ minds and conscience." (اللهيبي et al., 2006)

The Content of the Mecca Declaration and its Repercussions:

The declaration's preamble characterized the situation it addresses in Iraq, “where bloodshed is widespread, and where aggression ... is perpetrated under the guise of Islam.” (OIC, 2006) Then the draftsmen of the document assuming ownership of it “We the scholars of Iraq, from both the Sunnis and the Shiites, having met in Makkah Al-Mukarramah in Ramadan ... and deliberated on the situation in Iraq ..., issue and proclaim the following Declaration” (OIC, 2006). This statement marks religious leaders assuming the forefront and putting their weight behind the mediatory efforts.

Then, religious leaders used the operative part of the resolution to state their doctrinal judgment on the spiraling hostilities. Firstly and most essentially, they used religious knowledge to transform the two sects’ perceptions of each other as “infidels” by defining who a Muslim is. The religious definition of a Muslim illustrated that the defining “fundamental principles of Islamic faith are shared and espoused by Sunnis and Shiites with no exception.

They emphasized the substantiality of the common ground and the minority of differences between the Sunni and the Shiite schools of thought. This is one example of how religion constitutes a common ground between mortal enemies, by providing constructive narratives reinforcing the unity of faith and the religious ethos of virtuous coexistence. Such narratives serve as counterarguments to those providing the base points for radicalization. This enlightening educational voice counteracts the demagogic, inflammatory rhetoric that appeals to the mobs' emotion and group-thinking often used by radicalizing agents (Farasin, 2019, 23).

Later on, they set out the Islamic Shariah rulings that govern the relationship between Muslims as per the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the two primary, universal sources of legislation in Islam. These two sacred sources are not solely concerned with creed and ritual worship; most importantly, they constitute a comprehensive social and legal system. That system provides jus cogens, norms, and legal rulings that govern all facets of human life, from individual conduct and attitudes, to the relationship between man and man, including transactions (social, economic, political, etcetera) (Dar al-Ifta al Missriyyah, 2022).

The Iraqi case is a case of ideological, religiously-based extremism, which impetus originates from the assumption of radical differences between the two sects. Therefore, religious scholars' engagement appeared to be an effective and culturally-appropriate approach, as their mode of intervention delivered three crucial actions.

First is re-educating people; second, they delegitimized the "use of violence in the name of religion" narrative, by presenting an ideological counter-narrative with consensus jurisprudential rooting. Third, they represented a Pan-Islamically, binding-erga omnes legal framework to the public. The latter can further be found in paragraphs where the draftsmen established guiding principles and legal norms, such as: (OIC, 2006)

- The prohibition on a Muslim to excommunicate or hereticate another Muslim;
- The prohibition on a Muslim to subject fellow Muslims -or a member of their families- whether Shiite or Sunni, to any kind of aggression, terrorizing act, organized crime, forcible displacement, or incitement on the grounds of sectarian affiliation.
- The Sancrosanctity of blood, property, honor, and reputation of Muslims.
- The inviolability of all houses of worship. It is prohibited to attack them or appropriate them from their owners as per the Muslim jurisprudential rule adopted by all Islamic schools
- Whoever perpetrates such punishable acts is the party condemned to ex-communication “shall fall from the fold and grace of the whole Ummah, including all Muslim authorities, scholars, and all believers.”

Another paragraph states, “whoever deliberately and with premeditation kills a believer, his recompense is Hell to abide therein, and the Wrath and the Curse of God are upon him, and a great punishment is assigned for him.” (OIC, 2006)

However, these rulings entail no more than shaming penalties that ritualistically stigmatize transgressors of shared norms (Kahan, 2006, P. 497). Their formulation had abided by these limits, not because Shariah law does not offer punitive and deterring sanctions for these transgressions, but to ensure full respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference. Such penalties clearly appeal to the sensibilities (Kahan, 2006, P. 497) of believers who subscribe to an egalitarian religious creed and have the same moral and religious persuasion. Then, did these sanctions produce less effectiveness compared to coercive sanctions?

Assessment of the OIC mediation: How Religious Leaders' engagement Impacted upon the Conflict Dynamics.

The OIC-sponsored ten-point edict provoked considerable constructive responses from both ends of the religio-political spectrum.

