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Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	ʿ
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	ʾ
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
◌َ	a		◌َا، ◌َى	an
◌ُ	u		◌ُّو	un
◌ِ	i		◌ِّي	in
◌َا، ◌َٰ، ◌َى،	ā		◌َوْ	aw
◌ُو	ū		◌َيْ	ay
◌ِي	ī		◌ُّو	uww, ū (in final position)
			◌ِّي	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: http://rotas.iium.edu.my

Al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ (Allegiance and Disassociation) in Islam: A Source of Islamophobic Narratives?

Zouhir Gabsi

Abstract: *Al-Walā' wal-Barā'* (Allegiance and Disassociation) elucidates the essence of the Muslims' relationship with the 'Other' in socio-political terms. However, this concept has been marred with controversies and misunderstandings, largely due to the interpretations of Muslim 'jihadists' and Islamophobes. While jihadists interpret al-Walā' wal-Barā' as a justification for attacking non-Muslims, Islamophobes exploit this narrow interpretation to portray Islam as a violent religion. In its true essence, al-Walā' wal-Barā' upholds the spirit of Islam as defined in both the Qurʾānic and Prophetic traditions. This study, rooted in an Islamic perspective, aims to dispel these misunderstandings. It first delves into the concept of al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ, its interpretation, and the semantic distortions it has undergone from its origin to the present day. Second, it argues how a misinterpretation of this concept can fuel both Islamophobia and militancy. The article further posits that while the rules or codes of exclusion may persist, their implementation must align, at least to some extent, with the core principles of human rights and international relations.

Keywords: abrogation, *Al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ,* Ibn Taymiyyah, Islamophobia, Takfir

Abstrak: *Al-Walā' wal-Barā'* (Kesetiaan dan Penolakan) menjelaskan intipati hubungan Muslim dengan yang 'Lain' dari segi sosio-politik. Walau bagaimanapun, konsep itu telah dicemari dengan kontroversi dan salah faham yang berpunca daripada 'jihadi' Muslim dan Islamophobe. Walaupun jihad mentafsirkan *al-Walā' wal-Barā'* sebagai asas untuk menyerang orang bukan

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Islam, Islamofobia mengeksploitasi takrifan sempit jihad ini untuk menonjolkan Islam sebagai agama yang ganas. Pada dasarnya, *al-Walā' wal-Barā'* mengukuhkan semangat Islam yang sebenar yang ditakrifkan dalam kedua-dua tradisi Al-Quran dan Sunnah. Walaupun kajian semasa berkonsepkan daripada perspektif Islam, matlamatnya adalah dua kali ganda. Pertama, ia mengkaji konsep *al-Walāʾ* dan *al-Barāʾ*; tafsirannya, dan bagaimana ia berbelit-belit secara semantik dari asalnya hingga ke hari ini. Kedua, ia berhujah bagaimana salah faham konsep ini boleh mencetuskan kedua-dua Islamofobia dan pemahaman militan. Artikel ini seterusnya berhujah bahawa peraturan atau kod pengecualian akan terus wujud, tetapi bentuk pelaksanaan perlu selaras sekurang-kurangnya dengan prinsip asas hak asasi manusia dan hubungan antarabangsa.

Kata kunci: pemansuhan, *Al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ,* Ibn Taymiyyah, Islamofobia, Takfir

Introduction

The myths and misinterpretations of Islam's various tenets and philosophy, such as *ʿibādah* (worship), *muʿāmalāt* (transactions, relationship with the other), jihad[1], Sharia law, and the application of reason, are some of the themes that drive Islamophobic narratives. Debunking these myths has been the focus of numerous studies by early and contemporary Muslims and non-Muslim scholars, such as al-Ghazālī's colossal work *ʾIḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Revival of Religious Sciences), al-Bouṭī's work on jihad, Nasr's and Esposito's various works on Islam.[2] However, in the following pages, an unremittingly dominant Islamophobic[3] discourse continues to surface, relating mainly to misinterpretations of the notion of *al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ* (allegiance and disassociation); the subject of this paper.

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[1] The terms relating to jihad, a significant pillar in Islam, should not be confused with 'jihadism' or 'jihadists', nor with any other terms that seek to tarnish jihad's significance with unwarranted violence, aggression, and oppression.

[2] See al-Bouti (1993); Esposito (2002, 2011), Nasr (2002), and Gabsi (2024).

[3] The term 'Islamophobia' is contested, as argued by Gabsi (2024). While it is defined as an 'irrational' fear of Islam, Islamophobia may be premeditated and intentional.

The Islamic creed *al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ* (Allegiance and Disassociation) is a complex and significant element of a Muslim's *ʿaqīda,* 'faith'. It is bound by codes of behaviour and prescribed restrictions. Linguistically, the term *al-Walāʾ* is construed as a Muslim's 'closeness' and allegiance to Muslims who espouse and follow Islam literally. In contrast, the concept of al-Barāʿ deals with a Muslim's attitude towards non-Muslims, a form of rejection of being involved with them, especially when these non-Muslims exhibit enmity towards Islam or Muslims. Putting the two polarized concepts together, the concept of *al-Walāʾwal-Barāʾ* formulates rules of behaviour from the individual to the international relation sphere. Al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ can operate and manifest itself in various ways within the fluid boundaries of social, cultural, economic, and political constraints, where even the concept itself may not be consciously applied by Muslims when defining their relationship with the 'Other'. For instance, in multicultural and multi-faith societies, Muslims would be discouraged from socializing with non-Muslims for fear of being influenced and led astray from the path of Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) provided clear guidance on this social constraint when he stated, "Do not accompany except a believer and do not serve your food except to one with *taqwa* [piety and fear of Allah]" (al-Tirmidhī, 1996, p. 201). This guidance, rooted in the teachings of Islam, sets the tone for the concept of al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ and its application in social interactions. Politically, the recent call for *at-taṭbīʿ* (normalisation) of the relationship between the Arab states and the State of Israel has been contentious as it created a schism in most of the Muslim world because of its implication to Israel's occupation of Palestine. However, the concept of al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ did not exclude Muslims from being open-minded to study other religions and cultures, as crystalized in various and earlier studies, such as by al-Birūni's (973-1048) work on the Indian culture in the tenth century or by al-Shahrastani's (1086-1153) *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (The Book of the Sects and Creeds). Therefore, the interest in knowing the 'Other' to establish a good relationship is in line with the spirit of Islam, consolidated by the Qurʾānic (49: 13) verse:

