Reformist Islamic Legal Thought and Interfaith Harmony: A Study of Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman's Principles in the Post Easter Sunday Context of Sri Lanka

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A B S T R A C T

This article examines the relevance and applicability of Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman's reformist theory of Islamic international relations in addressing post easter sunday inter communal tensions in Sri Lanka. The 2019 attacks and their aftermath intensified ethno religious polarization, particularly affecting muslim non muslim relations, and exposed the limitations of state centric and securitized approaches to peacebuilding. Employing a qualitative normative contextual approach, this study analyzes Abu Sulayman's hierarchical ethical framework ranging from as-silm (peace) to higher moral principles such as al-'adl (justice) and al-qisth (equity) and situates it within Sri Lanka's contemporary socio political realities. The findings suggest that Abu Sulayman's emphasis on intellectual reform, ethical universalism, and human centered values offers a culturally resonant alternative to rigid legalism and majoritarian governance. By reframing concepts such as jihad, coexistence, dialogue, and justice, this framework provides practical normative guidance for religious leaders, civil society, and policy actors to foster sustainable interreligious harmony. The study concludes that integrating reformist Islamic ethical principles into peacebuilding initiatives can contribute to rebuilding trust, strengthening pluralism, and promoting inclusive national cohesion in post conflict, multi religious societies.

Keywords: Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman, interreligious harmony, Islamic peacebuilding.

Introduction

Abdul Hamid Abu Sulaiman's critical denunciation of traditional Islamic thinking and his efforts for change (Berghout, 2022) provides an important foundation for observing global relations as well as community dynamics in conflict prone societies. Abu Sulaiman's reformist thought highlights the societal

risks that emerge from intellectual stagnation and the absence of contextualized reasoning. His call for methodological renewal is particularly relevant in regions experiencing group based conflicts, where rigid interpretations often exacerbate social fragmentation (Berghout, 2022).

Sri Lanka's socio political climate has long been characterized by a deep entwinement of religious and ethnic identities, frequently resulting in cycles of tension and violence (Razick et al., 2021). One of the most significant turning points in inter religious relations was the Easter Sunday suicide bombings on April 21, 2019 (Saujan, Razick, et al., 2025). Coordinated attacks on churches and luxury hotels in Colombo and Batticaloa resulted in the deaths of more than 260 people, including foreign nationals, and left over 500 injured (Imtiyaz, 2020); (Mohamed Zacky, 2025) Sri Lankan authorities swiftly attributed the attacks to a domestic extremist group, the National Tauheed Jamaat (NTJ), led by Mohammad Zahran, who was alleged to have foreign links (Saujan et al., 2024); (Shaffer, 2023).

The deliberate targeting of Christian worshippers and tourists during religious celebrations was widely perceived as an attempt to intensify sectarian polarization and destabilize inter religious harmony (Shaffer, 2023). The rapid attribution of blame to an indigenous Islamist group, regardless of broader communal responsibility, placed the Muslim minority under heightened public suspicion (Imtiyaz & Mohamed Saleem, 2023). This process of stereotyping enabled an isolated act of extremism to be transformed into a collective threat narrative, reinforcing existing prejudices and significantly weakening social cohesion across Sri Lankan society.

Following the bombings, widespread fear was accompanied by sporadic yet intense anti Muslim violence across the country (Imtiyaz & Mohamed Saleem, 2023). In several instances, riots were reportedly instigated or encouraged by Buddhist monks and Sinhalese nationalist politicians affiliated with the then ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), particularly in the North Western Province, including Kurunegala, Gampaha, and Puttalam districts (Fowsar et al., 2020). These incidents led to extensive property destruction and loss of life. Despite limited government efforts to contain the unrest, the rapid escalation of violence exposed deep structural weaknesses in inter communal relations and underscored the powerful influence of ethno nationalist rhetoric on public opinion (Oberoi & Kaur, 2025).

In the aftermath of the attacks, the government introduced a series of emergency regulations that further intensified religious tensions (Mohamed Zacky, 2025). Measures such as a temporary ban on face coverings (burqa and niqab), widely criticized as disproportionately targeting Muslim women, were condemned as violations of human rights (Cruse & Media Team, 2024). Additional policies, including the forced cremation of COVID-19 victims, proposals to ban Islamic schools (madrasas), and the "One Country, One Law" initiative, were perceived as

direct challenges to Muslim personal law and identity (Manamperi, 2023); (Saujan, Razick, et al., 2025). Collectively, these measures deepened fears of marginalization and undermined the pluralistic foundations of the Sri Lankan state.

