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Qatar's *Islamweb* Fatwa on the Limits of Relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims: An Analysis

Saud Bin Mohammad^{*}
Adibah Abdul Rahim^{}**

Abstract

The relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is one of the central point of discussions in the *fiqhi* discourses of Islamic tradition. The Muslim jurists throughout Islamic history defined the extent of relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is based on the doctrine of *al-walā' wa al-barā'* as stated in the revealed discourses. This paper analyzes one of the scopes of relationship, that is, friendship. Some scholars including *Islamweb muftis* argued that the mode of friendship is connecting with loyalty (*al-walā'*), and based on such understanding, they claimed that friendship with non-Muslims is not permissible. After analyzing the views of the *Islamweb muftis* on friendship, the paper found that their definition of friendship is not in line with modern understanding of friendship. In the modern world order context, friendship carries various interpretations. Therefore, this paper did not agree with the *fatwā* issued by *Islamweb muftis* which prohibits friendship with non-Muslims. The paper argued that friendship with non-Muslims is conditional, essential (sometimes if not always) and strategic in the current world to serve the greater purpose.

Keywords: *Islamweb*, *muftis*, *fatwā*, friendship, *al-walā' wa al-barā'*, scriptural ambivalence.

Introduction

Peaceful co-existence in society is conditioned by the acknowledgment and acceptance of socio-cultural and religious diversity. In fact, living in a diverse and multicultural society is not possible without embracing others' religious and cultural diversity. The *Qur'ān* itself reveals various accounts of different religions and shows its attitudes towards religious tolerance, interfaith relations and communal harmony among religious communities. Despite those attitudes, there are some limitations related to the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, and this issue has been interpreted differently by Muslim scholars. Therefore, this paper attempts

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at analyzing an Islamic interpretation over the issue by contextualizing the relevant texts dealing with the relationship of Muslims with non-Muslims in the modern period.

The *fatwā* on the limits of relationship with non-Muslims in particular Christians is a part of larger discussion on *Islamweb.net*. Among the questions raised are about inter faith marriage, the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in the worldly affairs, having non-Muslim as friends etc. In this regard, it is imperative to observe the response of islamweb *muftis* towards the extent of relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Do they consider all sorts of relationship impermissible or do they consider some flexibility in the relationship? In addition, studying this website will help to understand how the state religious institution of Qatar and the *muftis* working on the internet approach of questions related to Muslims and non-Muslims relationship. Are they addressing issues like religious pluralism, inter-communal harmony, and interfaith dialogue? If yes, to what extent are they concerned? Are they voiced in public? Since the website is based in the Gulf, and the Gulf States are working to promote interreligious harmony, moderation and religious tolerance, do these religious authorities who work in the ministries of religious affairs observe these issues when they speak about other religions? How are these religious institutions promoting moderation and tolerance when issuing *fatwas* on Muslim and non-Muslim relationship? These issues need to be investigated. In doing so, this paper will shortly introduce *islamweb.net* and the question of the petitioner. Then it will highlight the context of the *fatwa* and analyses the answer given by the *Islamweb muftis*.

The Background of Islam-Web.net

This paper discusses the *fatwā* that deals with the *Limits of relationship with non-Muslims*¹ which is taken from the section “Etiquettes, Morals, Dhikr and Du‘a’ ” of *islamweb.net*. This website is one of the biggest online *fatwa* platforms based in Qatar, which inaugurated in 1998 with limited projects under the auspices of the Ministry of Awqaf’s Department of Da’wah and Religious Guidance.² The website is currently dealing with multifarious content like lectures, articles, and *fatwas*. It provides its services in five different languages: English, Arabic, French, German and Spanish. *Islamweb* claims itself as a universal, educational and informative website. Its objective is to increase awareness among Muslims and non-Muslims alike about the mission of Islam. *Muftis* of different regions

¹ <https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/88293/limits-of-relationship-with-non-muslims>, accessed on 10.20.2019.

