

Diab, Rasha. *Shades of Sulh: The Rhetorics of Arab-Islamic Reconciliation*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2016. 264 pages.

Chanon Adsanatham

As I compose this review, thirty-nine lives from fourteen countries have just been lost from a gun massacre in an Istanbul nightclub on New Year's Day. Their families are starting 2017 with misery and grief, a recurrence that may now be all too familiar across the globe. Earlier in 2016, terrorist bus drivers crashed into crowded streets in Germany and France, killing twelve people in Berlin and eighty-six in Nice. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had claimed responsibilities for all these onslaughts; it justified its attacks as retribution against counter-ISIS operations. ISIS's growing insurgencies have sparked aggressive crackdowns on terrorism across the globe but only seem to fuel more retaliations from insurgents. What rhetorical resources and practices, then, might be available to counter growing violence and aggression and move fragmented communities toward peace and reconciliation? Given that recent terrorist incidents have been erroneously tied to Islam, what within that religion might be invoked to help us create healing rhetorics of reconciliation? These pressing questions are the foci of Rasha Diab's *Shades of Sulh: The Rhetorics of Arab-Islamic Reconciliation*. The book examines sulh—reconciliation, peace, or peacemaking—as a longstanding tradition and praxis in Arab-Islamic culture. Comprised of four chapters, along with an introduction and a conclusion, Diab's monograph makes three specific contributions: It offers the first book-length study of Arab-Islamic rhetoric of peace grounded in rhetorical studies; expands scholarship of Middle Eastern rhetoric beyond exploring style, poetics, and translations of Greco-Roman rhetorical treatises in Arabic; and extends rhetorical examination of peacemaking discourse beyond the Judeo-Christian and Western context. Revisionary historiography, comparative and cultural rhetoric, and peace studies inform the book's inquiry. As a whole, *Shades of Sulh* presents a contextualized examination of sulh as a rhetorically rich and generative resource, past and present, to foster and sustain peace.

Organized topically rather than chronologically, Diab's book analyzes the usage of sulh to reconcile conflicts and yield peace in communal, constitutional, diplomatic, and intrapersonal contexts. Using rhetorical and critical

discourse analysis as the primary method, each chapter of the book zooms in to examine specific functions of sulh and to demonstrate its malleability and usefulness across time and space.

Diab begins by explicating the aims, features, and processes of sulh to set up a vocabulary and framework for studying peacemaking cases in the rest of her book. In chapter one, "Peacemaking *Topoi*: Cultural Iterations of Relational and Moral Needs," Diab posits sulh as a cultural principle in the Arab world to promote reconciliation, forgiveness, and cooperation among individuals and communities; sulh is an investment and call for cooperation and relational good to yield a "proactive, forward-looking [stance and] system that [aims] to subvert violation, violence and oppression at institutional and individual levels" (Diab 45). Reflecting Islamic beliefs about the significance of human dignity and lives, sulh works to create and maintain social harmony and interconnectedness among all human beings, regardless of their differences. Sulh is built upon three components or what Diab calls the "topoi of peacemaking": memory, justice, and prudence (52). Memory involves the heeding of grievances and concerns from stakeholders in order to yield acknowledgement and accountability, an important step toward healing and cooperation. Justice entails working to honor and recognize social, psychological, and ethical needs of *all* stakeholders to transform them into peace pursuers, so justice in this sense is not retributive but rather, restorative. Prudence frames the pursuit of justice. It helps curb hostility, retaliation, and retribution, establishing the possibilities for productive civil dialogues. Collectively, memory, justice, and prudence interconnect to yield dialogic interactions toward reconciliation.