At the level of elites and community leadership, the Makkah declaration was signed by prominent leaders of the major religious groups representing Shia and Sunni communities. Among the most prominent personalities who attended the signing ceremony of the document were: (KUNA, 2006)

- the head of the Sunni Endowment, Ahmed Abdul Ghafour Al-Samarrai, the head of the Shiite Endowment, Saleh Haidari,
- Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Sumaida'i, a member of the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq, the major religious group of Sunni scholars of Islamic law, provided guidance to the Sunni community on the relationship with Shi'a and Coalition forces (Patterson, 2013, P. 16).
- Sheikh Sadr Al-Din Al-Qubanji, a member of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) - is currently known as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. It is a major Shiite political force Iran established and sheltered during the Iran-Iraq war until the U.S. invaded Iraq. That group advocated an Iranian-modeled theocracy, and maintained an active militia known as the Badr Brigades (Patterson, 2013, P. 17)

The Makkah edict was widely circulated in mosques and religious institutes all over Iraq (Petersen et al., 2019, P. 236), where religious leaders addressed their communities, denouncing violence and promoting unity of ranks. Sayyid Yassin al-Moussawi, a leader in the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), addressed his constituency in the first Friday prayer sermon after the signing of the edict, at the Fatimid Mosque in Najaf, south of Baghdad.

He said “the mere openness of our brothers to Iraq and their participation in solving the problem of Iraqi bloodshed is a great thing.” (الرأي, 2006) He added, “We bear sacrifices in order for you people to be convinced of the sanctity of Sunni blood. So, the terms of the agreement must be implemented on the ground.” (الرأي, 2006)

In Karbala, Sayyid Ahmed al-Safi, representative of the Supreme Shiite authority, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, stated to the media that “the Mecca conference is a very blessed and vital step, and we wish if it had occurred before this day.” (الرأي, 2006). In addition, he stressed that the ongoing conflict was not sectarian, but rather a political one.

Al-Sistani’s representative emphasized in his sermon at the shrine of Imam Hussein in the center of Karbala that “the conference should include articles that remind the Sunni and Shiites that this country is theirs.” (الرأي, 2006). He also directed the worshipers, saying that the Shiite must learn the limits of the Sunni, and the Sunni must recognize the limits of the Shiite. If we do not respect each other's boundaries, there is no doubt that the equation will be anarchy” (الرأي, 2006).

Moreover, the then Prime Minister Al-Maliki held a couple of meetings with Al-Sistani and Muqtada Al-Sadr. He reported to the journalists that Al-Sistani had a letter addressed by Al-Sistani and the two references Najafi and Al-Yaqubi to the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu. In that letter, they affirmed their "full agreement with the provisions of the Mecca Document.” The Prime Minister confirmed that letters were sent to the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, and were read before the Makkah conference participants." (الوسط, 2006).

The Prime Minister also reported Muqtada Al-Sadr to have confirmed his support for the Makkah declaration and considered the efforts of the Muslim brothers and neighbors to be “in the interest of Iraq and the Iraqi people,” hoping that they help to establish security in this country. (الرأي, 2006)

This shows that using their popular legitimacy and moral power, religious leaders who gathered in Makkah managed to influence and modify the behavior of leading radical and insurgent elements, some of whom had been involved in subversive practices and agitating rhetoric toward their constituencies. They operationalized the common Islamic identity and upheld acceptable norms of conduct.

On a grassroots level, Iraqis in Sunni and Shiite-majority regions were reported to have demonstrated on October 21, 2006 (RFE/RL, 2012). By arousing sentiments of a common purpose, unity, and resolve in the fight against terrorism, violence, and disunity, that accord galvanized Iraqis to take to the streets in support of reconciliation efforts. According to news reports, the rallying call was, “No to terrorism, yes to the Mecca edict,” and “halt the bloodshed.” (RFE/RL, 2012).

Most remarkably, the fact that the Makkah Declaration induced a positive response even from the proponents of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr is remarkable and of implications. This shows that the message of unity and amicable coexistence is held in very high regard in Iraqis’ collective consciousness. It was aligned with the general consensus and strongly resonated with their sentiments and aspirations, even at the climax of full-blown antagonism and malice.

This substantiates Powers, G. F. (2010) and Smock, D. R. (2006)'s contention that religious peacebuilding lays solid foundations for reconstructing and repairing social relationships (Farasin, 2019, P.62). They promote collective action by speaking to their constituencies, reviving common regulative principles, and strengthening the values of peaceful coexistence and respect for existing customs. This sort of social action constitutes a peaceful social life, modifies the behavior of the actors and social participants, and transforms the conflict. Ultimately, this creates a favorable environment for officials and technical experts to negotiate and take constructive steps toward a settlement.

Before this initiative emerged, the situation in Iraq was deadlocked on many levels, with an incessant developing conflict, inter-community violence, and a lack of reconciliation (both political and communal) (UNHCR Iraq Operations, 2007, P. 13). Not only did that situation hinder the reinstatement of security and reconstruction efforts, but it prevented the provision of essential services (UNHCR Iraq Operations, 2007, P. 13). This caused people's disillusionment with the political process, discrediting all the actors in the scene. Furthermore, it created a breeding ground for radicalizing the frustrated, unemployed, and marginalized youths (UNHCR Iraq Operations, 2007, P. 13).

There are some substantive notes to take and draw on. Firstly, measuring the impact of the OIC's approach by factoring-in the mutually-hurting stalemate variable. The MHS is an intervening factor mediating the relationship between the two variables: the mode of intervention and its outcome; so, to what extent does it causally account for the result in this case?