> "O humankind! Indeed, We have created all of you from a
> single male and female. Moreover, We have made you people
> and tribes, so that you may come to know one another. And,

> indeed, the noblest of you, in the sight of God, is the most
> God-fearing of you. Indeed, God is all-knowing, all-aware."

To fully understand the concept of *al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ*, one needs to locate it within all religions' central themes, namely sharing the world with others, the idea of justice, and, more importantly, how these concepts can be politicized. The first point of 'sharing' the world with others engenders many principles, such as respecting and protecting others. It also includes respect for the elders. The second point discusses the concept of justice, where "the world is affected by us and our efforts and we have expectations in return" (Solomon, 1996, p. 810).

The third point is more complex and dangerous because the politicisation of justice could have serious repercussions if misunderstood or misinterpreted. It is enshrined in what Galtung refers to as 'cultural power' that branches out into 'choosiness with rights and duties', 'myths of past glories', and traumas suffered by the colonized (Galtung, 1995, p. 2-18). For instance, Zionism has argued that the occupation of Palestine is justified by the Biblical concept of the 'Chosen People'. Before outlining the significant misconceptions and misinterpretations about the creed of *al-Walā and al-Barāʾ*, some of the tenets of this significant belief are considered.

A review of the literature on this subject reveals that most works were written in Arabic, which limits a westerner's understanding of this critical concept. One of the best works available on the subject, based on the *Ahl-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿaʾs* interpretation, is al-Sināni's *The Concise Truth about the Creed of al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ in The Book (Qurʾan) and Sunnah*. Al-Sināni explains that the concept of al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʿ could be precarious if subjected to flaws in reasoning (al-Sināni, 2005). He opines that some impetuous Muslim youth, for instance, may consider all other Muslims as enemies without discrimination. Hence, al-Sināni opposes any *takfīri* (accusation of disbelief in God) attitudes towards Muslims and non-Muslims alike. He also insists that *al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ* have an affective dimension, profoundly connecting with matters of the heart.

When endeavouring to make sense of the concept of *al-Walāʾwal-Barāʾ*, numerous interconnecting areas need to be understood and settled first. One of these areas is the significance of hadith and the Prophet's *seerah* (Prophet Muhammad's conduct) in relation to the teachings of

the Qurʾān when dealing with the 'other'—the non-Muslim. The second area is the importance of language and how inadequate translations, especially of the Qurʾān, can lead to fallacious conclusions. Finally, different interpretations of the Qurʾān can play a double role, even though Islam encourages Muslims to differ on jurisprudence matters, which has brought forth the four different schools (Mālikī, Ḥanafī, Shāfiʾi, Ḥanbalī). On the one hand, some Qurʾānic interpretations are based on the Prophet's tradition that Islam is not a confounded religion and encourage Muslims to choose the easiest path to God. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was reported to have said, "Make things easy and do not make them difficult, cheer the people up by conveying glad tidings to them and do not repulse (them)"(al-Nawawi 1992, p. 637). On the other hand, not having one canonical interpretation can lead, as mentioned earlier, to interpretations contradictory to Islam›s foundations. Therefore, it is the role of Muslim scholars to question the underpinnings of these claims on the bases of the Qurʾānic sciences such as *ʾAsbāb an-Nuzūl* (the socio-political and historical reason behind the revelation) and *al-Naskh* (Abrogation).

Al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ in the Qur'ān

Numerous verses deal with the concept of *al-Walāʾ* and *al-Barāʾ*, which is usually interpreted and supported by either the Hadith or by various Muslim scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah. The Qurʾānic interpretation of al-Walā and al-Barāʿ strongly links it with Muslims with *ʾīmān* (faith). This is mirrored in several verses, such as in the following excerpt, "Let not the believers take the disbelievers as allies instead of the believers" (Qurʾān 3: 28).

Al-Walā towards non-Muslims comes in different forms. Sheikh Abdullah Ben Abd al-ʿAzīz Al-ʿAnqarī explained how someone shows allegiance to non-Muslims (cited in al-Sināni, 2005, p. 7). He indicates that al-Walāʾ to infidels means non-allegiance to Muslims, since "approval of the infidels in their disbelief, and showing approval, and helping them against Muslims, will support their actions and demonstrate obedience and pander to their disbelief" (cited in al-Sināni, 2005, p. 8). The implication is that al-Walāʾ to non-Muslims is a betrayal of one's brothers. However, the Qurʾān (60: 8) clearly states that it is permissible to do good to non-Muslims, as stated in the following verse, "God does not forbid you from honourable relationships with those who have not

fought you over religion, nor expelled you from your dwellings—that you relate kindly and equitably with them."

The Qur'ān specifies the two groups that should not be taken as ʾawliyā (allies), namely 'the Jews' and 'the Christians', as stated in the Qur'ān, "O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you—then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people" (Qur'an, 5: 51). Al-Walāʿ wal-Barāʿ also includes family members, fathers, children or brothers, or anyone from the tribe or community, if they are unbelievers. As stated in the Qur'ān, "O you who have believed, do not take your fathers or your brothers as allies if they have preferred disbelief over belief. And whoever does so among you—then it is those who are the wrongdoers" Qur'ān (99: 23).

