

Dar al-Harb and Dar al-Islam

The fundamental divide between the lands under Islamic control, or *Dar al-Islam*, and the rest of the world under non-Muslim rule, or *Dar al-Harb*, has long been a key concept in framing the interrelations of Muslims with the rest of mankind. *Dar* means abode, house, or home. It is that in which one is reared; it is a safe, nurturing, and nourishing environment. The *Dar al-Islam* is, then, the home, the zone of safety and control of Islam. Within the Abode of Islam, there is (ostensibly) no real threat to the faith or its adherents. This is contrasted sharply with the *Dar al-Harb*, or the Abode of War, which lies outside the control of Islam and is considered a warzone. The Qur'an describes how Muslims are to "Fight the ones who do not believe in Allah nor in the Last Day, and do not prohibit whatever Allah and His Messenger have prohibited, and do not practice the religion of Truth from among the ones to whom the Book was brought, until they give the tax out of hand (i.e., by a ready money payment, or in token of submission) and have been belittled." (Surah 9:29). Thus, the *Dar al-Harb* will ultimately be subsumed by the *Dar al-Islam* and Muslims will rule the world.

This concept is highly controversial in some Muslim circles when it comes to defining how efforts to expand the *Dar al-Islam* and combat unbelief are to be carried out. The problem which causes so much division ultimately comes down to an interpretation of the *Naskh* (abrogation) tradition. This tradition is based on the statement of God in two verses of the *Qur'an*, including Surah 2:106, "We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth one better than it, or similar to it. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?" and Surah 16:101, which reads "When We substitute a verse in place of a verse, and Allah is most knowing of what He sends down, they say: You are but a forger! But most of them do not know."

Certain verses of the *Qur'an* are considered abrogated by later verses. God revealed the truth in a growing amount of importance. The most common example is the prohibition of drinking alcohol. At first, the *Qur'an* is ambivalent, "They ask you about wine and gambling. Say: In them is great sin and some benefit for people, but their sin is greater than their benefit." (2:219). Then, it was prohibited to pray drunk: "O you who believe, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying." (4:43). As Muslims must pray at five specific times each day, it would be far more difficult to drink during the day. Finally, it is prohibited entirely, among other ancient Semitic pagan practices: "O you who believe, wine, gambling, sacrificing on stone alters, and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid them that you may be successful." (5:90). Thus, any verse in the *Qur'an* can be abrogated by a later verse. There is a grave problem, however, as what constitutes later and earlier is hotly debated among all of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence. As Islamic Jurisprudence schools define what is and is not orthodox, they play the key role in the Islamic life of their adherents.

This issue plays a key role in how Muslims understand the relationship between the *Dar al-Harb* and the *Dar al-Islam*. How the "war" against unbelief is meant to be waged or even what constitutes a viable target are not universally or historically agreed upon. The Hijazi schools of the mid-eighth century argued that non-Muslims should be won over by sound arguments and reason. It was fundamental to their thought that war had stringent boundaries. God had set limits to conflict: "Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits. God does not love transgressors." (Surah 2:190) War was supposed to be waged against aggressors only: "Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory."

(Surah 22:39) The *Dar al-Harb* was, by their understanding, only to be engaged when it first crossed the boundaries of the *Dar al-Islam*.

By contrast, the Maliki (mid eighth century) and Hanbali (early ninth century) schools consider the *Dar al-Harb* to be a place of constant warfare. Verses advocating relentless warfare against the non-believers were considered to have abrogated any “peaceful” verses. Thus, these schools took a view diametrically opposed to the more conciliatory ones. Where the Hijazi considered the passive injunctions to have been revealed at the height of Islamic power and security, the later schools considered the more violent passages to have been written at the height of Islamic security and power. What this means for the relation of Islam to the *Dar al-Harb* is that a Muslim’s allegiance to a particular legal tradition could determine how they believe the broader Muslim world should interact with non-Muslims. There has never been a consensus on the proper relationship between the two *Dar* because both sides are able to call upon *hadith* (traditions of the Prophet and his companions) and Quranic verses to support their interpretations. Moreover, in the Shafi’i and Hanafi schools of Islamic law, there also existed an intermediary type of “Abode of Truce,” known either as the *Dar al-Sulh* or *Dar al Muwada’ah*, both of which allowed for an armistice or treaty with a non-Muslim state bordering a Muslim state to prevent the need for constant conflict with their neighbors at inopportune times or for other reasons.

It should be noted that there is no explicit Quranic reference to the *Dar al-Harb* or the *Dar al-Islam*, which is a later conception first developed by Muslim scholars only in the mid eighth century. In the *Qur’an*, the dichotomy is set between the *Dar al-Iman* (Abode of Faith) and the *Dar al-Kufr* (Abode of Unbelief). This separation is seen as part of God’s plan for the universe, although the imposition of Islam will not change that separation. This is notably

different from the *Dar al-Harb* and *Dar al-Islam* concept, which sees Islam as being ultimately triumphant over the non-Muslim world.

Historically, the language of *Dar al-Harb* and *Dar al-Islam* was used to rally support for political ventures. War with Byzantium was almost constant, but alliances were made in the twelfth century with other Christian powers. While Byzantium was the political target, persecutions of Christian communities were sporadic. Even within the Muslim community itself, the language of dichotomy could be applied to incite violence against Shi'a or Kharijite Muslims. In the east, similar language was used to entice men to venture out to Khurasan, Sijistan, and Transoxiana to push Muslim holdings against the Princes of Afghanistan and the Fergana valley. The historical use of the *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb* dichotomy thus tended to be political, although with undeniable religious overtones. It was, in many respects, an ideology that utilized religious support to justify its political intentions.

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See Also:

Further Reading:

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