The Easter Sunday attacks thus exacerbated pre existing ethno religious tensions, plunging Sri Lanka into a multifaceted crisis of trust and social cohesion. Despite constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, violence against Muslim communities persisted, often facilitated by the passivity or complicity of state institutions. Investigations by the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission revealed that law enforcement frequently failed to intervene, effectively granting extremist actors unchecked space to operate. Policies such as the burqa ban, mandatory cremation practices, and the "One Country, One Law" program have been widely interpreted as part of a broader move toward a centralized, majoritarian state that exacerbates horizontal inequalities and fractures social cohesion. The amplifying role of social media, particularly the spread of conspiracy theories portraying Muslims as existential threats, further intensified communal hostility. These developments reveal the limitations of mainstream peacebuilding and International Relations (IR) theories rooted in Western secular and state centric assumptions, which often struggle to address identity based conflicts where religion plays a central role. This context highlights the urgent need for a culturally grounded and ethically responsive framework, rendering Abdul Hamid Abu Suleiman's reformist Islamic theory of international relations particularly relevant.

This article aims to examine the applicability of Abdul Hamid Abu Suleiman's reformist theory of international relations in Islam, particularly its hierarchical ethical principles, in addressing challenges of inter community cohesion in post Easter Sunday Sri Lanka. In addition, it seeks to formulate realistic and context sensitive policy options for religious leaders, civil society actors, and social institutions, drawing on Abu Suleiman's framework to foster sustainable interreligious understanding and peaceful coexistence.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative conceptual approach grounded in normative and interpretive analysis. It is primarily based on a systematic review of relevant scholarly literature examining Abdul Hamid Abu Suleiman's reformist theory of international relations in Islam, particularly his hierarchical ethical principles, alongside studies on interreligious relations, ethno religious conflict, and peacebuilding in Sri Lanka. The materials analyzed consist of peer reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy-oriented studies, and authoritative reports that address the Easter Sunday attacks and their socio political and intercommunal implications.

The analytical process follows a thematic and normative interpretive framework. Key concepts and principles articulated by Abu Suleiman such as ethical hierarchy, reformist methodology, and moral responsibility in international and intercommunal relations are systematically identified and interpreted. These principles are then analytically applied to the post Easter Sunday Sri Lankan context to assess their relevance in explaining patterns of stigmatization, social polarization, and structural marginalization affecting inter community cohesion.

Rather than generating new empirical data, this study focuses on conceptual analysis and contextual application. By situating Abu Suleiman's reformist framework within the specific socio political dynamics of Sri Lanka, the research seeks to bridge normative Islamic international relations theory with contemporary challenges of interreligious coexistence. This approach enables the formulation of context sensitive insights and policy oriented reflections without departing from the original theoretical premises advanced by Abu Suleiman.

Results and Discussion
Reformist Ethical Framework and the Post Easter Sunday Context
The analysis demonstrates that Abdul Hamid Abu Suleiman's reformist theory of international relations provides a coherent ethical framework for understanding inter community tensions in post Easter Sunday Sri Lanka. Rather than approaching conflict solely through legalistic or security centered lenses, Abu Suleiman's framework emphasizes moral responsibility, social cohesion, and the ethical management of diversity. This perspective is particularly relevant in contexts where identity based violence and collective stigmatization undermine trust among religious communities.

The post Easter Sunday environment in Sri Lanka represents a critical test case for such an ethical framework. The attacks intensified existing ethno religious fault lines, transforming isolated acts of extremism into broader narratives of communal threat and exclusion. In this context, Abu Suleiman's reformist approach allows for an analysis that moves beyond blame attribution toward examining how ethical principles can address structural marginalization, social polarization, and the erosion of pluralistic coexistence.

Accordingly, the following subsections examine key ethical principles articulated within Abu Suleiman's reformist thought and assess their relevance in addressing challenges of inter community relations in Sri Lanka. Each principle is analyzed not as an abstract norm, but as a practical lens through which post conflict social dynamics, state policies, and interreligious engagement can be critically evaluated.