Al-Sināni extends the circle of exclusion to atheists. He states that one should not use the concept of freedom of expression to shelter these people or exempt them from applying the rules of al-Walā wal-Barāʿ.

Constraints of Al-Walā Wal-Barā

Regarding Muslims' behaviour towards non-practising Muslims, al-Sināni (2005) argues that one should support them on the condition that they are shown the right path through the Islamic practice of maʿrūf (favour, kindness, courtesy). Al-Sināni (2005) also laid down some constraints about al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ, in order not to confuse it with the takfiri doctrine. Misunderstanding the precept may inadvertently lead to aggressive behaviours towards non-Muslims.

In effect, there are nine constraints. The first constraint deals with accepting or rejecting the Islamic faith, especially among dhimmi people or those seeking refuge, as summarized in the statement, 'no compulsion in Islam', as supported by the Qur'ānic verse (2: 256). The second constraint is that Islam permits Muslims to have treaties with non-believers if they are beneficial for the Umma of Islam. Then, al-Sināni (2005) warns against Muslim hardliner's literal interpretation of al-Walā wal-Barāʿ, where allegiance to non-Muslims–even for the benefit of Muslims–is opposed unconditionally. Muslims are prohibited from assisting another Muslim party if the latter has a treaty with non-Muslims, as stated in the Qur'ān (8: 72):

> "Indeed, those who have believed and emigrated with the
> Prophet and striven with their wealth and their persons in the
> path of God, and also those who gave them shelter an help—
> it is these who are allies of one another. As for those who
> have believed but did not emigrate, you have no obligation
> for their protection at all, until they emigrate. But if they
> seek your help against persecution in religion, then help is
> incumbent upon you, except against a people wherein there
> is a covenant between them and yourselves. And God is all-
> seeing of all that you do."

The fourth constraint indicates that allegiance towards the people of
Islam only occurs if they agree to follow the path of Allah and the
Prophet (peace be upon him). The fifth constraint permits Muslims to
seek a non-believer's protection, mirrored in the Qurʾānic verse (3: 28).
This is confirmed by accounts of when the Prophet Muhammad (peace
be upon him) sent some of his followers to Negus, the king of Abyssinia,
seeking his protection. The Prophet Muhammad knew that the Christian
king was a man of God; hence, it became obligatory for Muslims to seek
the help of unbelievers if it were the only viable option.

The sixth constraint makes it incumbent on every Muslim to
safeguard the life of non-Muslims and pray that they follow the right
path. The non-Muslims are treated by either preserving their lives or
giving them money to win them over and be protected.

The seventh constraint dictates that Muslims may protect non-
Muslims, which does not contradict the principles of al-Walāʾ wal-
Barāʿ, as stated in the Qurʾān (9: 6):

> "Now, if anyone of the idolaters seeks your refuse, then grant
> him refuge, until he hears the words of God in the Quran.
> Then convey him to his place of security. That is because
> assuredly they are a people who do not know the essence of
> faith."

The eighth constraint clarifies that non-Muslims, even those who had
been enemies, should be treated fairly and equitably. The Grand Mufti
of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Ibn Bāz, states that if Muslims are not at war
with non-Muslims, Muslims must treat them the Islamic way, with
honesty, no treason, no lying, and with fairness (al-Sināni, 2005, p. 35).

The ninth constraint permits a Muslim to have a relationship with a non-believer who is part of the family. A Muslim man can marry a person of the Book (Christian, for example). It is also permissible for Muslims to show affection towards non-Muslims. The often-quoted anecdotal evidence alludes to an event when the Prophet Muhammad cried at his mother's grave, knowing she died as a non-Muslim. Al-Sināni adds that many Muslims misinterpret the creed of al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ with excessive negativity and generalization and that Muslims should not treat non-Muslims inhumanly (al-Sināni, 2005, p. 35).

However, spying on a fellow Muslim to aid the enemy is considered a severe treacherous act in Islam. However, this does *not* justify the killing of the spy. Al-Nawawī mentions that a Muslim aiding the enemy does not make him or her automatically a non-believer. The Qurʾān (33: 57) supports this, "Indeed, those who malign God and His Messenger, God shall curse them in this world and in the Hereafter." Imam al-Shāfiʿi asserts that, "a Muslim should not be killed if proven that he is still a Muslim, only if he kills or commits adultery while married, or if he relinquishes his faith and he is proven to be a non-believer" (al-Sināni, 2005, p. 51).

Misinterpretation of al-Walāʾ and al-Barāʿ

With all these constraints, it is clear that the concept of *al-Walā and al-Barāʿ* is a multi-layered phenomenon. Misinterpretation of *al-Walā wal-Barāʿ* could fuel Islamophobia and encourage acts of terrorism. Muslims whose little understanding of Islam may make them susceptible to treating non-Muslims as enemies indiscriminately, leading to violence and acts of terrorism. Islamophobes may propagate false information about *al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ* to inflame anti-Islamic narrative to serve ideological purposes. For instance, Bukay's (2013) article *Islam's Hatred of the Non-Muslim* is an example of how misunderstanding of the concept can be advocated. Bukay perceives the notion of *al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ* as a carte blanche for Muslims to hate non-Muslims. To bolster his claim that Islam advocates violence towards non-Muslims, Bukay handpicked almost all Qurʾānic injunctions that cover elements of *a priori* violent beliefs. These verses were decontextualized as significant elements of Qurʾānic science, such as ʾasbāb al-nuzūl, an-Naskh, and the Arabic language itself, such as the power of rhetoric were ignored; these are

needed to understand the complexity of a Muslim's relationship with the other.

Bukay's flawed reasoning is semantically defined. In fact, the translation of *al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ* was understood by Bukay's literal translation as 'love and hate for the sake of Allah'. According to Bukay, this creed is interpreted as a license to hate anyone who does not adhere to Islamic teachings, including Muslims. A more informed, realistic, and educated analysis of the concept of *al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ* would define it as 'loyalty and disownment' or 'allegiance and disassociation'; the latter is adopted in this article.