² Islamweb.net, *Islamweb.net survey*, 2014, p. 5.

mostly from Arab countries are working for the accomplishment of *Islamweb*'s goal.¹ The website seems to be dominating due to its contents and myriad outputs. According to the survey of 2014, the website already produced more than 195 thousand *fatwas*, 135 thousand devices, 90 thousand articles, 200 thousand audio files, and received more than 1 million visitors per day. The website received a couple of international awards as the world's best online platform and producer.²

Understanding the Context of *Fatwā*

The *fatwā* on the limits of relationship with non-Muslims was issued in 2004, just after a couple of years of the September 11 tragedy. After the tragedy, the relationship between the Muslim world and the West worsened. Issues like crusade, war on terror, clash of civilization got revived. The post 9/11 attitudes of most non-Muslims were found to be very biased against Muslims. Muslims have been labelled as terrorists, extremists, and fundamentalists.³ As a result, Muslims from all over the world felt a dire need to revisit their attitudes towards religious tolerance, communal harmony, the concept of pluralism, coexistence and interfaith dialogue among religious communities. There have been many dialogues and attempts to bridge the gap between Islam and the West and promote interfaith dialogue. Muslims in general and Arab countries in particular took the issue very seriously and showed various efforts to demonstrate a harmonious and welcoming attitude towards non-Muslims. This attitude resulted in few great outcomes. The Arabian Gulf witnessed a number of initiatives directed towards Muslims and non-Muslims understanding of these relationships and that led to a variety of projects to promote moderation, tolerance and interfaith dialogue.

In 2002, Qatar established its diplomatic relations with the Vatican. In 2003, it hosted an interfaith seminar, where Muslim and Christian scholars gathered from all over the world. Later Saudi Arabia, keeping its *salafi* attitudes aside, was found to have few great initiatives to ensure its position on religious tolerance and harmony. Subsequently, in 2003 King Abd al-Aziz Centre for National Dialogue (KACND) was established with

¹ See Islamweb's website <https://www.islamweb.net/en/>

² Islamweb.net, *Islamweb.net survey*, 2014, p. 25.

³ Amir Hussein refers to that and uses the term "misislamism, a neologism that captures the move from a fear (phobia) to a hatred (*miso*) for Islam and Muslims". See: Amir Hussain, "Confronting Misislamism: Teaching Religion and Violence in Courses on Islam," in *Teaching Religion and Violence*, ed. Brian K. Pennington (NY: OUP, 2012), pp. 118-148.

an objective to develop a dialogue with other communities¹. Apart from this, there are many initiatives that have been taken by the Gulf States, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia², United Arab Emirates³, Oman⁴ and Bahrain. The basic aims of these initiatives were to focus on and strengthen the relations among individuals of other faiths, especially Christians and Muslims.

The above initiatives were taken in order to present Islam as moderate religion and to defend all the allegations.⁵ In 2007, Qatar established Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) and continuously contributing to promoting harmony and tolerance among different religious communities through dialogue, publications and other interfaith efforts.⁶ Since 2006 Qatar is continuously organizing conferences on interfaith dialogue annually on different themes, such as 'Steps towards Tolerance'.⁷ Therefore, Qatar manifested the broad and welcoming attitude towards other religious faith groups. At this juncture, it is important to investigate

¹ John Fahy, "The international politics of tolerance in the Persian Gulf," in *Religion, State & Society* 46, no. 4(2018):9-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2018.1506963>

² In 2008 Saudi Arabia sponsored a two-day conference in the United Nation on the religious tolerance. In 2012, it funded for King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) which is established in Vienna. Oman and Bahrain also betraying their consecutive contributions in the issue of tolerance "pursuing their respective tolerance agendas through academic publications, travelling delegations, exhibitions and international conferences". See: John Fahy, "The international politics of tolerance in the Persian Gulf," in *Religion, State & Society*, 3. See; MacFarquar, N. 2008. "Saudi Arabia to Lead UN Talks on Religious Tolerance". The New York Times. Available online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/11/world/africa/11iht-nations.4.17726793.html>

³ In 2012, a centre named *Hedayah* (which literally means 'guidance') was established in Abu Dhabi. In 2015, UAE co-founded with the US the Sawab Centre for countering radicalization and terrorism. UAE has shown a great interest in this regard and even establish world's first Ministry of Tolerance in 2016. After couple of months in 2017, a new post has been created for the minister of tolerance. In the same year, *International Institute for Tolerance* was established, and 2019 has been declared as the Year of Tolerance. See; Government, U. A. E. 2017. "Tolerance". Available online at: <https://www.government.ae/en/about-the-uae/culture/tolerance/tolerance-initiatives>, John Fahy, "The international politics of tolerance in the Persian Gulf", in *Religion, State & Society*, 5, DOI: 10.1080/09637494.2018.1506963,

⁴ Oman's multifarious efforts to promote religious harmony and tolerance can be found online at: <http://www.islam-in-oman.com/en.html>

⁵ John Fahy, *The international politics of tolerance...*, p. 10.