We find that the Arab League made an initiative, sponsoring a National Accord Conference in Iraq in November 2005. This initiative held a couple of preparatory meetings that reportedly witnessed broad participation by Iraqi stakeholders: political, religious, tribal, and civil society

leaders (UNHCR Iraq Operations, 2007, P. 64). The last of those meetings was in Cairo from 25-27 July, only two months apart from the OIC's initiative. This -unequivocally- means that the mutually-hurtful effect of the stalemate was as intense and pressing as it was at the time of the Mekkah conference. Though, LAS efforts to hold a reconciliation conference had failed (UNHCR Iraq Operations, 2007, P. 65).

More remarkably, in June 2006, when the new Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki launched a promising Reconciliation Plan and reached out to political, tribal, civil society leaders, and even armed groups. Tribal and civil society representatives held separate conferences, and made declarations in support of the national dialogue. Even more to the momentum of the dialogue efforts, in the Council of Representatives, Shiite and Sunni delegates came together in an internal dialogue to supplement the reconciliation process (UNHCR Iraq Operations, 2007, P. 64). However, July recorded another peak escalation of sectarian violence.

Even more strikingly, the calls of some clerics and imams to refrain from violence and exercise restraint, including the supreme Shiite authority Al-Sistani, were all to no avail. In contrast, the Mecca edict was the only intervention that was popularly received with a welcome reaction. It appears to be the only initiative that provoked the divided and suffering grassroots to take to the streets, to express their satisfaction and alignment with it.

This can be traced back to two factors: in contrast to those separate calls for restraint by wise religion-men, the edict was a united and decisive stand, articulated in clear-cut religious legal terms, that defines "Islamic identity" and prescribes/standardizes accordant conduct. Second, the power of this declaration is also traced to the setting where it was constructed. It was especially efficacious because it was brought forward in Muslims' most sacred place by a powerful and legitimate institution, i.e., the OIC.

The outcome promoted the political process, increased communication, and gave vigor to the National Reconciliation scheme. This can be seen in the spin-off constructive activities which followed the declaration. It acted as one pillar for peace, in tandem with other political developments like the Sunni Awakening and the military “surge” (Patterson, 2013, P. 13).

In November 2007, Sheikh/ Muhammad Taqi al-Mawla, head of the Supreme Authority for Hajj and Umrah in Iraq, announced to the media that a more expansive Sunni-Shiite conference was to be held in Makkah Al-Mukarramah during the pilgrimage season; to activate the Makkah Document, side by side with the achievements of the national reconciliation project of the Prime Minister. Marking the difference in time and circumstances between the two conferences, Al-Mawla highlighted significant developments effected by the Mecca Declaration: “This conference differs in timing and circumstances. As it is being held in a security situation that is the best in more than two years,” (الجريدة, 2007). “ Additionally, the conference is taking place amid clarity of the participants’ positions on the violence, awakenings, reconciliation process that is undergoing in the country,” Al-Mawla added (الجريدة, 2007).

Moreover, the Head of the Pilgrimage Authority highlighted that “ the past months witnessed the conduct of tens of unified religious rites between the Sunni and Shiite communities in more than one place in Baghdad and other provinces.” (الجريدة, 2007). He also referred to reciprocal visits between scholars and clerics, which yielded positive results reflected in the country's general situation, and victories achieved by the security and military forces against terrorism (الجريدة, 2007).

In Ibrahim Sharqieh’s 2011 interview with Mohamed Al-Dawraki, the Iraqi official commended the OIC’s intervention as a successful intervention that brought about “a social peace” in several parts of the country (Sharqieh, 2012, P. 169). Tariq Ali Bakheet -the then,

Director-General of the Dept of Political Affairs at the OIC – shared the same view, and suggested that this particular intervention strategy be replicated in addressing radicalism in Somalia (Salah, 2011, P. 20).

Though, Négron-Gonzales notes that the cessation of sectarian hostilities it produced in Iraq was limited, and was not a sustainable success (Négron-Gonzales, 2015, P. 130). Efforts for reconciliation stagnated in 2007 (UNHCR Iraq Operations, 2007, P. 65). This can be attributed to the failure to fulfill some fundamental requirements that would have enabled the society to reap the social order that the accord had sowed.

The first is that the declaration's success was not well-invested in a parallel political breakthrough or success. At the political level, slow progress and the special committees' failure to meet deadlines and deliver on their agendas have frustrated hopes of significant achievement (UNHCR Operation in Iraq, 2017, 65) settling fundamental issues of contention. This specifically entails the establishment of a just political transition based on:

- A participatory political process
- restorative justice
- social and educational de-radicalization and rehabilitation programs.