Peace (As-Silm) Beyond the Absence of Conflict
Peace (as-silm) constitutes a central concept in Islamic ethical thought, denoting a condition of mutual safety, security, well being, and social harmony

(Hussain, 2019). The Qur'an explicitly calls believers to enter into peace wholeheartedly (Qur'an, 2:208), underscoring peace not merely as the absence of violence but as a foundational and normative objective of Islamic life. Classical Islamic thought envisions the ideal society as *dar al-salaam* a community characterized by justice, security, prosperity, and social solidarity (Khazendar, 2020). Within this framework, Abdul Hamid Abu Suleiman accords primacy to peace by articulating a comprehensive ethical and legal orientation toward international and inter communal relations, including a firm rejection of pre emptive warfare and coercive domination (Adan, 2023). His reconceptualization of *jihad* as sustained moral and social effort rather than militarized struggle further reinforces peace as an active and constructive pursuit rather than a passive condition.

The relevance of this ethical conception becomes evident when applied to Sri Lanka's post conflict environment. Following the end of the civil war in 2009, Sri Lanka experienced what has been described as a "winner's peace" achieved through military victory rather than negotiated reconciliation (Höglund & Orjuela, 2011). While overt hostilities subsided, underlying insecurity persisted, particularly in the Northern and Eastern provinces, where an extensive military presence continued to shape everyday life (Role et.,al, 2024). This form of peace marked by stability without justice or reconciliation falls short of the comprehensive vision of *as-silm* and reveals the limitations of peace defined solely by the absence of armed conflict. The Easter Sunday attacks and their aftermath further exposed the fragility of this condition, as anti Muslim violence and securitized state responses deepened religious divisions and mistrust.

From Abu Suleiman's reformist perspective, genuine peace cannot be sustained through coercion, over securitization, or the suppression of dissent. Instead, *as-silm* requires addressing structural injustices and fostering accountability, trust, and social inclusion. Sri Lanka's reliance on militarization and its limited engagement with transitional justice mechanisms have, in practice, perpetuated insecurity rather than resolved its root causes. Moving beyond a "winner's peace" therefore necessitates a shift toward an inclusive and justice oriented peace that recognizes the grievances of minority communities and restores confidence in civilian governance. Reducing military involvement in civilian spaces, strengthening civilian administration, and ensuring meaningful participation of affected communities align with Abu Suleiman's opposition to tyranny and his advocacy of peace grounded in consent and moral legitimacy.

At the societal level, sustaining *as-silm* also entails countering narratives that conflate Islam with violence and distort *jihad* into a perpetual logic of conflict. Promoting peace as a positive, overarching Islamic value is essential to preventing extremist interpretations from gaining traction. Religious leaders and civil society institutions play a critical role in this regard by disseminating teachings that

emphasize reconciliation, patience, and diplomacy, drawing on Islamic historical precedents such as the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah. Mosques, as trusted public institutions, can contribute by framing *jihad* as a commitment to collective well being rather than violence, while religious bodies such as the All Ceylon Jamiathul Ulama (ACJU) can reinforce peaceful coexistence through clear condemnations of terrorism and public affirmations of pluralism.

Mutual Understanding (Ath-Thafahum) and Epistemic Polarization

Mutual understanding (*ath-thafahum*) represents a foundational ethical principle in Islamic thought for fostering harmonious relations within diverse societies. The Qur'an emphasizes the imperative of "knowing one another" among peoples and tribes as a recognition of diversity as a divine sign rather than a basis for hierarchy or exclusion (Qur'an, 49:13). Within Islamic ethical reasoning, *ath-thafahum* is closely linked to consultation (*shura*), critical reflection, and the pursuit of knowledge as prerequisites for social cooperation and peaceful coexistence. Abu Suleiman's reformist methodology reinforces this principle by calling for intellectual renewal, comparative reasoning, and the rejection of blind imitation (*taqlid*), which he identifies as a major obstacle to social progress and constructive engagement across differences.

In the Sri Lankan context, deficits in mutual understanding have played a significant role in sustaining ethno religious polarization. Longstanding narratives surrounding ethnic incidents and national history have often been shaped by selective representations that privilege sinhalese buddhist dominance while marginalizing pluralistic religious perspectives. Educational curricula, particularly in history and civic studies, have at times reinforced these exclusions by presenting homogenized national narratives that downplay the contributions and experiences of minority communities. Such epistemic distortions have contributed to entrenched misunderstandings that extend beyond mere informational gaps, actively shaping perceptions of threat and otherness among religious groups.