⁶ For more info, visit DICID website at <http://www.dicid.org/>

⁷ Ibid, p. 10.

whether the state's religious institutions are working in line with the state authorities in their projects or not.

The Question of Petitioner

The petitioner asked the *muftis* whether or not having Christian friends and teachers are permissible from the Islamic point of view. The question is “*It is okay to have Christian teacher or friend?*” The question was very simple, short, general and presents no broader context. Since the question was in English, one might speculate that it might come from a Muslim living as a minority in the West or in South Asia. The question might also come from a Muslim studying under non-Muslims since international schools are gaining attraction in the Muslim world in which many teachers in those schools come from the West and might be Christian. This question presupposes a discourse on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims within the Islamic tradition.

The Answer by Muftis

The *fatwā* is issued in Qatar by the *Islamweb* website. In reply to the question, the *muftis* referred to a couple of Qur’anic verses and *ḥadīth*. Based on Qur’anic verses of 58:22¹ and 3:118² and one *ḥadīth*³, the *muftis* claimed that friendship with non-Muslims is categorically prohibited. The former verse claims that those who believe in Allaah and the last day cannot make friendship with non-Muslims, whereas the latter enjoins not to take other religious people, such as Christians, Jews etc as friends. They argued that friendship with non-Muslim is impermissible because they cannot fill up the criteria of friendship as dictated by Islam¹. They warned that the

¹ “You (O Muhammad) will not find any people who believe in Allaah and the Last Day, making friendship with those who oppose Allaah and His Messenger (Muhammad), even though they were their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred (people). For such He has written Faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with Rūh (proofs, light and true guidance) from Himself. And We will admit them to Gardens (Paradise) under which rivers flow, to dwell therein (forever). Allaah is pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the Party of Allaah. Verily, it is the Party of Allaah that will be the successful” (58:22).

² “O you who believe! Take not as intimate those outside your religion (pagans, Jews, Christians, and hypocrites) since they will not fail to do their best to corrupt you. They desire to harm you severely. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, but what their breasts conceal is far worse. Indeed, We have made plain to you the signs if you understand” (3:118).

³ “A person is upon the religion of his friend, so you have to choose whom you befriend.” [Abu Daawood, At-Tirmidhi and others]

¹ <https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/87176/>, accessed on 02. 05. 2019.

case of friendship is even much more dangerous and serious if it includes the people of different genders among Muslims and non-Muslims. However, the *muftis* are quite flexible in mutual cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims in affairs of buying or selling, commerce, study, and in the fields of sciences and technologies¹. They are quite flexible as well in the issue of inter faith marriage².

The Interpretation of Friendship

Friendship is one of the keywords in this *fatwā*, which is defined by the *muftis* as love and affection to someone, and highlighted as a very serious issue related to '*aqīdah*'. Hence, it should not be taken lightly, for the relationship in friendship encourages one to show loyalty, mutual affection, equal and egalitarian attitude towards friends.³ In the view of *muftis*, friendship with non-Muslims is categorically impermissible with few exceptions under certain conditions. The *muftis* used verses 5:22 and 3:118 as a bedrock of Muslim and non-Muslim relationship. They compared the English word friendship with Arabic term *bithana* (3: 118) and *awliyā* (5:22). Based on those verses, the *muftis* claimed that the friendship with non-Muslim is impermissible. However, it can be argued that the terms *bithana* in the verse 3: 118 and *awliyā* in 5:22 may not correspond to a modern understanding of friendship.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr's commentary of the first verse gives a different account of what *muftis* provide. It is argued that the verse was meant for specific occasions after the battle of *Badr* and *Uḥud* to refer to the people who were opposing God and the Messenger and conspired against the Muslim community and were killed by their Muslim relatives. The verse claims that "bond of faith and belief overrides that of family and provides greater protection"⁴. However, the *muftis* generalized it to non-Muslims and Christians of all times and places. This is the strategy of *muftis*' interpretation which is literal reading of the text and reformulating the issue of the human transaction as an issue of '*aqīdah*'.