Second, is the lack of a follow-up mechanism; there was no follow-up done after the signing of the agreement. Another reason is the lack of practical support from the international community. It did not present an adequate degree of a united front behind the accord, to give it power and momentum and did not demonstrate effective endorsement by sustaining a consistent, genuine effort that builds upon its outcomes.

Third, Regional powers and OIC members generally did not commit to their role as guarantors of the reconciliation process; on the contrary, some continued to act as spoilers. As per the edict, they did not act to collectively empower and reward compliance and disempower an offender through negative publicity and social and international seclusion. In this case, they were more interested in breaching these norms and getting away with it. The political support for the edict would have created dividends for peace, and liabilities for contraventions.

Institutional resources to tap: the IIFA as a potential institutionalized link between the grassroots and the OIC

The International Islamic Fiqh [Jurisprudence] Academy (IIFA) is a subsidiary organ of the (OIC). It ascribes itself as a universal jurisprudential reference, representing all the recognized Islamic schools in the Muslim world. It is entrusted with “elucidating the legal rulings, positions, and provisions of Shariah on issues of concern to Muslims around the world,” and it claims to do so “in full independence, based on the Holy Quran and the Noble Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH).”

This organ, whose functions and role are hardly ever recognized in the Islamic world, seems to have the potential to play a role in developing the OIC’s institutional mechanism for peace efforts. While the discourse among the OIC members, either within the organization’s framework or outside it at the state level, was sowing the seeds of religious, sectarian, and ethnic divisions among Iraqis, and holding up national interests and the minor identities that are aligned with them. The IIFA had consistently adopted a rhetoric that recalled and emphasized: “the Ummah’s unity despite the multiplicity of its sects” (IIFA, 2008).

The Academy addressed the entirety of Muslims to remind them of the unlawfulness of excommunicating a sect’s followers and the sanctity of their blood, honor, and property as long

as they believe in Allah The Almighty and His Prophet PBUH, and as long as they practice the pillars of faith and abide by the laws of Islam without denying any unchangeable and evident rituals (IIFA, 2006). Thus, it was drawing the OIC and the general Muslim discourse back on the rails of the overarching egalitarian identity, to which normative umbrella they all willfully submit.

The IIFA religious jurists declared in clearer-cut terms what is the behavior and attitude Islamically prohibited, and what is reasonable conduct. This created an opportunity to bring the common values to bear in the context of modern political realities. In religious terms, at the peak of vindictiveness, disciples of each sect were violating all that is fundamentally inviolable in Islam, such as: shrines, mosques, and above all, the blood of fellow Muslim; the IIFA 's stance was substantial.

The academy produced resolutions that asserted that “all Islamic schools are unanimous in prohibiting attacks against Muslims, religious sites, and cemeteries”, and that religious texts relating to this are comprehensive and unequivocal. Moreover, its resolutions reminded all Muslims that venerable Imams of Shiites like al-‘Askari are still the grandsons of Prophet Mohammad – PBUH – from the lineage of his daughter Fatima. This entails that the desecration of their graves, all such violations of what is sacred for one sect, are “crimes against all Muslims, whether Sunni or not. Consequently, whoever commits such an act is deprived of Allah the Almighty and His Prophet’s love – PBUH –”. (IIFA, 2006)

Operationally wise, the scaling up of the mediation approach by the OIC to a multi-track approach, and dialogue facilitation was consequential. It can be seen how the conflict management activities operated on various levels to reach out to the broad spectrum of involved actors, to cater to the particularities of the conflict, and the exigencies of societal culture. Also,

the OIC intervention, in this case, was the closest to the guidelines for effective culturally-sensitive mediation, that were proposed at the OIC third Member States Conference on Mediation thirteen years later.

As Ambassador Moratinos repeatedly propounded, the OIC engaged in activities at various levels and involved a combination of actors both from the highest levels of decision-making (Track I), as well as unofficial social actors (Track II) (UNHCR Iraq Operation, 2007, P.22). This strategy was adequate to address the complexity of the situation, as it achieved an extent of a substantive outreach effort with the relevant stakeholders in the peace process (Dudouet et al., 2018, P.183).

The IIFA's role here is of considerable significance, as it provided an interface between the OIC -intervening in its official institutional capacity as an intergovernmental organization- and religious leaders from the middle ranges of society. Religious leaders performed as middle actors who maintained direct contact with both the grassroots and the official institutions. (UNHCR Iraq Operations, 2007, P. 18). These mechanisms cater to the diverse needs of societies in their demand for justice, and are sensitive to the identity, culture, and traditions they speak to. In that sense, religious actors are one of the potential traditional, insider peacemakers who -often- are better suited to address conflict issues satisfactorily, compared to international peacemaking efforts.

There are various dynamics in which the OIC has been enabling the continuation of disputation, either by giving religious credibility to military intervention and coercive measures, or by being permissive to unreasonable conduct in service of the interests of prominent Arab member states. In contrast, this case study offers one way how religious-based intervention by the OIC in intra-Muslim conflicts can be successful.