The next three chapters of the book analyze rhetorical processes and practices of sulh in communal, international, and intrapersonal contexts. Chapter two, "The Sweet Power of Persuasion: Cultural Inflections of Interpersonal Sulh Rhetorics," lays out sulh procedures for resolving conflict in a community. First, a stakeholder (the wrongdoer, third party, or the victim) initiates reconciliation to restore peace and order by soliciting a respected elder or noble individual in the community to mediate a concern. Upon accepting the request, the mediator plays the role of an objective peacemaker and approaches all stakeholders to request truce and invite them to come together to rhetorically listen to each other's issues with an aim toward eliminating an "us versus them" mentality. Drawing upon Krista Ratcliffe, Diab defines rhetorical listening as a trope for interpretive invention that enables a rhetor to assume a stance of openness in cross-cultural communication. To encourage open, honest exchange toward reconciliation, the various interlocutors separately reflect on their needs, thoroughly clarifying their desire. Afterward, they reconvene in the presence of the mediator and community members to openly acknowledge one another's issues; and within this process, stakeholders work to lower their ego by heeding

everyone's rights and dignity. If relevant, the wrongdoer makes a sincere apology to show accountability and move toward amends. In the end, they eat together as a sign of reconciliation. The mediator plays the most important role throughout these time consuming, challenging steps. S/he must carefully balance stakeholders' needs and diligently nudge them to collaboratively construct a peaceful resolution that is acceptable to all parties. His/her mediation must reflect magnanimity, prudence, deep listening, and care. Altogether, sulh processes motivate interlocutors to value, dignify, and remain accountable to one another. Unlike traditional judicial process, sulh leads people away from punitive retribution toward social reintegration and peaceful co-existence.

Sulh, however, is not merely a mediation practice; it also constitutes a fundamental principle behind the founding of the first Islamic community in the seventh century. Chapter three, "*We the Reconciled: The Convergence of Sulh and Human Rights*," explicates features of sulh in the Charter or Constitution of Medina (CM) from 622. During this time, various tribes had fought and persecuted one another for dominance over religion, territory, and economic gains, creating massive turmoil. To restore peace, the prophet Muhammad formed a new peaceful city-state—Medina—and instituted CM to decree equal protection of all citizens regardless of difference. Specifically, CM affirms the importance of respecting and preserving people's lives and everyone's right to peaceful livelihood. Muhammad's constitutional decree reconstitutes fragmented citizens into a political community, creating a "unified citizenry" (Diab 102). Thus, in addition to being a mediation practice, sulh is a political vision and more broadly, a way of governing and living in an Islamic nation. As CM accentuates "immanent value of human beings and life," "equality of all people," and "the right to be a responsible member of a community," it represents an early human rights document in the Arab tradition—one that precedes the Geneva Convention by nearly thirteen centuries (Diab 101).

The next chapter, "*From the Egyptian People's Assembly to the Israeli Knesset*," turns to investigating a contemporary uptake of sulh to restore strained relations between Egypt and Israel in 1977. Diab analyzes a diplomatic speech that President Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt delivered to Israel—the Knesset Address (KA)—to end a longstanding warfare that led to economic and emotional devastation in both nations. Reading his speech through the lens of sulh, Diab demonstrates how al-Sadat's rhetoric praises peace and censures war by depicting the former as a moral order and the latter as unethical destruction, thereby presenting peace as a more viable and desirable pursuit. Specifically in his address, al-Sadat uses commissives, or speech acts of promise, to invite trust, cooperation, and openness to change by declaring his determination to "go to the end of the world" to end the war and save lives (Diab 133). Al-Sadat's declaration creates a voluntary self-binding

commitment to sulh and shifts his subject position from an enemy to a caring, tenacious peacemaker. Second, al-Sadat employs narratives to invoke goodwill and credibility by telling stories about the losses he experienced from war, his previous records of peace pursuits and ceasefire agreements, and the benefits of ceasing combat. His narratives further “increased the rhetorical force of his commitment and make it recognizable to Israeli publics and political elites” (Diab 135). Finally, al-Sadat employs rhetorical listening by acknowledging Israeli grievances and his country’s complicity in the conflict in order to create accountability and truce. Collectively, all of these moves minimize an “us versus them” positionality and reconstitute the two warring nations as collaborative peace seekers. KA reflects the tradition and practice of sulh in international diplomacy context.