The proliferation of misinformation and hate speech through mass media and social media platforms has further intensified epistemic polarization in Sri Lanka. Sensationalist reporting and digitally amplified conspiracy narratives have reinforced communal stereotypes and hindered meaningful dialogue, particularly in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. From the perspective of *ath-thafahum*, these dynamics represent a structural barrier to peace, as distorted knowledge production undermines the possibility of empathy, trust, and shared moral understanding. Abu Suleiman's emphasis on intellectual responsibility and critical engagement provides a normative framework for addressing these challenges by situating knowledge production itself as an ethical domain requiring reform.

Advancing *ath-thafahum* therefore necessitates interventions that extend beyond interpersonal dialogue to include systemic reforms in education, media,

and civic engagement. Educational initiatives that promote critical thinking, intercultural literacy, and balanced historical narratives can contribute to dismantling epistemic hierarchies and fostering inclusive understandings of national identity. At the societal level, ethical media practices and counter disinformation strategies are essential for mitigating polarization and enabling constructive public discourse. Religious institutions, civil society organizations, and bodies such as the All Ceylon Jamiathul Ulama (ACJU) can play a facilitative role by supporting inter community learning forums and promoting narratives that emphasize shared values and mutual recognition. In this sense, *ath-thafahum* functions not merely as a moral ideal but as a practical ethical lens for addressing the knowledge based roots of inter community tension in contemporary Sri Lanka. Qubool al-Akher (Acceptance of Others) and Pluralism

Acceptance of others (*qubool al-akher*) constitutes a core ethical principle in Islamic thought that extends beyond mere tolerance to the positive recognition of pluralism. Islamic teachings emphasize respect for the inherent dignity of every human being regardless of religion, ethnicity, or social status, affirming freedom of belief as a divinely sanctioned right (Qur'an 2:256). Within this ethical framework, diversity is understood as part of God's will, and peaceful coexistence is grounded in justice, fairness, and restraint toward those who do not engage in aggression (Abdel Haleem, 2012); (Abu Sulayman, 2002). Abu Suleiman's reformist perspective reinforces this principle through his articulation of *tawhid* as a foundation for "pious tolerance toward non Muslims" and the protection of freedom of destiny and self determination. By challenging literalist interpretations such as the absolutist reading of the so called "Verse of the Sword," he advances a universalist vision that prioritizes human welfare and fraternity over exclusionary legalism.

The relevance of *qubool al-akher* becomes particularly salient in the Sri Lankan context, where pluralism has come under sustained pressure in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks. State policies and legal initiatives, most notably the "One Country, One Law" agenda, have been widely perceived as targeting Muslim personal laws and, by extension, the institutional foundations of religious diversity. Such measures threaten long standing plural legal arrangements that historically accommodated Sri Lanka's multi religious society. In addition, incidents of religiously motivated violence against minority communities and the inconsistent enforcement of protections for Christian and Muslim places of worship have further eroded confidence in the state's commitment to religious equality. Although freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed, the preferential status accorded to Buddhism under Article 9 has at times been invoked in ways that tip the balance of rights and protections, reinforcing perceptions of structural bias (Gunatilleke, 2018).

From the standpoint of Abu Suleiman's reformist ethics, these dynamics represent not merely administrative shortcomings but a deeper violation of *qubool al-akher* as a moral commitment to pluralism. The imposition of a homogenizing national identity through legal and policy mechanisms undermines the autonomy and dignity of minority communities and transforms difference into a source of suspicion rather than enrichment. Acceptance, in this sense, does not imply the erasure of distinct identities but the creation of legal and social spaces in which diversity can coexist without coercion. Abu Suleiman's emphasis on self determination and moral restraint offers a normative counterpoint to majoritarian impulses that seek unity through uniformity.

Strengthening pluralism in Sri Lanka therefore requires reaffirming constitutional and legal guarantees that protect religious diversity while resisting policies that disproportionately burden minority communities. Ensuring equal treatment of all religious groups in matters of personal law, land use, and places of worship is essential for restoring trust and social cohesion. Religious and community institutions, including Muslim representative bodies such as the All Ceylon Jamiathul Ulama (ACJU), can contribute by articulating pluralism as compatible with national unity and by engaging in advocacy that frames diversity as a shared moral and civic asset. In this way, *qubool al-akher* functions as both an ethical principle and an analytical lens for evaluating the conditions under which pluralistic coexistence can be sustained in post Easter Sunday Sri Lanka.