Evidently, this happens by operationalizing the Organization's Islamic identity and representation of all Muslims (Petersen et al., 2019, P.239) by working in the complementarity of religious leaders. Bringing religious leaders' societal reach and moral power into play, effectively leverages conflicting parties into mediating, reconciling, and upholding acceptable norms of conduct. The IIFA endows the OIC with some potential to act as a neutral mediator or actor, and provide a mechanism for inter-track coordination between the OIC and societal, religious actors. As expounded above, this is theoretically and practically proven to help overcome the organization's structural weaknesses like: the inconsistent handling of intra-Muslim conflicts, heterogeneity, excessive state influence, and pervasiveness of regional rivalry (Petersen et al., 2019, P.234, 239).

Chapter 5 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

This research project sought to show that the OIC is capable and equipped to play a role in intra-OIC conflicts that is more dynamic than the mere endorsement or backing of international mediation efforts. It primarily contests the claim that its commitment to Islamic identity, its ideals, and imperatives, is a restrictive framework for its operation. There are many debates in the literature about how problematic the religious attribute of the organization is:

1. The religious-ideological *raison d'etre* is an anachronism to the secular, realist function of the modern international order
2. As an ideological source, it is the subject of myriad interpretations, and it is not a monolithic system of ideas that can construe the basis for international relations policies
3. The OIC region is a vulnerable region where different problems (weak statehood, economic crises, power struggles, ...) and various sorts of tensions (between states, tribes, regional identities, classes, and ethnic groups) find outlets in religious narratives. Hence, Exploiting doctrinal differences, and leveraging the mobilizing power of religious rhetoric are prevalent conflict trends across the OIC.

Consequently, mainstream literature on conflict management and resolution discussed religion as a driver of violence.

Against this backdrop, the main purpose of this analysis has been to reveal the fundamental discrepancies between what is pronounced and what is in operation. The organization proclaims a Pan-Islamist ideology; it determines its *raison d'etre* to safeguard the Ummah's interests and solidarity; the dynamics of relations are meant to be peaceful, non-interventionist, and

cooperative. However, in effect, Arab culture dominates the organization (Gassama et al., 2018, P. 414-415), realpolitik is the overriding rationale; regime survival is the guiding imperative; pragmatism is the only ideology; and the working dynamics are power dynamics, unregulated in the absence of a contractual normative framework.

Then, this research builds on that illumination to develop an understanding of how this organization's cultural identity is the panacea to its paradoxical tenets, and gives it great potential to promote peaceful conflict management. The pan-Islamic culture here features an overarching system of norms to which heterogeneous factions defer. It establishes social order, and fosters conditions for an inclusive, just, and peaceful society, nationally, regionally, and universally. In this sense, the notion of culture presents a site for a principled dialogue, observance, and broader constructive engagement that eschew narrow identity politics.

This investigation showed that international peace interventions in intra-Muslim conflicts tend to be superficial and poorly designed. One shortcoming of these mediation processes is that they are consistent with the values of the mediators and the international community, rather than the disputants. The most striking finding, which has not been described before, is that international peace actors, including the UN itself, demonstrate blatant disregard for the principles they prescribed in their reference guidelines for effective mediation.

Moreover, they are influenced by many strategic aspects, including major powers' agendas. Such agendas might comprise self-interests in mediating the dispute, but not as much interest in finding an adequate, sustainable solution to its causes. These systemic features directly translate into another weakness, as they focus less on relationship-building and sustainable solutions in conflict societies (Lanz, 2008, P.3). Instead, they mainly resort to standardized strategies, power-

or interest-based, that usually impose unrealistic terms, bring the process to a premature end, or fulfill short-run objectives at best (Lanz, 2008, 14).

While on the part of the OIC, this study showed that, as in the case of the organization's appellation, Saudi Arabia constantly deploys this specious ideological label to legitimize its foreign policy pursuits, which have quintessentially divergent motives than the ostensible Islamic-guided ones. Endorsing the military alliance as "Islamic" aligns with the OIC's use of this label as a mere pragmatic device to reinforce Saudi Arabia's interests and mobilize Muslim states in its service.

It also demonstrated that, under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, the OIC takes shelter in using this identity vaguely to eschew casting the so-called Islamic teachings, values, and norms into the contractual form. As this ideological affiliation -although traditional and unformulated- appears much more prominent and important than a signed, contractual obligation. This ensured that the Kingdom does not fall under any contractual compulsion or normative limitations within the OIC. The discrete reason this analysis shows is not Islamic ideology's inadequacy to guide international collective work, but a deliberate measure to spare the pragmatic Members any bounding contractual duty under the Sharia law.