¹ <https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/369448/cooperating-with-christians-in-disseminating-worldly-sciences> accessed on 02. 05. 2019.

² <https://www.islamweb.net/womane/nindex.php?page=showfatwa&FatwaId=384922>, accessed on 02. 05. 2019.

³ Kenneth H. Rubin, Julie Bowker. *Friendship*, accessed from Research Gate on 20. 04. 2019. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309187516>, DOI: 10.4135/9781506307633.n339

⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (HarperOne; Reprint edition (August 1, 2017): 1347.

For classical and modern exegetes like Ibn Kathīr¹, Sha‘rawī², Rashid Riḍā³, the above verses are intended for the impermissibility of relations with non-Muslims or hypocrites that allow sharing secrets. The secrets that should not be shared with non-Muslims are related to the information of war and peace. If shared, it could threaten the stability of the Muslim polity which was very clearly organized along religious lines, where Muslims and non-Muslims are enemies. Thus, those verses are revealed in a context where individuals had direct access to information related to war and peace. In the modern context, such information is classified and confidential, and not accessible to most people. In this regard, the verses are related to the political context in which guidelines are being formulated to address the issue. The *muftis*’ quotations on those verses indicate that they used the Qur’anic verses out of context and applied them in different context.

In addition, *muftis*’ definition of friendship seems to be narrow whereas there are some other interpretations of friendship. Some authors claimed that friendship had a special place and it was considered as a fixed and lasting covenant among the friends.⁴ It is also considered as a balm to the soul and an intellectual solution to tensions in his society⁵. In al-Tawhidi’s view, *ṣadiqa* (friendship) is too fundamental that it unites different souls together and is ultimately a condition for the survival of the whole community. He said that we should not be hesitating to befriend with an enemy because this relationship could be helpful in many ways. An enemy could be influenced with our good conduct and might correct his faults which ultimately lead to his moral development. Thus, friendship is conceived by al-Tawhidi as one of the regulating force of people or society. After all, friendship is not unconditional; rather it is based on reason and is conditional.¹ Thus, it could be adopted with the enemies for the sake of greater interest. Based on the logical standing of the mentioned arguments, it could be said that this account of friendship would be very

¹ Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1st ed. 1419H.), v.2:92

(يَقُولُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى نَاهِيَا عِبَادَهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَنِ اتِّخَاذِ الْمُنَافِقِينَ بَطَانَةً، أَيِ يُطْلِقُونَهُمْ عَلَى سَرَائِرِهِمْ وَمَا يُضْمِرُونَهُ لِأَعْدَائِهِمْ، وَقَوْلُهُ تَعَالَى: لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بَطَانَةً مِنْ دُونِكُمْ أَيِ مَنْ غَيْرِكُمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْأَدْيَانِ)

² Muḥammad al-Sha‘rawī, *Tafsir al-Sharawi* (n.p: Maṭāb‘i Akhbar al-yawm, 1997), v.3: 709-710.

(أَيِ النَّاسِ الَّذِينَ يَصَاحِبُهُمْ وَيَجْلِسُونَ مَعَهُ وَيَعْرِفُونَ أَسْرَارَهُ)

³ Muḥammad Rashid Riḍā, *Tafsir al-Manar* (Miṣr: Al-Hai‘a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Amma, 1990), v.3:67

(بَطَانَةُ الرَّجُلِ: وَلِيَّتُهُ وَخَاصَّتُهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَعِيطُونَ أَمْرَهُ وَيَتَوَكَّلُونَ سِرَّهُ)

⁴ Nuha A. Alshaar, *Ethics in Islam Friendship in the Political Thought of al-Tawhidi and his Contemporaries* (New York: Routledge, 1st ed. 2015), p. 17.

⁵ Ibid, p. 119.

¹ Ibid, pp. 123-128.

different from what is explained by *muftis*, which is a very narrow definition of friendship. With regard to the verses (5:51) that warns about not having Christians or Jews as friend or allies, in the view of scholars like Ayoub, this is meant for political alliances during the war times, and therefore this verse should not be generalized to indicate as a general concept to disallow all social relations between Muslim community and others.¹ Not to mention, there are such many Qur'anic terms and contexts which are misunderstood by the scholars.²

Al-Walā' wa al-Barā'

The concept of *al-walā' wa al-barā'* is very significant when it comes to defining the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is an Islamic concept that features prominently in contemporary *Salafi* discourse and is considered as a condition for *imān*.

