Political Loyalty in Reformist Islamic Ethics: Resources and Limits

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Abstract

This article critically examines three authoritative Islamic discourses on political loyalty produced by prominent figures of Sunni reformist Islam: The Egyptian-Qatari Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (1926-2022), the Mauritanian ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah (b. 1935), and the Iraqi-Qatari ʿAlī al-Qaradāghī (b. 1949). First, I analyze the key arguments presented in each discourse: al-Qaradāghī advocates that allegiance is determined by fairness, whereas al-Qaraḍāwī retains a realist perspective on loyalty in context, while ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah argues for a complementary relationship between loyalty to religion and to the homeland. Second, I

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discuss the three discourses in terms of the foundations, manifestations, and implications for political loyalty. Finally, I point out some of the limitations of the reformist notion of political loyalty toward non-Muslims, particularly in pluralist societies.

Keywords: Political Loyalty; Sunni Reformism; Ethics

Introduction

Loyalty is a moral foundation that is essential to politics, group identification, and religion. All communities and organizations construct an idea of loyalty to form and maintain alliances and partnerships. The ultimate penalty for breaking this rule of commitment is betrayal and treason.[1] In particular, a code of loyalty is crucial for political ethics since it illustrates the norms of inclusion, in-group dynamics, and mechanisms of exclusion as well as the guidelines for creating a shared society, especially in a world that is increasingly pluralist. Loyalty has been defined as "perseverance in an association to which a person has become intrinsically committed as a matter of his or her identity."[2] While betrayal entails cutting off disloyal people, the political virtue of loyalty entails binding loyal ones. To preserve continuity and order, religious communities, like political cultures, have a stake in making their codes of loyalty clear.

In Islamic political ethics, the question of loyalty is posed as follows: To whom should a Muslim give their support and be loyal to, to whom should he distance himself from and consider an enemy? We can distinguish between two positions within the Sunni realm: 1. Salafist absolutism, which sees no possible friendship or alliance with non-Muslims (though, Salafism is made up of a variety of discourse strands and stances, some are sophisticated and engaged with modernity while others are quietist or militant);[3] 2. and reformist Sunnism which supports a more nuanced position that takes into account alliances with non-Muslims in cases of peaceful and normal relations, based on values of justice and peace. The Salafist approach has been the focus of academic studies on Islamic political allegiance. Since terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam has caused instability in many Western countries, most

loyalty research to date has focused on the securitization of allegiance, that is, the relationship between political loyalty and extreme Islamist ideologies and terrorism.[4]

The reformist stances on political loyalty is still not well understood or contextualized. Comparing reformist discourses on loyalty to Salafi arguments - particularly radical Salafism[5] - or envisioning the reformist perspective as a pursuit to adapt Islamic law to norms of Western citizenship, has been the main subject of inquiry.[6] Thus, it is necessary to consider Sunni reformist thinking on political allegiance as a moral basis of group identification, conceptualizing the self and the other, and its processes of forming alliances and creating enemies. This is all the more important since the Sunni reformist school of thought is authoritative and widely representative. This article aims to accomplish this task by closely examining the discourses of three important Sunni reformist figures: the Egyptian-Qatari Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (1926-2022), the Mauritanian ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah (b. 1935) and the Iraqi-Qatari ʿAlī al-Qaradāghī (b. 1949). First, I present each scholar's background, their place in the religious and political landscape, and the primary points of their discourse; second, I critically analyze the foundation, forms, and implications of the reformist conceptions of political allegiance in the context of international relations. Lastly, I also point out some of the limits in the reformist notion of political loyalty to non-Muslims, particularly in pluralist societies.

This article views political allegiance as a moral and social process that (re)builds and transforms identities. The theoretical framework underpinning this study also draws on the works of the sociologists Georg Simmel and Helena Flam. Simmel defined loyalty as the "activation of society" and the "inertia of the soul,"[7] while Flam views loyalty as a regular and important social emotion, asserting that gratitude and loyalty are the two emotions that solidify social relations and turn them into permanent institutions.[8] This paper also makes use of Jonathan Haidt's moral foundations theory, particularly his research on loyalty and disloyalty, which highlights the moral basis of the ways people and groups establish alliances, delineate boundaries, negotiate family, tribal, national, and religious loyalties, foster group cohesion, and engage in rivalries.[9] Political philosophy has also informed this article, particularly

the ideas of R. Scruton, who believed that virtue or friendship should be the foundation of governmental loyalty.[10] These authors share the belief that political allegiance is a moral and/or religious commitment rooted in a set of values that are shared by both communities and individuals, in addition to being a contract between citizens.