Continuing with Bukay's analysis, one finds that he relied heavily on numerous injunctions from the Qurʾān, quotations from Muslim jurists, including exegetes such as Ibn Taymiyyah, and jihadist websites. Bukay argues that these various sources encourage violence and hatred towards non-Muslims. Bukay's arguments unequivocally contradict the Qurʾānic verses, which allow friendship with non-Muslims and the obligation to protect them. For instance, the Qurʾānic verse (9:6): "If one among the pagans seeks your protection, grant it to him so that he may hear the word of Allah, and then escort him to where he can be secure"; also, in (5: 82), "And you shall assuredly find that the nearest of all them in genuine love to those who believe are those who say: We are, indeed, Christians". This amity between Muslims and non-Muslims is reflected in the institution of marriage, where Muslim men may marry Christian and Jewish women because Islam considers the concept of *al-fiṭra* (human nature), such as love and its vicissitudes when establishing rules for Muslims to observe.

As mentioned earlier, context plays a crucial role in understanding the Qurʾān, or indeed any text. The verses deemed to attack non-believers were usually decontextualized, without ʾasbāb an-nuzūl, and without understanding the concept of an-Naskh. For instance, verse (9: 28) considers the unbelievers as *najas* 'unclean' because it relates to the rules concerning the performance of Ḥajj 'pilgrimage'. Before the revelation of this verse, Hajj was permissible to everyone, including non-Muslims.

Furthermore, Bukay (2013, p.11) criticizes the Sheikh of Islam, Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), quoting him as having said that:

> "Whoever loves for the sake of Allah, and hates for the sake
> of Allah, and whoever seals a friendship for His sake, or
> declares an enmity for His sake, will receive the protection
> of Allah. No one may taste true faith except by this even if
> his prayers and fasts are many."

This pronouncement masks a historical fact about the Tartar and Mogul
invasions. Regarding the Mogul's invasion and their killing spree, al-
Athīr (1149–1210) reports that the Moguls committed some barbaric
acts and unspeakable violence, such as opening a pregnant woman's
womb to kill the foetus. It was reported that Ibn Taymiyyah fought the
Moguls and issued *fatāwī* (jurisprudence rulings) against them, saving
the Muslim world and the West (al-Athīr, 2007).

Bukay's term 'hate', as universally acknowledged, denotes a natural
and irrational feeling. According to al-Shaʿrāwi, in his commentary on
the Qurʾān, the concept of 'feeling' in Islam comprises three stages:
ʾidrāk (perception), *wijdān* (inner feeling), and *nuzūʿ* (action). While
the first two types cannot be controlled, the third stage can be controlled
and subject to Sharia law. In Islam, having feelings or evil thoughts are
not considered punishable sins by God. Only an individual's *actions* are
considered in Islam (YouTube, 2016).

Another example taken out of context refers to verse (2: 65) where
God describes the Jews as 'monkeys', as in "And well ye knew those
amongst you who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath: We said to
them: 'Be ye apes, despised and rejected.'" According to al-Shaʿrāwi, the
verse does not include all Jews, and the curse resulted from disobeying
God's command not to labour (go fishing) on Saturdays. However, the
Jews tried to trick God by using traps to catch the fish on the day before
the Sabbath (al-Shaʿrāwi, 1991).

A final example deals with verse (8:12): "I shall cast terror into the
hearts of those who disbelieve. So strike at the necks of the disbelievers,
and strike from them every fingertip!" This verse is understood to be
a straight case of a 'call for war'. The verse targets no individuals or
groups but explains why these wars are fought. However, Bukay chose
not to include the succeeding verse (8:13), stating, "This is because they
wilfully rebelled against God and His Messengers."

However, Bukay is not alone in exaggerating the threat of Islam
and the relationship of Muslims with the other. The recent 'trend' in

demonising Islam as Muslims is falsely anticipated to take over Europe through what Egyptian-born British author Gisèle Littman, known by her pseudonym Bat Ye'or, projected Europe as 'Eurabia' in her book, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis*, as Justin Vaisse argues, "Eurabian follies" or the "plain wrong genre" fuels fear that Europe will become unrecognisable in two decades and that "political subservience to a Muslim agenda was turning Europe into an appendage of the Arab world" (Vaïsse, 2010, para. 3). Bat Ye'or's work and many others help spread the Zionist ideology that aims to besmirch Western thinking of Islam.

What is more concerning is that the exaggerated threat of Islam in Europe has been linked to the manipulated notion of *dhimmitude*, where Bat Ye'or (2005, p. 194) defines it as a culture that "stems from a denial of the difference and identity of the 'other''. The concept of *dhimmitude* was used as a system when Muslims conquered lands and forced non-Muslims to pay *al-jizya* (poll tax) for their protection and participation in the socioeconomic life of the countries. However, Bat Ye'or, especially in her book *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilisations Collide,* refutes any suggestions that dhimmi non-Muslims were either protected or had any human rights under Islamic rule. As critically explained by Ahmad (2004, p. 152) in his review, her work "has little to offer a serious scholarship of Islam …and that it has much to offer propagandists who seek rhetorical ammunition to increase, rather than decrease, the hatred and strife in the world." Ahmad's diatribe hinges on many instances from Bat Ye'or work, where she cuts short contextless quotations from the Qurʾān, and gives false and misleading definitions of words such as jihad and *fedeyeen* where the latter is defined by Hans Wehr's dictionary as "someone who sacrifices his life, especially for his country", but Bat Yeo'r twisted the definition to mean "literally a fighter against Christians for the triumph of Islam" (cited in Ahmad, 2004, p. 151).