The *Qur'ān* states,

“And if they had believed in Allah and the prophet and in what was revealed to him, they would not have taken them as allies; but many of them are defiantly disobedient” (Al-Mā'idah: 81).

Ibn Qayyim comments that the verse came as a conditional structure, *imān* of Allah and friendship of non-believers cannot happen at the same time. Taking non-believers as friends is contradictory with the sense of *imān* as mentioned in the aforementioned verse.³ The *muftis* has applied this concept of *al-walā' wa al-barā'* and explained that Muslims are not allowed to show their loyalty toward non-Muslims in any sense.

The interpretations of the verses associated with the concept of *al-walā' wa al-barā'* varied amidst the scholarly circles and sometimes the verses were given wrong interpretations.¹ Wagemaker argued that *al-walā' wa al-*

¹ M. Ayoub, “The Islamic context of Muslim-Christian relations,” in: M. Gervers & R. Bikhazi (Eds) *Conversion and Continuity: indigenous Christian communities in Islamic lands, eighth to eighteenth centuries* (Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), p. 469.

² Jamal Badawi, *Muslims/ Non-Muslims Relations -Reflections on Some Qur'anic Texts*, ResearchGate Publication, 26-30, accessed on 26.2.2019, available at; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283421811_Muslim_and_NonMuslim_Relation_Reflections_o_n_Some_Qur'anic_Texts

³ Ahmad bin 'Alī al-Zāmīrī, *Manhaj al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Razzāq 'Afīfī wa Juhūdihī fī Taqrīr al-'Aqīda wa al-Raddu 'Alā al-Mukhālifīn*. Master dissertation, Imām Muḥammad bin Sa'ud University, 1431H, p. 584.

¹ Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf, Mira Menzfeld and Yasmina Hedider, “Interpretations of al-wala' wa-l-bara' in Everyday Lives of Salafis in Germany,” in *Religions* 2019, vol.10, no. 124: 1. 2019.

barā' features very prominently in *salafī* discourse and it is used to frame a threat to Islam that is usually associated with the West¹. According to ibn 'Utaymin, *muwala* happens when someone is found satisfied with the disbelief of disbelievers or acknowledged their doctrines as truth. He also believes that asking the help of non-Muslims, putting trust unto them, taking them as patrons, traveling their countries without necessity, borrowing their laws and applying them, participating in their festivals either by attending or congratulating them and imitating their customs and traditions are in a way or another indicate that the imitator is impressed by non-Muslims and transgressed the limit of *al-walā' wa al-barā'*.²

The terms of *al-walā' wa al-barā'* indicates loyalty to Allah and disavowal to whatever contrasts his instructions. It is compulsory for every Muslim to believe in Islamic *aqidah* and this *aqidah* demands to encounter those who do not believe in it.³ From this sense, *al-walā' wa al-barā'* has been used in the *salafī* discourse to exert the loyalty towards God and discarding all non-Islamic influences in the worship. The theory was strictly followed by the early Muslims and it was adopted as an intrinsic part of Islam. Subsequently, it has been considered as a duty for all Muslims to disavow everything considered un-Islamic, and an instrument to separate the true Muslims from the rest⁴. In fact, there are four parts of beliefs associated with the concept of *al-walā' wa al-barā'*; attachment to the God, loyalty towards other fellows Muslims, detachment from all beliefs and ideologies that contrast to the Muslims *sharī'ah* and finally detachment from the parties who bear contradictory ideology to Islamic *aqidah*.⁵

In relation to the concept of *al-walā' wa al-barā'*, there is no use of the term *wala'* in the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* although *barā'* is used for once.⁶ However, there are a number of passages from both *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* that explain about the idea of relationship of a believer towards his fellow communities and the other faith groups. Wagemaker claims that '*al-walā' wa al-barā'*' as a fixed terminology is quite new and introduced in the late

¹ Joas Wagemaker, "Framing the "Threat to Islam": Al-Wala' wa al-Bara in Salafi Discourse," in *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 4: 3-4. Fall 2008.

² 'Abdallah Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān, *Ḥuṣul al-Ma'mul bi Sharḥi Thalātha al-Uṣul* (Maktaba al-Rushd, n.d), pp. 39-40.