Moreover, the OIC established itself on the inviolability of state sovereignty, which governed the operational frame of its median role. Throughout its history, the organization's adherence to this norm effectively overruled the core norms and ideals it claimed to stand up for (such as, the principle of Muslim unity, the supremacy of the interests of the Ummah, and the Islamic norm of justice). Nonetheless, the organization overtly sponsored and advocated Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen. This demonstrates that, rather than normative concerns, the crude

geopolitical calculations determine whether the OIC will invoke Islam to condone violence or justify it.

Here we get to clearly see two parallel mutually-reinforcing phenomena, i.e., State terrorism vis-à-vis armed group terrorism. Both inflict unrestrained violence against a broadly defined enemy. Both abuse religious teachings and history to legitimize it. However, the OIC seems to endorse and glorify the former, and condemn the latter.

One significant result emerging from this study is that focusing solely on the logic of material power and interests in dispute settlement activities is inadequate to address the intractability of intra-OIC conflicts. In contrast, a peacemaking intervention that takes due account of the ontological mindset and epistemological framework can establish well-founded peace, justice, and security. The reason is that this kind of intervention fulfills a broader range of underlying interests and deeper motifs.

As an interstate organization worked to address religious relations, the paradoxical aspect of the OIC compels it to be conscious of the various sources of its strategic strength. Its peculiar cultural identity endows it with unique types of powers, and sui generis means to exercise an active peacemaking role, as they do not clash with its state nature. Besides, they are more cost-effective and outcome-effective.

Material power and cost-benefit calculations are not the only determinants of disputants' behavior. Ideas, identities, and norms construct international relations just as well. John R. P. French and Bertram Raven (1959) presented a nuanced classification of the types of power which are seen as conditions for achieving outcomes and compliance (Carnevale,2002, P. 28).

Among those types was legitimate power, which ascribes the third-party intervenor the right to prescribe behavior, and the acceptability by the adversaries. It derives from norms and values, yet, it is deemed a hard power (Carnevale, 2002, P. 28). Also, there are the informational, the expert, and the referent power, which are soft powers that enhance an intervenor's clout (Carnevale, 2002, p. 28). These elements constitute the appeal of religious leaders' engagement in peacemaking interventions.

These results thereby feed into the major contribution this study makes to research on conflict management and resolution. Namely, the proposition of a culturally-sensitive approach that operates identity and norms in internal OIC conflicts, through the engagement of religious leaders in peace interventions. The analysis identifies potential benefits of this approach:

1. It is a solution to the OIC's inherent normative and operational conundrum

For long decades, scholars and ideologues have concentrated on the inherent contradiction between Islamic principles and the fundamentals of the international system. Thus, article two of the OIC charter, which juxtaposes "the Islamic teachings and values" with international system principles (independence, sovereignty, and non-interference), seems paradoxical. This ideological and operational oxymoron, embedded in the genesis of the OIC, is at the core of its plague.

This study's ultimate contribution is to alter the dominant assumption of an unavoidable clash between the Islamic frame of work and the conduct of international relations, and international conflict management. It suggests the engagement of religious agents as a soft power that can intervene transnationally to prevent conflicts, found for peace, and overcome the restrictive and disruptive impacts of realpolitik. All while leaving the outer layers of the national systems intact, namely territorial integrity and state regime.

2. A solution to the dilemma in mediation practice: voluntarism vs. coercion

Ibrahim Sharqieh posits that the “no-force-based mediation” is an advantageous feature of the OIC’s approach (Sharqieh, 2012, P.171). However, the total absence of any mechanism for enforcement and deterrence causes mediation to be of no consequence. The case of Iraq showed that despite religious leaders' rulings entailed no more than shaming and stigmatizing penalties for transgressors of shared norms; they demonstrated to be more conducive and productive than the coercive intervention against the Houthis in Yemen. The former led to modifications in the behavior of disputants, while in contrast, the later intervention had only complicated -if not totally disrupted- peace process dynamics.

Even more, the content of the Makkah Declaration appears to be of considerable substance, unlike the coercive sanctions of the Saudi-led coalition, which have not offered anything beyond a mere device of political signaling. With the polarization of relations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis reaching a climax, the links between the parties seem to be severed, which impedes these sanctions from being conducive. The only outcome of such military intervention has been prolonged combat, and an insecure environment.

3. A gentle force for change through enacting effective norms of unification and multilateralism

The OIC, at its core, is a conglomeration of states that are disparate in many ways, either in terms of political structures (monarchic, theocratic, authoritarian, and democratic), foreign policy positioning and alignment, sectarian allegiances, ethnicities, ... so on and so forth. These fundamental intersubjective structures underlie their perception of each other because they are overlaid, upheld, and emphasized in the rhetoric and actions of these states.

These intersubjective structures form the OIC's official, pragmatic framework toward Intra-Muslim conflicts, which is the reason for the vast chasm between Muslim societies and states. The OIC's mediation activities generally serve the interests of some state actors, but the socio-cultural needs of historically and culturally-situated actors are not served. Consequently, such an engagement fails to generate positive trends for reconciliation that trickle down to the grassroots (Irani, 1999).