Chapter five “To Gather at Court: Sulh as Rhetorical Method” analyzes a literary dialogue *The Great Court of Sulh* (GCS) by Muhammad Madi Abu al-’Aza’im (1869-1937), a theologian and professor of Islamic law. GCS presents an allegorical debate among virtuous and wicked voices within the self, as they attempt to achieve reconciliation in an imaginary court: Temperance, Generosity, Folly, Cowardice, and so forth. The dialogue shows internal challenges and debates that one must confront to achieve sulh. Comprised of two major sections, the first part of GCS details vices’ grievance and protest against reconciliation; they present their complaints and demands for punitive justice. The second part transitions to examine potentials for *wasatiyah* (the middle path or goodness between two extremes), *tazkiyah* (purification through abstaining from bad deeds and striving for good), and *kamal* (perfection based on the character of Allah, the Islamic God). Thus, GCS moves from conflict-ridden relations based on a self-centered perspective to a reconciliatory mindset built upon restorative justice, empathy, and prudence. As a whole, GCS illustrates the intrapersonal struggle and debate that one must undergo to achieve sulh. It posits internal deliberation as a significant component of sulh praxis; sulh rhetorical process involves both internal deliberation and external articulation.

Altogether, *Shades of Sulh* tells “a story of the gift of realizing an alternative option” toward conflict management—one that moves interlocutors beyond an either/or, conquest/submission, or win/loss paradigm toward the pursuit of peace within communal, constitutional, international, and intrapersonal contexts (Diab 192). Though sulh is a difficult rhetorical practice, its generative reconciliation potentials warrant additional exploration. Diab identifies three promising areas for future research in the closing chapter of her book: examining processes and performances of reconciliation in greater details, recovering the invisible contribution of women to sulh, and capturing and investigating discourses of intrapersonal deliberation or internal rhetoric in the pursuit

of peace. Taking up these issues, Diab contends, will not only further advance rhetorical studies beyond the dominance of the Western tradition but, more broadly, will allow us to continue the important rhetorical work of fostering and sustaining peacemaking in conflict-ridden twenty-first century.

All in all, *Shades of Sulh* provides a compelling model for how to conduct contextualized, focused, and accessible cross-cultural research. Most importantly, the book encourages us to theorize, employ, and instruct rhetoric as an art of peacemaking. As sulh aims to make peace rather than to conquer or prove guilt and innocence, it challenges us to teach and practice rhetoric beyond the conquest-conversion model in traditional rhetorical theory. Diab's book asks us to contemplate: How might we adapt and teach argumentation as peacemaking and use sulh processes to complicate rhetoric (Booth), listening rhetoric (Glenn and Ratcliffe), invitational rhetoric (Foss and Griffin), arguing as an art of peace (Kroll), and Rogerian praxis? Additionally, given that sulh promotes relationality, deep listening, and accountability, its practices can perhaps be reappropriated as a research methodology for engaging cultural differences and studying marginalized rhetorical traditions and figures. How might we use sulh as a framework to yield ethical, responsible rhetorical studies? In particular, given that sulh praxis aligns with feminist principles of reflexivity, non-harm, non-violence, and non-domination, a sulh methodology might be particularly productive for feminist and comparative scholars. In sum, sulh represents a "gift of possibility" for enriching the theory, method, and praxis of rhetoric, making Diab's book innovative and refreshing (Diab 192). It is a worthwhile read.

Works Cited

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About the Author

Chanon Adsanatham, assistant professor of English, researches and teaches comparative rhetoric, multimodality, and digital writing at the University of Maryland, College Park. His current book project recovers conduct (kaya karma) as a major form of rhetoric in the Thai tradition and posits this rhetoric as a lens to rethink rhetorical studies beyond the focus on the five canons. Several of his articles on online activism, public memory, and multimodal assessment have appeared in *Computers and Composition*, edited collections, and Asian academic journals.