³ Ṣāleḥ bin Fawzān, al-Fawzān, *Al-Walāwu wa al-Barā'u fī al-Islām* (Palestine: Jam'iyyatu Dār al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah, n.d), p.2.

⁴ Joas Wagemaker, *Framing the "Threat to Islam": Al- Walā' wa al-Barā' in Salafi Discourse...*, pp. 3-4.

⁵ Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf, Mira Menzfeld and Yasmina Hedider, "*Interpretations of al-Walā' wa al-Barā' in Everyday Lives of Salafis in Germany...*, p. 2.

⁶ Ibrāhīm: 26.

20th century by *salafī* scholars of Saudi Arabia.¹ However, the current *salafī* understandings are often divergent from the early Muslims' understanding. Few strict issues and ideas as conceived by *salafīs* are different among the circles outside *salafīs*.² It has been argued that *salafīs* used *al-walā' wa al-barā'* since 1970 for two basic ways; religious and political aspects. Religiously, non-Muslims are considered as potential enemies of the purity of Islamic rituals and customs. Hence, it is believed that to maintain any relationship with these enemies is harmful. Therefore, Muslims should avoid this relationship. Politically, political rulers should show the same disavowal of non-Muslim countries as ordinary Muslims are compelled to show to Jews and Christians. They should not have a diplomatic relation with non-Muslim countries. Therefore, *al-walā' wa al-barā'* has to be applied to both personal and societal level as well as to politics and diplomacy.³ Meanwhile, the issue of *walā' wa al-barā'* with the friendship, love and liking others is closely interlocked because the way friendship and love are described by the *muftīs* is the same point meant by the *salafī* scholars when they speak about loyalty (*walā'*) meaning love or affection (*maḥabba*) for non-Muslims.⁴

The *muftīs* tend to justify their argument of prohibiting friendship with non-Muslims for two reasons. Firstly, it is commonly a widespread notion among many scholars that befriending non-Muslims will contaminate one's Islamic purity and lead to the things impermissible in the eyes of Islam. Secondly, it is believed by the most *salafī* scholars that loyalty is connected to the notion of *tawḥīd*, a very central point of Muslim's faith. Hence, all types of loyalty should be directed towards Allah and Islam.

Considering love or affection for non-Muslims as an important threat that could potentially damage the very basis of Islam and bring Muslims closer to being infidel is not shared by a great proportion of Muslim society.¹ Apart from this fear, the application of such approach in a general manner is identical to the heedless attitude toward the new world order.

Scriptural Ambivalence towards Non-Muslims

The relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims are difficult to understand from the discussion of *muftīs*. The verses that describe the

¹ Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf, Mira Menzfeld and Yasmina Hedider, *Interpretations of al-wala' wa-l-bara*, p. 2.

² Joas Wagemaker, *Framing the "Threat to Islam": Al-Wala wa al-bara in Salafi Discours*, p. 4.

³ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

¹ Joas Wagemaker, *Framing the "Threat to Islam": Al-Wala wa al-Bara in Salafi Discourse*, p. 6.

Muslims and non-Muslims' relationships are primarily of two kinds: confrontational or critical and irenic or laudatory. The *Qur'ān* termed Christians and Jews as a 'People of the Book' (*Ahl Kitāb*); it is one of the most used terms. It was mentioned more than thirty times according to McAuliffe,¹ whereas some others counted it thirty-one times in the *Qur'ān*.² Although it has been argued that this term has been applied in the Qur'anic passages to indicate to be 'neutral...faith identity', it has not been given a particular legal status.³ In addition to that, few other verses imply the attitudes of conciliation and plurality of religion. For there is a verse that enjoins the prophet once to ask the 'people of the book' if they have any doubt in the revealed materials (10:94). Qur'anic discussions engaged with many terms *dīn*, *millah*, *ibādah*, *ḥanīf*, *sharī'ah*, *ahl al-kitāb*, etc.

The first three connote religion as a collective category, whereas the rest connote to Qur'anic approval or toleration.⁴ There are several verses that portray the characters of *ahl kitāb* in positive manners alongside their negative portrayal. The *Qur'ān* praised some *ahl kitāb* for their piousness, religiosity, and strong attachment to the religion. (Āli-ʿImrān:113-115). In other occasions, the *Qur'ān* sometimes criticized them as narrow-minded and dissatisfied with the blissful situation of Muslims. (Al-Baqarah: 105) and also for their disbelief and rejection of Allah's signs (Āli-ʿImrān: 75).