Sources of Misinterpretation

An-Naskh or 'Abrogation'

One of the reasons for misunderstanding the concept of *al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ* emanates from overlooking the concept of *an-Naskh* (abrogation). According to Khan, there is no clear and satisfying definition of the term an-Naskh (Khan, 2012). In fact, it is a confusing concept, despite the

numerous efforts to define it by several works in the Arabic language
(Abū 'Ubayd, 1990).

The best definition of an-Naskh was probably provided by Ibn al-
Jawzī where he points to the concept's two literal meanings, first, to
mean "removal and lifting up" (cited in Khan, 2012, p. 2). For example,
the sun removes (carries naskh) the shadow because the shadow recedes
with the light of the sunrise. The second literal meaning refers to the
act of copying a document in another place. A Qurʾānic example of
this import is found in the verse (45:29): "This is our preserved Book
of Record! It speaks about all of you with all truth. Indeed, We have
registered all that you have ever done in life."

However, the fundamental understanding and application of an-
Naskh in Islamic jurisprudence refers to removing an initially obligatory
command with or without a replacement alternative. It is formulated as
the last resort when various attempts are not easily reconciled while
bearing in mind that abrogation is dismissed if the chronological order
of the two verses cannot be determined (Halimi, 2017, p. 4). Since
abrogation does not occur haphazardly, it needs to satisfy the following
five conditions, according to Ibn al-Jawzī: First, no contradiction to
be tolerated between the abrogated and the abrogating verses (cited in
Khan, 2012, p. 2). Second, the abrogated ruling needs to precede its
abrogating ruling, as its identification can be determined either through a
divine statement or through historical information. Third, the abrogated
ruling is a constituent of Islamic law. Fourth, the abrogating ruling
should also be an approved part of Islamic law. Fifth, the reasoning
behind an abrogating ruling should be as convincing as the abrogated
ruling. However, "in case of the tenuous strength of the abrogating in
comparison to the abrogated one the abrogation will not occur" (Khan,
2012, p. 2).

The Qurʾanic verses that argue for abrogation are many and include
the following verses (2:106), (2:269), (3:7), (4:160), (5:48), (13:39),
(16:101), (17: 86), and (22:53). For instance, verse (2:106) reads,
"Whatever decree or verse We abrogate, or cause to be forgotten, We
bring in its place one better for the welfare of humanity or one similar
to it. Do you not know that God is, indeed, powerful over all thing?"

Abrogation Dilemma

When the Qurʾān was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) over twenty-three years, the Quraysh attempted character assassination by accusing the Prophet of forgery, using statements in the Qurʾān like this one (16:101): "And when We substitute one revelation for another—and Allāh knows best what He reveals in stages—they say: You are but a forger! Nay, but most of them do not understand it." These periodic revelations made the Quraysh believe the Qurʾān was Prophet Muhammad's manufacture; they thought that it would have been revealed all at once had it been God's word.

The Quraysh's questioning of the veracity of the Qurʾān, because it was revealed by piecemeal development, is not that different from the question of abrogation in the Qurʾān, where some Muslim scholars, such as Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī (868-934), an exegete and prominent figure during the ʿAbbāsid ruling, refute all arguments against the very existence of abrogation (Halimi, 2017).

One of the problems of understanding abrogation in the Qurʾān emanates from Muslim scholars who fail "to refine the principles of abrogation to give them universal shape. Different scholars developed their own interpretations of abrogation in the Qur'an, which is why they could not agree unanimously as to which verses are abrogated" (Halimi, 2017, 12). One of the problems, as stated earlier, alludes to al-Zurqāni's reckoning that the existence of abrogation in the Qur'an occurs because certain verses in the Qurʾān can never be practised. It simply means that al-Zurqānī and others from the community of Muslim scholars made their judgments that some verses of the Qurʾān were practically invalid forever.

According to Shāh Waliullāh Dehlawi (1703-1762), a Muslim scholar and reformer, the number of abrogated verses has decreased from twenty-one to only five. This narrowing down of the abrogated verses is based on the interpretation of the verses concerned. According to Dehlawi, the only abrogated verses in the Qurʾān are (2:180), (2:240), (8:65), (33:52), and (58:12). However, some scholars declare that these five verses are non-abrogated (Khan, 2012).

Therefore, no verse of the Qurʾān stands abrogated. In this case, the stance of al-Zurqānī regarding the existence of abrogated verses in

the Qur'an is unsustainable (Khan, 2012).Early Muslim scholars have different attitudes towards abrogation. This disagreement centres on the following scholars, namely Ibn al-Jawzī and al-Suyūṭī, who confirm that Muslim scholars agree about the existence of abrogation, while al-Naḥḥās thinks that it was rejected. Al-Suyūṭī claims that Muslims have a consensus on the abrogation of the Qur'ān. However, this consensus only occurs when all the scholars agree and without any exception. In his book, *ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*, al-Zarkashī thwarts the idea of abrogation in the Qur'ān (Khan, 2012).

Al-Zarkashī (1344-1392), a Muslim scholar and an expert in Shafiʾi legal jurisprudence, seems to have supported the idea of the Qur'ān being protected from all kinds of contradictions. To substantiate his understanding, he quoted verse (15:9): "Indeed it is We alone who have sent down the Quran instead as a revealed Reminder to humanity of the way of God. And, indeed, We alone shall forever preserve it." However, there is no consensus on abrogation in the Qur'ān among Muslim scholars; scholars are divided into two groups, one supporting it and the other negating it. In addition, the claim of consensus contradicts the reality in history today, and, according to Abu Bakr al-Rāzī (865) or Rhazes, a Muslim philosopher and alchemist, "that a consensus of Muslim scholars is not a sufficient basis to cancel the practical validity of Qur'anic rulings" (Khan, 2012, p. 13).