1. Reformism: Loyalty and disloyalty from a political realist perspective

Reformism, a mainstream school of thought in Sunni Islam that developed from Muḥammad ʿAbduh's (1849–1905) *iṣlāḥ* movement, takes a moderate and nuanced approach to loyalty in contemporary Islamic ethics. Reformists aim to strike a balance between upholding the tradition's spirit and contextualizing it in the present. They adhere to a concept of political relations between Muslims and non-Muslims on the basis of whether a group is hostile to Muslims or not (and not on the mere difference in religions). Three important voices, those of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah and ʿAlī al-Qaradāghī, whose influences on Islamic movements and ethics in the West as well as in the Arabic speaking Sunni world have been substantial in the last 30 years, will serve as examples of the reformist perspective.

1.1. Al-Qaraḍāwī: Loyalty in context

Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī was an influential Egyptian Sunni jurist, theologian, and preacher who resided in Qatar from the 1960s until his passing in 2022. In particular, his impact has been felt in three areas: 1. Al-Qaraḍāwī's complete works (105 volumes) consist of approximately 170 books on Islamic law and ethics. 2. His enormously successful religious television programs (his al-Jazeera program drew millions of regular viewers). 3. The establishment of the International Union of Muslim Scholars in Qatar in 2004 (he presided over the latter organization from 2004 to 2018) and the European Council for Fatwa and Research in Dublin in 1997. To date, these two institutions have been instrumental in revitalizing Sunni Islam's legal thought.[11]

Al-Qaraḍāwī discussed the subject of loyalty in Islamic political ethics in several of his writings, but three in particular are important. First, he states in *al-Waṭan wa-l-muwāṭana fī ḍaw' al-uṣūl al-'aqadiyya wa-l-maqāṣid al-shar'iyya* (*The Homeland and Citizenship in Light of Theological Principles and the Higher Purposes of the Sharia*), at the outset of his argument, that Muslims have historically understood homeland, *waṭan* to mean the place where a person was born or raised, and with which they have a material and emotional relationship, signifying a sense of belonging and loyalty. This interpretation was not at odds with another idea, which holds that Muslims are more deeply and profoundly affiliated with Islam than they are with their native country or territory.[12] This allegiance and sense of belonging are owed to God, His Messenger, and the country that upholds these beliefs. A Muslim's pride, allegiance, and affiliation are all derived from accepting God as his Lord, Islam as his religion, and Muḥammad as his Messenger. The Islamic community thus becomes his family and brotherhood. To put it another way, according to al-Qaraḍāwī, religious and national allegiance are compatible with one another. Loyalty to one's homeland is an expression of commitment to a local identity that is defined by a territory; loyalty to the Islamic realm is still far more expansive and vast, delimited by religion rather than national boundaries.[13]

Al-Qaraḍāwī, therefore, believes that adherence to Islam and local identities can coexist. There is a hierarchy between the two kinds of loyalty, though. Islamic loyalty should be prioritized, and it eclipses national allegiance. In other words, if a person upholds their allegiance to Islam—that is, to God, the Islamic faith, and the Prophet Muḥammad's authority—they can support national loyalty as a supplement to Islam. However, if the latter loyalty is absent, then devotion to one's country has no ethical value. The essential and fundamental allegiance to be maintained is to Islam. Moreover, global allegiance to one's motherland might be asserted as a secondary and complementary loyalty. Nevertheless, under normal circumstances, allegiance to one's homeland and to Islam should not conflict.

The issue arises when a person's commitment to their homeland and allegiance to it clash with other affiliations and attachments.

Al-Qaraḍāwī admits that there can occasionally be a conflict of allegiance between one's allegiance to mankind, Islam, one's native country, or an ethnic group. One of these allegiances and loyalties must be given priority in this situation. In his view, there is only one solution to the dilemma of whether allegiance to Islam or the nation (or other allegiances) takes precedence above religion: preference should be given to loyalty to Islam because there is no alternative to religion, while there are alternatives to the homeland for example. Put differently, while homelands may vanish, Islam never does. This is, in fact, consistent with al-Qaraḍāwī's hierarchy of allegiance, which places the highest priority on fidelity to Islam.[14]

Al-Qaraḍāwī mentions two historical examples of steadfast allegiance to Islam and disappearing allegiances to one's native place. The first example is the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions, who faced a conflict between their religion and their homeland (Mecca). They left their homeland for the sake of God, as Mecca oppressed the believers, and limited their ability to spread the Islamic faith.[15] The second precedent, he argues, is that of nationalism, which emerged when the Islamic Caliphate was split apart and the idea of a single country and state was violated, turning Muslims toward a kind of fanaticism for their own states or mini-states as every nation strove to substitute allegiance to God, His Messenger, and the larger Muslim world with allegiance to its own tiny nation.[16]

Thus, according to al-Qaraḍāwī, Islamic faith is the cornerstone of political allegiance. Regarding the implications of this loyalty, he asserts that a Muslim's duty to his *umma* is to protect its boundaries and not permit anyone to assault it, take possession of its property, desecrate any of its holy symbols, or diminish the dignity of some of its children.[17] That is to say, this allegiance is divided between two domains: 1. the Islamic world as a whole composed of states and territories that make up the physical *umma*. 2. loyalty to Muslims as people whose integrity and dignity should be upheld and preserved outside the actual boundaries of the Islamic world, as a larger symbolic *umma*.

Coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims is a topic that al-Qaraḍāwī discusses in his *Fī fiqh al-aqalliyyāt al-muslima* (*On the*

Jurisprudence of Muslim Minorities). According to him, Islamic ethics makes a distinction between people who coexist peacefully with Muslims and people who harbor animosity toward them. Islamic morality dictates that non-Muslims that live in peace should be treated with respect and justice. While righteousness is superior to justice and denotes love and favor, justice is defined as fairness. To be just is to assert your rights, and to be righteous is to relinquish part of your rights. Giving someone their right without taking away from it is justice or fairness; giving someone more than their right while showing them compassion and favor is righteousness. And so, for al-Qaraḍāwī, the Quran prohibits association with those who are hostile to Muslims because they fought and opposed Muslims and forcibly removed them from their homes, much as Quraysh and the Meccan polytheists did to the Messenger and his companions.[18] In his view, the fact that it is acceptable to marry Christian and Jewish women and consume their food shows that Islamic ethics perceives no harm in friendship with non-Muslims who live in peace with Muslims. With this permission, close family and community ties are strengthened, and Muslims are encouraged to treat non-Muslims with kindness and respect in order to preserve positive social interactions.[19]

Finally, in his book *Ghayr al-muslimīn fī al-mujtamʿ al-Islāmī* (*Non-Muslims in the Islamic Society*), al-Qaraḍāwī stated the principle of tolerance towards non-Muslims in Islamic society. He maintains that Islamic ethics upholds the dignity of every person, regardless of their race, religion, or color. Islamic ethics also holds that religious differences among people are a result of God's will, who granted humans freedom and choice. It is not the role of a Muslim to force others to become Muslims. Therefore, Islamic ethics does not present a conflict between Muslims' duty to treat non-Muslims with justice and righteousness and their requirement to classify them as disbelievers. Islamic ethics teaches that God hates injustice, loves equality, requires high moral standards even towards polytheists, requires fairness, and punishes those who oppress others—even when they are Muslims oppressing non-Muslims.[20]

1.2. ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah: Complementarity of loyalty between religion and citizenship

Born in 1935, Bin Bayyah is a Mauritanian Sunni Muslim scholar who has had prominent roles in organizations pertaining to Islamic law and ethics in the Gulf States and Europe; Bin Bayyah is the head of the UAE Council for Fatwa and a key member of the Dublin-based European Council for Fatwa and Research.[21] ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah's text titled *al-Walāʾ bayna al-dīn wa-l-muwāṭana* (*Loyalty between Religion and Citizenship*) was published on the European Council for Fatwa and Research in Dublin website in 2014. Bin Bayyah begins by stressing the concept of having multiple loyalties:

> *From the perspective of the meaning of walāʾ (loyalty), it could be different depending on the context. This leads us to state that this concept is not rigid or a legal reality like prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Rather, it sometimes means belonging to the religion by supporting it and assisting its people, especially in the case of aggression against it. Here, we should refer to the Quranic verse 5:55 {Your true allies are God, His Messenger, and the believers—— those who keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and bow down in worship}.[22] Loyalty could mean belonging in terms of kinship, and in here we should refer to the Quranic verse 33:6 {In God's Scripture, blood-relatives have a stronger claim than other believers and emigrants, though you may still bestow gifts on your protégé},[23] and the Quranic verse 19:5 {I fear [what] my kinsmen [will do] when I am gone, for my wife is barren, so grant me a successor——a gift from You}.[24] Loyalty could be formed by the bond of an oath and emancipation from slavery, as in the Quranic verse 33:5 {—if you do not know who their fathers are [they are your] 'brothers-in-religion' and protégés}.[25] [...] There is a system of loyalties in Islam, indicated by a group of verses and hadiths of the Prophet, which encourage the development of virtues, whatever their source, and condemn vices, aggression, and tyranny.[26]*