So as long as divergent political interests stand in the way of this organization's evolution (i.e., into either an international society like the EU, or the transnational community of creed (Sheikh, 2003, P. 42) in Islamic ideological terms); they will hamper the institutionalization of security relations between these states into a contractual, normative framework for the peaceful management and settlement of Intra-Muslim disputes.

In this heterogeneous environment, religious actors act as gentle forces for change. Although Islamic states have developed distinctive national identities, religious actors can deliver a transnational role to bring Islamic identity and its common normative code to bear again. This stimulates the people to reflect upon their cultural distinctiveness, which is paramount in creating an identity or reviving it in this case. Only at that moment would other minor allegiances and divisive entities, like the sect, ethnicity, and nationality, be downplayed.

4. Positively affect the reputation of the international actor (the OIC) and the parties' view of the peace process.

The self-contradictory, double-standard behavior of the OIC in intra-Muslim conflicts diminished its reputation as a mediator and discredited its moral power in conflict societies. In comparison, religious leaders' involvement delivered two requisites that state actors failed to fulfill. The first is even-handedness, with no double standards; second, they exercised the expert

and referent powers to enact the Muslims' supreme reference. This restored the sense of justice and order, which absence is responsible for developing conflicts. Such engagement opens the way in return for grievances to be addressed fairly, instead of them playing out in screeching demagoguery.

5. The bonus contribution of the culture of honor and shame

The data and results from the Iraq case study support that perception of punishment and threat are essentially subjective. Hence, the effectiveness of any persuasive or dissuasive instrument depends on the perception of the targeted parties. Also, it depends on the context that makes their leaders either concerned about the consequences or defiant to them.

In this connection, the researches conducted by the UNHCR (2017), the USIP (2008), and Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University (2013) are substantial. The following common themes emerge from this set of analyses: number one is that the identity of the Iraqi people is made-up of multiple layers of belonging and different value systems; which produce particular social determinants and dominant motifs (UNHCR Iraq Operation, 2007, P. 10). Two, is that the primary identity markers of the Iraqi society are: religion, sect, tribe, and ethnicity (Steele, 2008, P. 4) (Patterson, 2013, P. 10), and that conflict parties have non-negotiable interest in them (UNHCR Iraq Operation, 2007, P. 29). From this lens, they explain how those cultural and cognitive factors constitute the multiple forms of violence in Iraq (UNHCR Iraq Operation, 2007, P. 10), why they erupt, and what capacities could resolve them.

These analyses provide considerable credence to the conceptual premise that tradition-based, communal societies, are motivated by shame. In contrast, individualist societies tend towards guilt (Steele, 2008, P. 4). They attest to that distinction by drawing on the essential characteristics

it captures for the Iraqi society. These Characteristics include the overarching values that distinguish Middle Eastern cultures at large from Western cultures, such as: “the emphasis on tradition, group welfare, hierarchy, respect for authority, and face-saving; as opposed to innovation, individualism, equality, respect for the law, and frank communication” (Steele, 2008, P. 4).

These characteristics make Middle Eastern societies shame-oriented, whereas Western societies are guilt-oriented. This classification is made by cultural anthropologists (Steele, 2008, P. 4), and it manifests itself in people’s motivations and responses to peacemaking processes. The study conducted by the USIP included the most nuanced analysis of these issues. The preceding data are revealing in many ways, as they draw attention to subtle distinctions in contexts, of profound implications.

Steele points out that, while tensions erupt in some societies due to laws being broken, they break out in others because of the hierarchical ordering of relationships being trespassed (Steele, 2008, P.4). This helps us understand why tensions that seem to be settled through superficial formality, ceremonial amity, and ritualized reciprocity can abruptly relapse into hostilities (Steele, 2008, P.4). The essential reason is that international norms do not speak to the intense motifs inherent in disputes over tribal standing, personal honor, or family reputation (Steele, 2008, P.4). There are different parameters to which local people relate, which set the conditions for their affairs. These parameters are the product of their sense of belonging and belief systems.

Some could contest that claim by maintaining that the modern Iraqi, Muslim, and Middle Eastern societies- are different. The tribal system no longer plays a pivotal role in the societal weave. Many sectors do not espouse strong religious beliefs and have little commitment to tribal traditions. Still, religious legitimacy, moral righteousness, and alignment with social norms are

deeply embedded, even in modern urban culture. They are demonstrated to be sustained by modern political experience, where social acceptability and religio-political legitimacy are constantly negotiated in leadership bids. That was evident in the case of Iraq, particularly in intra-Sect disputes among leaders over claims of authority and legitimacy (Patterson, 2013, P. 10).