Thakreem al-Insan (Human Dignity) and Rights Violations

Human dignity (*thakreem al-insan*) occupies a foundational position within Islamic ethics, affirming the inherent worth of every human being irrespective of religious affiliation, ethnicity, or social status. The Qur'an explicitly underscores this principle by declaring the honor bestowed upon humanity (Qur'an, 17:70), situating dignity as an inviolable moral value that must guide social, legal, and political relations. Islamic ethical reasoning further associates human dignity with justice, equality, compassion, and responsibility, framing human beings as moral agents entrusted with stewardship over society and the natural world (Obaidullah, 2015). Abu Suleiman's reformist framework integrates *thakreem al-insan* into a broader ethical vision grounded in *tawhid*, emphasizing freedom of destiny, self determination, and pious tolerance as essential expressions of respect for human dignity. His critique of punitive and exclusionary interpretations of Islamic law reflects a commitment to safeguarding dignity against coercion and injustice.

In the Sri Lankan context, the principle of *thakreem al-insan* has been severely strained in the period following the Easter Sunday attacks. Members of the Muslim community have experienced heightened violations of basic rights, including arbitrary arrest and detention under emergency and anti terrorism legislation, often on tenuous grounds such as the possession of religious texts or Arabic language materials. Episodes of mob violence targeting Muslim owned

homes and businesses, coupled with allegations of police inaction or complicity, have further undermined the protection of dignity and security for minority populations (Razick et al., 2021). Beyond physical harm, Islamophobic practices have also manifested in economic and social exclusion, restricting access to employment, education, and public resources through discriminatory mechanisms.

From Abu Suleiman's ethical standpoint, such practices constitute structural violations of *thakreem al-insan*, as they reduce individuals to collective stereotypes and instrumentalize security narratives to justify the erosion of fundamental rights. The normalization of indiscriminate detention, unchecked mob violence, and economic marginalization fractures social trust and inflicts long-term psychological harm, thereby eroding the foundations of inter community cohesion. Rather than enhancing security, these measures reproduce cycles of fear and resentment that are incompatible with a dignity centered conception of peace and justice.

Addressing these violations requires a recalibration of legal and institutional practices toward the protection of human dignity as a non negotiable ethical baseline. Ensuring due process, fair trials, and accountability for abuses committed by state and non state actors is essential to restoring confidence in the rule of law. Preventing and responding decisively to communal violence, including the prosecution of perpetrators and remedies for victims, is equally critical. Measures to counter economic discrimination and to guarantee equal access to education and employment can further contribute to the restoration of dignity through social inclusion and self reliance. Religious institutions and civil society organizations, including bodies such as the All Ceylon Jamiathul Ulama (ACJU), may play a supportive role by advocating for the protection of rights and by assisting victims of abuse. In this sense, *thakreem al-insan* serves as both an ethical imperative and an analytical lens for evaluating the human rights consequences of post Easter Sunday policies and practices in Sri Lanka.

Al-Hiwar (Dialogue) and Interreligious Engagement

Dialogue (*al-hiwar*) occupies a central position in Islamic ethical reasoning as a constructive means of communication, persuasion, and mutual understanding. The Qur'anic model of dialogue emphasizes reasoned argument, ethical speech, and respectful engagement as essential tools for resolving disagreement and dispelling prejudice. Within this framework, dialogue is not merely an exchange of views but a moral process aimed at fostering understanding, cooperation, and social harmony. Abu Suleiman's reformist approach reinforces *al-hiwar* by prioritizing persuasion (*husna*), tolerance (*la ikrah*), and contextual reasoning over coercion and confrontation. His insistence that Islamic principles be applied dynamically within specific socio political contexts situates dialogue as an indispensable mechanism for preventing intellectual stagnation and mitigating conflict.

In Sri Lanka, interreligious dialogue holds significant potential for rebuilding trust and cohesion in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, particularly in relations between Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Hindu communities. However, existing initiatives have encountered substantial challenges, including entrenched stereotypes, religious extremism, and deeply rooted suspicions reinforced by politicized narratives (Adan, 2023). While programs such as the "Promoting Religious Harmony Project" have sought to create spaces for engagement and understanding in regions such as Ampara, Colombo, and Galle, their impact has often been constrained by broader structural conditions, including sensationalist media coverage and the persistence of exclusionary discourses (Afra & Abdullah, 2025).