Abrogation and the Verse of the Sword

The most debated contention that has a profound ramification to al-Walāʾ and al-Barāʾ refers to a Qur'ānic verse (9:5), called 'verse of the sword', where on first reading, and without hinging on the Qur'ānic science of *ʾasbāb an-Nuzūl* (the socio-political context in which the verse was revealed), and the science of an-Naskh, it was perceived by non-Muslims, especially Islamophobes as an unwavering proof that Islam advocates violence towards non-believers. The verse of the sword, even though the word sword was never mentioned in the entire Qur'ān (9: 5), states that:

> "Then when the sacred months elapse, you may then slay the idolaters wherever you find them, or seize them, or besiege them, or lie in wait for the in every place of ambush. But if they repent and establish the Prayer and give that Zakāt-

> Charity, then let them go their way. Indeed, God is all-forgiving, mercy-giving."

As stated earlier, misinterpretations of this verse, considered one of the many forms of Muslims' attitudes toward non-Muslims, are also found among Muslim scholars and jihadists who have disagreed about the meaning of that verse based on an-Naskh and ʾasbāb an-Nuzūl. Early scholars, such as al- Naḥḥās (949), believe that the verse of the sword has abrogated 113 verses that preach "dialogue, freedom of belief, forgiveness, peace and even patience!" (Auda, 2004, p.196).

However, such an interpretation not only contradicts verses that foster peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims, but it is illogical to consider that the whole Qurʾān with its 114 chapters that start with "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful", happens to encourage hostilities toward non-Muslims (Halimi, 2017, p. 12).

Before delving deeper into some of the arguments of *al-Naskh*, one needs to explain the reason behind the revelation of this verse. The verse of the sword indicates that based on the treaty between Muslims and the polytheists and idol worshippers, it is to leave the Muslim lands and if they refuse, then Muslims are instructed to fight them within Islam's ethical parameters. However, the Qurʾān (9: 6) has instructed Muslims to give the polytheists protection upon leaving Muslim lands as indicated in the following verse:

> "Now, if anyone of the idolaters seeks your refuge, then grant him refuge, until he hears the words of God in the Quran. Then convey him to his place of security. That is became assuredly they are a people who do not know the essence of faith."

However, the interpretation of the verse of the sword as abrogating all verses advocating mercy and peace toward non-Muslims was adopted by various scholars and jihadists as a false pretext to kill non-Muslims without reason. They hinge on what is referred to as "liberal abrogation" adopted by Abdul-Salam Faraj (1954-1982) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) to a certain extent. Abdul Salam Faraj, the leader of the Egyptian group *Jamāʿah al-Jihād*, emphatically believes, in his book *al-Jihād al-Farīḍah al- Ghāibah* (*Jihad: The Absent Duty*), that the verse of the sword has "abrogated every treaty, every contract, and term made

between the Prophet and any of the *Mushrikīn* [disbelievers]" (Faraj, 1981,16-17). He opined that the revelation of Qurʾānic Chapter 9 (*al-Tawba*), also called *Al-Barāʾa,* is considered the chronological decider, after which no treaty with non-Muslims should be advocated or considered (Faraj, 1981).

Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966)[4], a member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, considered the context in which the sword verse was revealed; however, he still maintained that the rulings to fight non-Muslims are still possible (Halimi, 2017). He argued against having an unconditional peace treaty with non-Muslims, and only peace can be advocated if Muslims are less powerful (Halimi, 2017). Yet, Qutb did not believe it had abrogated hundreds of other verses. In contrast to these earlier claims, contemporary Muslim scholars such as al-Qardhāwī (1926-2022)[5], Zakaria Bashier (1940)[6], and Abu Suleiman Al-Zuhayli[7] believe that jihadists' interpretations contradict Islam's advocating for peace, as there are many instances in the Qurʾān (8: 61) that advocate peace, such as in: "Yet if they incline to peace, then incline to it also—but rely upon God alone." Zakariah Bashier believes that the verse of the sword needs to be understood in its historical context (Bashier, 2006). They also argue that the Qurʾān should be understood entirely, not solely on one verse. Additionally, if one verse could abrogate many others, then one questions the Qurʾān's sanctity and would "diminish the universal message of the Qurʾān on peace, dialogue, forgiveness, patience, and freedom of belief" (Halimi, 2017, p. 8).

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[4] Sayyid Qutb was executed in 1966 for allegedly conspiring to assassinate Gamal Abdel Nasser. Qutb was considered an influential Muslim scholar in the early sixties in Egypt. He wrote numerous books on Islam, such as *fi ḍhilāl al-Qurʾān* (In the shades of the Quran), which he wrote in his prison cell. He was known for his *jāhiliyyah* doctrine (state of ignorance), in which he indicates that anyone who does not adhere to Islamic law, including non-practicing Muslims, is part of the jāhliyyah system. Qutb stands as a prominent Muslim figure; even as Western narratives persist in linking him to fundamentalism and animosity toward the West.

[5] Al-Qaradhāwī (2009).

[6] Dr Zakaria Bashier, an Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah

[7] Al-Zuhayli is a Syrian professor and Islamic scholar specializing in Islamic law and legal philosophy. See Al-Zuhayli (1998).

Summary

There is a general disagreement among Muslim scholars about abrogation in the Qur'ān. This is primarily due to the lack of understanding of the context by which the Qur'ān formulates its rules. In understanding the Qur'ān, it must be read *in full*, and it states in many parts of the Qur'ān that it is a guide to human beings. And the verses at the beginning of the al-Baqarah remove doubts about the authenticity and practicality of the Qur'ān (2: 2), as God states, "This is the Book of God. There is no doubt therein. It is a guidance for the God-fearing"; hence, it consolidates earlier interpretations of abrogation in the Qur'ān and treats it not 'as a permanent suspension of the Qurʾānic commands" (Khan 2016, p. 12).