There are Qur'anic verses enjoining Muslims not to befriend with non-Muslims, admonish those who maintain close ties with non-Muslims, and instruct to fight against them (58:22, 3:118, 2:193, 24:2) while some other Qur'anic texts indicate broader attitudes of welcoming to other faiths or non-Muslims, which strongly exhort for maintaining the diversity and taking care of the people from other religions, faiths, and beliefs in a respectful and amicable way (11: 118-119, 60:8, 5:2, 2:256, 209:6). Hence, it is common to have a question where there appears to be a contradiction in the Qur'anic statements. As a result, the attitude of Muslims remains undecided and confusing.¹ Therefore, these contradictory statements need

¹ Jane Dmmen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 3.

² Muhammad Fu'ād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-Mufaḥras li Alfāz al-Qurʿān* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1945), pp. 95-96 and 592-593.

³ M. Ayoub, "The Islamic Context of Muslim-Christian Relations," in M. Gervers & R. Bikhazi (Eds) *Conversion and Continuity: indigenous Christian communities in Islamic lands, eighth to eighteenth centuries* (Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), p. 469.

⁴ Clare Wilde, "Religious Pluralism and the Qur'ān" in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurān*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2004), 4: pp. 400-403.

¹ Ibid, p. 416.

to be revisited in order to check on how the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is restricted to certain limits.

Ignoring the Reality of the Modern World Order

The attitude of the *muftis* in producing their *fatwā* regarding the relationship of Muslims with non-Muslims seems to be an obstacle for Muslims in modern times in the international atmosphere when the socialization of Muslims with non-Muslims is very significant. Due to the current political restlessness and wars, a great number of Muslims have migrated to different European countries. There are many theories that have changed with changes of time. The idea of *ahl dhimmi* does not exist anymore, and equal citizenship has been accepted by Muslim states¹. When the Islamic revival movement started in the early 17th century, Muslim scholars called for reinterpretation and reform of *sharī'a* application. Muslim scholarships showed appreciation to the non-Muslim scholarships in science and technology and followed a selective approach. Islamization movement could be one of those examples.² Millions of Muslims migrated to the West and enjoying their living even as a minority group having rights and freedoms.³

In relation to this scenario, there are many questions on the status of citizenship of Muslims under non-Muslim authority in the non-Muslim countries. Under the commitment of citizenship a citizen has to give his loyalty to the country, thus, how would that be treated by Muslim traditions? Is giving loyalty permissible for Muslims to non-Muslim authority or not? If yes, under which circumstances? If not, then how to tackle this problem? These issues have been asked by many on different occasions.¹ Apart from the loyalty issues, the issue of relationship with non-Muslims is one of the most pressing agendas in the Muslim world in the post 9/11. The issues of socialization, friendship, amity, harmony between Muslims- non-Muslims in the contemporary time are much more important than any other historical period, for Muslims are now living in close level to the Christians or other religious groups than any other time in

¹ Kate Zebiri, Relations between Muslims and Non-Muslims in the Thought of Western-Educated Muslim Intellectuals, p. 258.

² Ibid, p. 258.

³ March, Andrew F. "Sources of Moral Obligation to non-Muslims in the "Jurisprudence of Muslim Minorities" (Fiqh al-aqalliyyāt) Discourse". *Islamic Law and Society* 16, no. 1 (2009), p. 38.

¹ Faysal Mawlawi, "Citizenship of Muslims in Europe," in *Islam Online Archive*, accessed on 20-04-2029. <https://archive.islamonline.net/?p=1172>

the history. It has added a new dimension as well as importance in their relationship. However, due to the terms and speculations of Muslims against non-Muslims, Muslims are facing some disadvantages¹ in the international polity. Hence, a good relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is the demand of the modern time; and the multifarious problem which the world is experiencing now could be solved only through cooperation among the religious communities.² Hostile and antagonistic attitudes will only enlarge the distance.