From the perspective of *al-hiwar*, these limitations indicate that dialogue cannot function effectively in isolation from wider epistemic and institutional reforms. Genuine interreligious engagement requires not only forums for conversation but also the cultivation of environments in which dialogue can translate into empathy, cooperation, and shared civic responsibility. Abu Suleiman's emphasis on intellectual renewal suggests that dialogue must be accompanied by efforts to address misinformation, challenge extremist narratives, and promote ethical communication practices. Without such supporting conditions, dialogue risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

Strengthening *al-hiwar* in Sri Lanka therefore involves expanding inclusive and structured platforms for interreligious engagement at local, regional, and national levels. Training facilitators in conflict sensitivity, cultural competence, and neutral mediation can enhance the effectiveness of dialogue initiatives and ensure that discussions remain constructive. Countering the polarizing role of media through ethical journalism and counter-narrative strategies is equally important for sustaining meaningful engagement. Religious institutions and community spaces, including mosques and community centers, can serve as accessible venues for dialogue oriented programs that bring together diverse groups. Bodies such as the All Ceylon Jamiathul Ulama (ACJU), in collaboration with other religious leaders, can further institutionalize dialogue by actively mediating disputes and publicly affirming interreligious coexistence. In this sense, *al-hiwar* operates not only as a moral principle but as a practical ethical tool for rebuilding inter community relations in post Easter Sunday Sri Lanka.

Bridging and Integration Principles in Inter Community Relations

Middle level ethical principles in Abu Suleiman's reformist framework emphasize active engagement, collective responsibility, and the construction of balanced social arrangements capable of sustaining plural societies. These principles function as practical mechanisms that translate foundational ethical commitments into lived social relations by fostering cooperation, shared spaces, and mutual responsibility among diverse communities.

Ath-Tha'awun (Cooperation) and Collective Action for the Common Good

Cooperation (*ath-tha'awun*) represents a core Islamic ethical value that encourages concerted effort for collective welfare across religious and communal boundaries (Thalgi, 2024). The Qur'an calls believers to "cooperate in righteousness and piety, but not in sin and aggression" (Qur'an, 5:2), framing cooperation as a moral obligation grounded in justice and mutual care. Abu Suleiman's reformist vision reinforces this principle through its emphasis on brotherhood, the avoidance of cruelty, and the pursuit of human well being, thereby legitimizing cooperation not only within Muslim communities but also across religious divides.

In Sri Lanka's post conflict and post crisis context, *ath-tha'awun* has demonstrated practical relevance, particularly during moments of collective vulnerability such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Interreligious collaborations involving Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian actors contributed to humanitarian relief, countered misinformation, and fostered solidarity across communal lines. However, such initiatives have largely remained ad hoc and reactive rather than institutionalized. From Abu Suleiman's perspective, sustainable peace requires moving beyond episodic cooperation toward coordinated, nationwide mechanisms that embed inter community collaboration within social and institutional frameworks.

Institutionalizing *ath-tha'awun* through coordinated platforms for interreligious cooperation can enhance long term trust and shared responsibility. Joint development projects addressing common needs such as infrastructure, livelihoods, and social welfare have the potential to transform fragmented relations into cooperative partnerships. Religious institutions, including mosques and community centers, can serve as hubs for inclusive social welfare activities, while bodies such as the All Ceylon Jamiathul Ulama (ACJU) have already encouraged mosque centered humanitarian initiatives that extend assistance irrespective of religious affiliation.

Ath-Tha'ayush (Coexistence) and Living in Shared Social Spaces

Coexistence (*ath-tha'ayush*) refers to the ethical commitment to living together peacefully while respecting religious, cultural, and ethnic differences (Islam, 2018). Islamic ethical thought affirms coexistence as a natural expression of humanity's shared destiny, emphasizing compassion, respect, and care across communal boundaries (Haruna, 2025). Abu Suleiman's rejection of rigid binary classifications such as *dar al-harb* and his advocacy of "pious tolerance" and self determination align closely with *ath-tha'ayush*, promoting a universalism rooted in fraternity and human dignity.

Sri Lanka's historical experience reflects both periods of inter ethnic coexistence and recurrent breakdowns during times of political and social tension. In the post war period, concerns have emerged regarding state sponsored

resettlement schemes, land appropriation, and the instrumentalization of archaeological narratives to reconfigure shared spaces in ways that marginalize minority communities. Practices such as land expropriation for religious constructions in minority dominated areas disrupt the ethical foundations of coexistence by transforming common spaces into sites of exclusion and symbolic domination.