Those scholars–the proponents of abrogation–hinge on the Qur'ānic verses and base their judgments equally on earlier interpretations of the Qurʾān. However, not considering factors such as context may increase misunderstanding of the abrogated verses. As Khan states, "In most cases, the Qur'anic verses used as arguments in favour of abrogation theory are misquoted. They are read either outside the context or are advanced only in part. When reading those verses in full and also in context, a totally different message emerges" (Bashier 2016, p. 18). Hence, as stated earlier, the Qur'ān must be read comprehensively, including the abrogated verse and its preceding and succeeding verses. As "reading the Qur'ān half-heartedly is a kind of manipulation and not treated as an interpretation" Bashier (2016, p. 18). Knowledge of all aspects of the Qur'ān includes text, context, rhetoric, and *al-ʾiʿjāz* (the inimitability of Qur'ānic style) (Bashier, 2016, p. 18).

The Magnificent Complex Nature of the Language of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in a language that is often referred to as Classical Arabic or Qurʾānic Arabic. The 114 chapters of the Qur'ān are arranged in decreasing order, from the longest (mainly revealed in the Medina period) to the shortest (mainly revealed in the Meccan period), not in chronological order, which can lead to misunderstandings as verses may be taken out of context (Bashier, 2016, p. 18).

Even though the Qur'ān was translated into numerous languages, Sale's (1877) translation remains unequivocally one of the best works to date. The Qur'ānic analysis demands that the reader be equipped with

knowledge of the text and context to acquire a clear understanding of the message.

One of the linguistic aspects of Arabic is rhetoric, which is "the flesh and blood of the Arabic language (Abdel-Raof, 2006, p. 2). Rhetoric is defined as:

> "A linguistic discipline that aims to sharpen up and upgrade the linguistic competence of writing and speaking. It provides us, as language users, with the appropriate and effective stylistic mechanisms required for eloquently forceful discourse. Thus, Arabic rhetoric makes language meet the communicative needs of the language user" (Abdel-Raof, 2006, p. 5).

In addition, rhetoric considers the symbiotic relationship between discourse features such as speech acts and context— working together to achieve a communicative objective. Rhetoric is profoundly related to stylistics, "a bridge between literature and linguistics" (Abdel-Raof, 2006, p. 1). According to Abdel-Raof (2006, p. 1), "Arabic rhetoric is concerned with the truth or falsehood of a given speech act in relation to the external world. Thus, as an approach to communication, Arabic rhetoric is a bridge between logic and language."

Rhetoric in Arabic is comprised of three elements: *ʿilm al-maʿāni* (word order, i.e., semantic syntax), *ʿilm al-bayān* (figures of speech), and *ʿilm al-badīʿ* (embellishments), which are the three constituent disciplines of the Arabic rhetoric (Abdel-Raof, 2006, p. 2). However, what is fundamentally significant about the importance of knowledge of rhetoric is that it serves as:

> "A prerequisite of exegesis without which an exegete cannot be a qualified practitioner. The rhetorical account of allegorical and non-allegorical expressions, especially those related to God's epithets in Qurʾanic discourse, has been the major criteria in the theological distinction between some schools of thought such as the Muʿtazilites who reject the assignment of human attributes or elements to Allah and the Ashʿaries who take God's epithets literally and assign them to Allah" (Abdel-Raof, 2006, p. 2).

Moreover, "Arabic Rhetoric provides comprehensive answers to these questions and elucidates the profound relationship between text

and context, on the one hand, and between the communicator and the addressee, on the other" (Abdel-Raof, 2006, p. 4). The work of al-Jāḥiẓ, who introduced the linguistic notion of "the text within context', i.e. how a speech act unfolds in its context, is particularly enlightening. This understanding of context has sparked a new level of linguistic analysis, known in linguistics as sentential pragmatic analyses. Arabic rhetorical studies have strived to establish a thesis that there is no aesthetic value and no effective discourse without the harmony between the lexical item and its signification, i.e. between the form and content, between the body and the soul (Abdel-Raof, 2006, p. 4).

Therefore, this précis about some of the features of the Arabic language in the Qur'ān can direct one's thinking to two contentious arguments. First, translating the Qur'ān into other languages can potentially diminish its eloquence and power. Second, a lack of knowledge of all aspects of Arabic grammar and rhetoric can lead the reader to misinterpret the Qur'ān and consequently formulate fallacies, which could lead to Islamophobia. Hence, the first point of Qur'ān translation is our immediate concern.

Lost in Translation: The Dilemma of Qur'ānic Translation

As mentioned earlier, there exist reliable translations of the Qur'ān. One includes earlier translations such as George Sale's *The Koran*, and, more recently, the translations of Abdel Haleem (2001) and Hammad (2009). The Muslim scholars' stance towards the translatability of the Qur'ān is marred with disagreement. Those who oppose the translation of the Qur'ān argue that the Qur'ān was revealed to Prophet Muhammad in Arabic and, therefore, translations are considered ill-equipped to rival the Arabic language's eloquence and beauty. For instance, Suleiman mentions that, "the Qur'ān is Arabic and its secret lies in the Arabic language and Allah made sure it was revealed in Arabic" (ʿAref, 2005, p. 5). The Qur'ān is not translatable "because of the choice of beautiful words that not a single word of the Quran can be replaced with a synonym or an analogy without diminishing the beauty of its diction or the specific nature of its meaning" (cited in Kermani, 2018, p. 114).

These scholars hinge their arguments on the Qur'ānic verse in which Allah challenges any reader, particularly about the unrivalled eloquence of the Meccan poets, to devise a similar verse. Furthermore, the scholars who advocate against the translation of the Qur'ān base their arguments

on the difficulties and subtleties of the Arabic language and the link between form and meaning in the Qur'ānic text. The meaning of the Qur'ān is the outcome of the intimacy between parts of speech and the well-defined word order in phrasal and sentential constructions by creating a delicate balance between lyrical beauty and clarity of message. Changes to word order may cause a change of meaning in the translation process and potential translation errors. Kermani contends that the Qur'ānic vivid and acoustic nature is 'untranslatable', as the sonorous nature of the text 'produces meanings and emotions by acoustic means, by rhythmic sequences and by the assonance, consonance, euphony, paronomasia, alliteration, onomatopoeia, and phonetic parallelism of its acoustic figures" (Kermani, 2018, p. 118).