The Need for Redefining of Justice

Although the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is defined through *al-walā' wa al-barā'*, *Islamwebsite muftis* believed that there should always be justice in dealings with non-Muslims³. For them, not having friendship does not necessarily mean that Muslims will be unjust to them. However, the issue of justice has not been dealt accordingly by the *Muftis*. The issue of justice is questioned based on the historical reality where non-Muslims were treated as *ahl al-dhimmi*. Although the Muslim scholars provide justifications from their parts, some non-Muslims claim that they have been treated as second class citizens in the Islamic polity. Although Muslims believe that equality was maintained among all human beings over Islamic history, some non-Muslims claim that there are some aspects where discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims was evident. It includes the issues of *qīṣaṣ*, blood money, witness as evidence in *sharī'ah* court, inheritance, holding top military, governmental or administrative position etc.⁴ In relation to this, al-Faruqi responded to the limited exercises of freedom enjoyed by non-Muslims in certain realms of Muslim society. He argued that the limitation of the role of non-Muslims was in the positions that required personal commitment to Islam.¹

In addition, there have always been divergencies between the theories and practices. This is the truth for all religious communities. The reasons for this difference could be many; deviance of the right part, misinterpretation of the texts, or the influence of socio-political circumstances. Even in the

¹ Kate Zebiri, Relations Between Muslims and Non-Muslims in the Thought of Western-Educated Muslim Intellectuals, in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 6, no. 2, (1995), p. 255.

² Ibid, p. 269.

³ <https://www.islamweb.net/ar/fatwa/103614/لا-حرج-في-تقديم-الكافر-الماء-والشاي-والقهوة-للموظفين>

⁴ Kate Zebiri, *Relations Between Muslims and Non-Muslims in the Thought of Western-Educated Muslim Intellectuals...*, p. 257.

¹ I. R. Al-Faruqi, "The rights of non-Muslims under Islam: social and cultural aspects," in *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 1, no.1 (1979), p. 95.

current days, it is found that native Muslims, as well as Muslim diaspora in a few countries, are not allowed to perform their religious obligation, whereas in some other places they can enjoy the rights of freedom.¹ Meanwhile, there are non-Muslims who became the victims of unequal treatment in the Muslim polities. This is due to misunderstanding of Muslims about the hierarchy of human beings (Muslims– non-Muslims) as described in the Qur'anic verses. These verses inculcate in their minds that Islam is the only religion approved by God; any religion other than Islam will not be accepted. Also, it is only Muslims who possessed positive characteristics, and this upright behavior gives a message on the lofty and distinctive nature of their religion and community. Thus, Muslims feel superior over others. Based on such understandings, non-Muslims in the Muslim polity receive sometimes a different legal and jurisdictional treatment from Muslims.

Considering these historical facts as discussed earlier, it is argued by some non-Muslims that since Muslims are now living in non-Muslim countries as immigrants or as diaspora, they should be treated also as second class citizens as Muslims treated Christians and other religious communities.² Taking into consideration the above points, it is incumbent for the *muftis* to define the justice that Muslims advocate while still having differences in terms of rights and freedoms.

Conclusion

There are many anxieties about the West due to the ongoing intellectual and cultural wars. The *fatwā* on friendship of Muslims with non-Muslims emerges in context when all Muslims, *salafis* in particular, are very anxious about the Muslim identity. The *fatwā* reflects that state religious authorities are not necessarily in line with state projects promoting tolerance and interfaith. The *muftis'* *fatwā* remained very much tied with *salafī* literalist reading of the texts where friendship is connected to the question of loyalty, disloyalty and in ways that are not fully attentive to modern realities of a new modern order. They do not seem to correspond to the reasonable understanding of what friendship entails today. In addition, the *muftis* only used Qur'anic texts and only one *ḥadīth* while he could go beyond that, such as, citing from the scholars to situate the idea in the best way. The reasoning of *muftis* and their deliberations indicate to the application of the *salafī* approach. They seemed to read the texts literally

¹ Muhammad Hamidullah, "Relations of Muslims with non-Muslims", in *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 7, no.1 (1986), p. 8. DOI: 10.1080/13602008608715960

² Samuel Shahid, *Rights of Non-Muslims in an Islamic State*, p. 10, accessed on 01.03.2019 <https://www.dhimmitude.org/archive/Rights-of-Non-Muslims.pdf>

and following the strategy of generalization of a particular context. The explanation is laconic, narrow and abstract. It focused on one part of the question “friend”, and skipped another part “teacher”.

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