From the standpoint of *ath-tha'ayush*, sustainable integration requires equitable and transparent land governance, particularly in conflict affected regions such as the Eastern Province. Promoting integrated housing, mixed community development projects, and shared civic spaces can facilitate meaningful interaction beyond mere spatial proximity. Cultural exchange initiatives, language learning programs, and shared religious and cultural celebrations further contribute to dismantling barriers and fostering mutual respect. Mosques and community institutions can play an active role by engaging neighboring communities in shared social activities, while organizations such as the ACJU can support coexistence by promoting peaceful living and inter-ethnic cooperation as essential components of national cohesion.

Justice, Equality, and Structural Reform

Structural justice and equality constitute higher level ethical imperatives within Abdul Hamid Abu Suleiman's reformist framework, functioning as conditions that enable foundational harmony and middle level integration to endure. Principles such as moderation (*al-wasathiyyah*) and equality (*al-musawath*) operate at the level of institutions, laws, and power relations, addressing systemic imbalances that cannot be resolved through interpersonal ethics alone. From this perspective, sustainable inter community cohesion requires not only social goodwill but also structural arrangements that prevent domination, exclusion, and the politicization of identity. Within this framework, al-'adl (justice) functions as the overarching normative foundation, while al-qisth (equity) represents its distributive and procedural manifestation at the institutional level.

Al-Wasathiyyah (Moderation) and the Containment of Extremism

Al-wasathiyyah (moderation) represents the ethical commitment to balance, restraint, and justice, rejecting excess and extremism in belief, governance, and social conduct (Ibrahim, 2018). The Qur'an characterizes the Muslim community as a "balanced nation" (*ummatan wasatan*) (Qur'an 2:143), underscoring moderation as a normative ideal rather than a compromise. Abu Suleiman's reformist approach closely aligns with this principle through his critique of rigid and archaic interpretations of religious texts and his call for contextual, dynamic reasoning (Adan, 2023). His holistic understanding of *jihad* as moral and social self exertion further reflects a commitment to balance and restraint.

In Sri Lanka, the relevance of *al-wasathiyyah* becomes evident in the rise of religious extremism and the politicization of religious identity. Sinhalese Buddhist

nationalist groups, including movements such as Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), have employed religious rhetoric to justify exclusionary narratives, Islamophobia, and, at times, violence (Imtiyaz, 2020). Such practices represent a departure from moderation, as religious teachings are mobilized to promote a singular national identity and suppress pluralism. From Abu Suleiman's ethical standpoint, this instrumentalization of religion constitutes a structural failure that demands both moral counter narratives from within religious traditions and firm institutional responses from the state. Promoting moderation therefore requires challenging hate speech, curbing extremist mobilization, and fostering religious literacy that enables communities to distinguish between ethical teachings and politicized distortions (Vidgen & Yasseri, 2020).

Al-Musawath (Equality) and the Challenge of Horizontal Inequalities

Equality (*al-musawath*) is a central Islamic ethical principle that affirms the equal moral worth of all human beings and rejects discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, race, or social status. Islamic teachings emphasize the unity of humanity and regard diversity as a divine sign rather than a basis for hierarchy. Abu Suleiman's universalist vision reinforces this commitment by rejecting "might is right" paradigms and advocating justice, accountability, and human welfare as the foundations of social order. His critique of monolithic legal interpretations and his emphasis on public interest (*maslahah*) further support flexible and inclusive approaches to equality.

Sri Lanka's post independence political history reveals persistent horizontal inequalities that challenge the realization of *al-musawath*. Political under representation of minorities, economic marginalization, unequal access to public services, and discriminatory land policies have contributed to entrenched disparities between identity groups. The appropriation of Muslim and Hindu lands for Buddhist religious developments and the unequal enforcement of laws exemplify structural practices that reinforce majoritarian dominance. Such inequalities are not merely residual effects of conflict but active processes that undermine reconciliation by normalizing exclusion and eroding trust in state institutions.

Addressing these challenges requires structural reforms that operationalize equality as a lived reality rather than a constitutional abstraction. Policies aimed at equitable resource distribution, inclusive political representation, and non discriminatory access to education and employment are essential for reducing group-based disparities. Strengthening bilingual public services and protecting religious personal laws from homogenizing initiatives such as the "One Country, One Law" agenda can further safeguard pluralism and equality. Initiatives to enhance the participation of women and marginalized groups in mediation and community leadership also align with *al-musawath* by broadening access to justice and decision making. Religious and civil society organizations, including the All

Ceylon Jamiathul Ulama (ACJU), can contribute by advocating reforms that uphold equality while engaging constructively with state institutions, as reflected in support for revisions to discriminatory provisions within the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA) (Saujan, Mohamed, et al., 2025).