Indeed, 'Aref pinpoints errors in the Qur'ān from both English and French translations ('Aref, 2005). Some of the errors include the following noteworthy examples. For instance, 'repetition' as an accepted and valid rhetorical style in Arabic can be regarded as tautology in other languages. In Dawood's commentary on the repetitious verse in the chapter Al-Rahmān, he likened it to a style taken from the repetition of the Old Testament and ignores that repetition is part of rhetoric in Arabic ('Aref, 2005). A significant translation error appears in Dawood's interpretation of the verse (7:158). Where Dawood writes, "Say to your people: I am sent forth to you all by Allah," he fundamentally misrepresents the text's meaning ('Aref, 2005, p. 24). As 'Aref explains (2005, p. 23), this verse declares that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was sent as a messenger to all of humanity, establishing Islam's universal message. By inserting the phrase 'to your people', Dawood's translation erroneously suggests that Muhammad's prophetic mission was limited to *his* immediate community rather than the entire human race.

Other general and noticeable errors relate to grammar. It includes making the definite indefinite, the passive form of the verb into active or active into passive, singular vs. plural, nouns into verbs, or verbs into nouns. All of these–without a doubt– may distort the intended meaning of the Qur'ān ('Aref, 2005). The author's dismay about most of the translated works of the Qur'ān is vehemently expressed when stating, "I do not find among all these translations a single one that I trust, rely upon, and feel reassured" ('Aref, 2005, p. 9). Furthermore, 'Aref made a scathing attack on Dawood's translation because Dawood wrongly

assumed that the Prophet was influenced by the earlier scriptures of Christianity and Judaism.

Remarkably, in an interview with Professor Muhammed Abdel Haleem, a professor of Islamic studies at SOAS in London, about his recent translation of the Qurʾān, he outlines three problematic areas: *literalism* and *semantics* (ABC Radio National 2011, para. 15). Literalism constitutes a significant problem for most translators. In some translations, the word order was retained in English, resulting in ambiguous or worse, unintended meanings and messages. The second problem lies in semantics, which is when the translator keeps translating the same word while disregarding context. Abdel Haleem gives an instance of translating the word 'spring' where some translators provide matching translation regardless of where it is found in the Qurʾān for consistency. Abdel Haleem gave another example regarding the word *ʾawliyāʾ* cited in the Qurʾānic verse (5:51), "you who believe do not take the Jews and Christians as ʾawliyāʿ'", where most translators have interpreted ʿawliyāʿ to mean 'friends'. In Abdel Haleem's view, the literal meaning of ʿawliyāʿ to mean 'friends' is unacceptable because contextually it means "to ally yourself", which is 'a very strange thing to say" (ABC Radio National, 2011, para. 15). The context dealt with hypocrites who posed a threat during the propagation of Islam.

One of the other significant elements in the Qurʾān is when it deals with the question of gender. According to Abdel Haleem, "reading the Qurʾān, the Qurʾān translation, it is easy to get the impression that it is mostly about men, when in fact it is not so" (ABC Radio National 2011, para. 21). He explains that the use of the generic Arabic relative pronoun *man* to mean 'who' or whoever' when starting a sentence in Arabic, "everything after that has to be singular masculine, simply because this is the way the Arab language works" (ABC Radio National 2011, para. 15). Hence, Abdel Haleem chose 'whomever' as an alternative translation to include men and women dictated by Qurʾānic contexts.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have outlined some of the fundamentals of the Islamic creed *Al-Walāʿ wal-Barāʾ*. This significant creed dictates through detailed constraints how a Muslim defines his/her/their relationship with other fellow Muslims and non-Muslims. As discussed in this paper, misunderstanding this concept may be pernicious, as Muslims could

interpret it as a carte blanche to attack any non-Muslim, or it can be used as a pretext to fuel the Islamophobic narrative.

In line with the Prophetic tradition of spreading peace among Muslims and non-Muslims, *Al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ* serves as an essential compass for Muslims navigating the complexities of the 21st century and beyond. At the same time, this principle takes on renewed significance for Muslim communities and Islamophobia monitoring observatories to track anti-Muslim sentiments, especially within media and academic spheres where some actors manipulate Al-Walāʾ wal-Barāʾ to tarnish Islam's reputation and perpetuate their ideological agendas.

It is also essential to adopt a human rights-based approach, as humans' propensities to love, hate, accept, or reject form part of the human psychological and metaphysical condition on both the individual and collective levels. The rules or codes of exclusion will continue to exist, but the form of execution has to concord at least minimally with the fundamental tenets of human rights. What should be perceived as unaccommodating is the dissemination of violent ideologies based on ignorance or belligerence. The dialectical interpretations of events and discourses will continue, as often demonstrated in history. However, the division of the polarised 'us' versus 'them' will continue to occupy a central position on humanity's continuum of consciousness. Humans display various behavioural trajectories, and if these behaviours are defined by context without ethnocentrism or provincialism, there could be a good chance for humans to work together in seeking what binds them rather than what separates them.

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The Qur'ān

In-text:

(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:

The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

Ḥadīth

In-text:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

The Bible

In-text:

Matthew 12:31-32

Reference:

The new Oxford annonated Bible. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Transliteration of Arabic words should follow the style indicated in ROTAS Transliteration Kit as detailed on its website (http://rotas.iium.edu.my/?Table_of_Transliteration), which is a slight modification of ALA-LC (Library of Congress and the American Library Association) transliteration scheme. Transliteration of Persian, Urdu, Turkish and other scripts should follow ALA-LC scheme.

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