David Steele's insightful analysis continued to offer a deeper understanding of this aspect of social order, as he marked a substantial distinction between the kind of honor upheld and its implications. He differentiates between the "honor of precedence," which is rivalrous and aggression-mongering, and the "honor of virtue," which is pacificatory and promotes rectitude (Steele, 2008, P. 5). This distinction is significant, as the first type characterized pre-Islam Arab culture. In contrast, the latter is the transformation that Islam came to preach and spread.

Thus, this implies two contrasting dynamics and perceptual mindsets that play out when Arab culture is invoked versus when Islamic identity is summoned in a conflict situation. Each culture arouses divergent attitudes and enacts contrasting values in the collective consciousness. In that sense, Steele contends that his communal nature is a dynamic, not a static process, which engenders certain perceptions and behavioral options that a third-party intervener can utilize (Steele, 2008, P.5).

From an Islamic perspective, justice depends on every individual (or rather, a member of the society) having the responsibility to acknowledge when a moral offense is committed and denunciate it, even when the perpetrator is among one's own group (Steele, 2008, P. 5). This is the influence of the Islamic faith system, which downplays ethnic, tribal, and all such factious allegiances, and makes Muslims identify with an egalitarian society of believers organized by a

particular legal code. This way, it extended honor and shame beyond the tribal loyalties or the narrow communal ties.

6. *Filling the void left by the absence of contractual obligations under the OIC*

Most interestingly, this dynamic offers significant prospects to fill the gap created by the absence of a normative, contractual framework regulating intra-Muslim relationships. Turning back to the thesis statement that ideological destitution is not why factors of shared identity and culture did not produce a collective normative framework among Islamic countries. The reason is not that the Islamic identity is bereft of ideological content, but because regimes' interests are the overriding factor that restricts the utilization of that ideological system, in favor of realpolitik considerations.

All these findings corroborate the hypothesis of this thesis, that a context-sensitive approach that brings to bear values pertinent to honor and shame would be a non-coercive way to pressure a transgressor, or deter a wrongdoer who threatens to disrupt intra-Muslim solidarity. This presents one potential pathway to enable the organization to deliver its Islamic mission, while being a good member of the international order by preserving the nation-state system.

7. *A bottom-up approach to change in broader terms*

The later specific result leads to the most significant implication emerging from this research project: its proposition of a bottom-up mechanism for norm-making. Constructivists have always argued for the constitutive function of policies and regulations, which establish norms. However, the discourse that took place at the Third OIC Conference on Mediation suggested that the lifecycle of a norm can work the other way around too.

The broad-based adoption and compliance with these norms by the people and societal actors can influence state behavior. This is why it is compelling to mobilize a wide-range engagement in the peace process from the different tracks, nationally and internationally, depending on the conflict context, not just religious communities and leaders.

The prescriptive function of norms can then work from the bottom up to inform policy-making that constrains state behavior at the institutional level. At least, this would amount to momentous pressure on states of the organization to conform to these norms in their foreign policymaking and behavior. The fulfillment of a medium degree of alignment by track I actors then, with the outcomes of religious actors' engagement, would conduce to these results coming to fruition, and to a peaceful, effective conflict resolution.

This opens another area for future common work between the OIC and religious actors, to bring peace to the OIC area and the Middle East. This involves a concerted effort to institute a dialogue that conceptualizes and reinterprets concepts and values like honor. Rectifying these distorted concepts, and extending the concept of the "honor of virtue" to the most considerable degree possible is vital to breaking the cycle of revenge in Iraq (Steele, 2008, P. 10), and repairing all the toxic changes in social values and environment.

Limitations of the culturally-sensitive approach and the role of religious leaders in peacemaking.

This research demonstrated that religious leaders' role is still constrained by the governing principles and dynamics of the realist world order. Religious leaders' moral clout does not guarantee their ability to influence politicians' decisions and behavior. The normative, cultural framework alone does not affect abiding commitments, unwavering progress, and the accomplishment of final resolution to substantial grievances.

A consistent effort to build vertical pressure through a multi-stakeholder process that engages the different tracks of diplomacy is imperative. Religious leaders though popularly accepted but still need to be well supported with practical measures, at the regional and international levels, to enhance the credibility of the process. This involves a concerted effort to reward compliance, and disempower an offender through negative publicity and social and international seclusion.

Areas for further research

More research on this topic needs to be undertaken for a more nuanced understanding of when is the best time for the involvement of religious leaders in conflict management and resolution. In which stage of the conflict is their engagement necessary and appropriate? According to their capabilities and resources, what are the different roles they can serve in each conflict phase, as per its exigencies?

Additionally, a full discussion of the areas of potential, joint work between the OIC and religious actors, is required. Such research can develop an operative bottom-up scheme in which community-level actors, civil society, and transnational non-official organizations initiate to establish links with the OIC's institutional structure. This engagement scheme would aim to revitalize the organization and create margins for real, collective action on the causes of the Ummah.

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