Ethical Excellence and Social Healing

At the highest level of Abdul Hamid Abu Suleiman's reformist ethical framework, principles such as *al-ihsan* (ethical excellence) and *al-birr* (comprehensive righteousness) articulate the moral horizon toward which social relations should ultimately aspire. These principles transcend legal compliance and institutional reform by emphasizing moral character, sincerity, and responsibility in both individual conduct and collective life. From Abu Suleiman's perspective, sustainable peace and cohesion cannot be achieved solely through structural justice, but require a transformation of ethical sensibilities that cultivate compassion, trust, and social healing.

Al-ihsan denotes excellence in conduct grounded in sincerity and moral consciousness, encouraging individuals to act with kindness, integrity, and responsibility toward others. Abu Suleiman's emphasis on reforming thought and aligning power with truth resonates strongly with the spirit of *al-ihsan*, which calls for ethical leadership and moral restraint in the exercise of authority. In the Sri Lankan context, the persistence of hate campaigns, communal violence, and the misuse of religious narratives to justify exclusion represent clear departures from ethical excellence. Such practices undermine social trust and perpetuate cycles of resentment, demonstrating that reconciliation requires not only political solutions but also a moral rejection of hatred and dehumanization.

Closely related to *al-ihsan* is *al-birr*, a comprehensive concept of righteousness encompassing goodness, social responsibility, fidelity to commitments, and care for the vulnerable (Mubarok, 2019). *Al-birr* emphasizes that moral integrity extends beyond belief to concrete actions that uphold shared values and collective well-being. In societies marked by prolonged ethno religious conflict, such as Sri Lanka, the erosion of mutual commitments and the normalization of harm toward perceived "others" reflect a deficiency of *al-birr* at the societal level. This deficiency manifests not merely as individual moral failure but as a weakening of shared ethical covenants necessary for peaceful coexistence.

From an ethical reformist standpoint, social healing in Sri Lanka requires the revitalization of *al-ihsan* and *al-birr* as guiding values in public life. Educational initiatives that promote universal moral responsibility, civic virtue, and respect for diversity can contribute to rebuilding ethical foundations across communities. Encouraging acts of kindness, humanitarian cooperation, and service that transcend religious boundaries helps transform tolerance into genuine solidarity. Religious leaders and institutions play a crucial role in this process by modeling ethical excellence, mediating conflicts, and reclaiming religious narratives from

extremist distortions. Mosques, schools, and community organizations can embody these principles through inclusive charitable activities and moral education that emphasize responsibility toward all members of society. Bodies such as the All Ceylon Jamiathul Ulama (ACJU) have the potential to further this ethical vision by promoting moral leadership and social welfare initiatives that contribute to unity, coexistence, and long term reconciliation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Abdul Hamid Abu Suleiman's reformist theory of Islamic international relations provides a coherent ethical and contextual framework for addressing post Easter Sunday inter community tensions in Sri Lanka. By critically challenging intellectual stagnation and advocating continuous reinterpretation of Islamic values, Abu Suleiman offers a model that enables Muslim communities to remain faithful to their religious heritage while engaging constructively with contemporary social and political realities.

The application of his hierarchical ethical framework from *as-silm* (peace) as a foundational condition, through principles of cooperation, coexistence, moderation, equality, and justice, to the apex of ethical excellence embodied in *al-ihsan* and *al-birr* illustrates how Islamic ethics can inform practical pathways toward social cohesion and reconciliation. These principles demonstrate that peace in plural societies cannot be sustained solely through the absence of violence, but must be grounded in justice, institutional fairness, and moral responsibility at both structural and societal levels.

Importantly, Abu Suleiman's human centered and universalist approach, rooted in *tawhid*, transcends religious particularism by offering moral guidance applicable to diverse societies. His reformulation of key concepts such as *jihad* and his contextual reading of scripture provide powerful counter narratives to extremist interpretations, simultaneously addressing intra Muslim challenges and fostering trust among non Muslim communities. In the Sri Lankan context, this approach highlights the necessity of integrating ethical reform into policy making, religious leadership, and civil society initiatives.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that embedding Abu Suleiman's dynamic, ethically grounded framework within national reconciliation efforts offers a viable path toward durable interreligious harmony. Such integration supports the construction of an inclusive national identity that acknowledges diversity as a source of strength rather than division, thereby contributing to long term peace and social healing in post Easter Sunday Sri Lanka.

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