In this text, ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah both restates and expands upon the idea of displaying multiple loyalties. He illustrates the polysemy of the term *walāʾ* in Islamic authoritative sources and demonstrates the range of contexts and usages of loyalty in Islamic ethics. As noted by Marina Rustow, *walāʾ, wilāya, muwālāt* (loyalty) in medieval Islamic political thought indicated that God, friends, allies, sponsors, clients, rulers, political and religious organizations, could all be considered objects of allegiance.[27] By highlighting the various meanings of loyalty found in Islamic authoritative writings, ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah would be able to appeal to two audiences who have doubts about the possibility of Muslim allegiance to non-Muslim states: 1. Extremist Muslims who would find it difficult to refute this argument in favor of various loyalties by arguing that allegiance ought to be based on one's Muslim identity or religious beliefs only. Indeed, we can observe his usage of verses from the Quran to support his assertion, presumably in response to radical Muslims who would question him about it or use a single verse out of context. 2. The second group of people this discussion is intended for are ordinary Muslims who are unsure about how to balance their religious allegiance with their other commitments. Many Muslims were afraid that obtaining European citizenship would go against their Islamic affiliations, because they had been taught by Salafi preachers in Europe for a long time that the only valid loyalty that was acceptable was to Islam. Therefore, his remarks aim to absolve Muslims who believe they have de facto numerous allegiances to their families, ethnic groups, religions, and home countries and feel obligated to support all of them simultaneously.

ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah also expands here on the rationale behind Muslims' allegiance to non-Muslims. Beyond religion, loyalty is a virtue, and betrayal is a vice that is condemned along with other vices. This moral reasoning presents a sensible defense of Muslim loyalties, arguing that Muslims are urged to observe moral standards in addition to Islamic law (even if the latter can frequently be interpreted as ethical guidelines). Loyalty to one's home nation is, in fact, a necessary quality of virtue; moral coherence is essential in this situation as religious allegiance and patriotism are related. ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah thus shifts the focus of the discussion to a universal moral framework that holds that both Muslims

and non-Muslims share a moral code of virtue that governs plural societies. Yet, the relationship between loyalty to religion and to a nation is complex, as Bin Bayyah puts it:

> *Loyalty can be considered in the form of circles and ranks, and they can communicate and interact instead of clashing and fighting. Loyalty to religion is a given for every Muslim, and indeed for every religious person, and it is the highest peak of the pyramid of loyalties. It does not exclude loyalty to the homeland in the concept of citizenship that we referred to, as it is not incompatible with loyalty to religion as long as the citizenship contract does not include a departure from the religion, abandonment of rituals, or a restriction on a Muslim's freedom to live out his faith. The relationship between the citizenship contract and religion can be visualized in areas including what is legally required and of course desirable, such as the right to life, justice, equality, freedoms, protection of property, prevention of arbitrary imprisonment and torture, the right to social security for the poor, the elderly, and the sick, cooperation between members of society for the public good, and the duties that result from it, such as paying taxes and defense on behalf of the homeland against aggression and compliance with the laws in fulfillment of the citizenship contract. In reality, this is included in fulfilling the covenant and respecting its requirements, and this is included in loyalty to the religion {O you who have believed, fulfill [all] contracts}.[28]*

Here, the concepts of coexistence, diversity, and hierarchy of loyalty are reaffirmed by ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah. Even though religious commitment is the highest kind of loyalty, it can coexist with citizenship and loyalty to one's country for two reasons. On the one hand, a contract that clearly outlines the rights and obligations of Muslim citizens serves as the legal basis for citizenship. However, one issue that might make peaceful coexistence between loyalty to religion and to the homeland impossible is that the contract of citizenship should not contain any clause that requires a Muslim to give up their religion, rites, or freedom

of practice. In principle, there should be no issues at this point because every European citizenship contract guarantees the freedom of religion (I will discuss the topic of freedom of religion in Europe below). On the other hand, religion and citizenship can coexist ethically since Islamic ethics upholds many of the fundamental human rights that modern constitutions promote, such as the right to life and the pursuit of justice. Modern constitutions and Islamic ethics both strike a balance between these rights and the responsibilities that citizens have to their country of origin (homeland security for example). Then, Muslims should understand that, in order to completely implement Islamic ethics and the requirement of respecting agreements and contracts, they must demonstrate political loyalty to their home countries. ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah concludes his statement as follows:

> Loyalty to Islam is not a hanging, exclusionary wall that bans every worldly relationship with people. It does not deny the foundation of faith, and does not mix love with hatred or submissiveness, and obedience with rejection of Islam. Rather, a Muslim should deal with people in order to bring about benefits and to ward off harm, and should exchange friendly greetings with them, and deal with them in accordance with the social and ethical conventions around good relationships with good words and beneficial deeds. This is in accordance with God's words in Quran 2:83: {Speak good words to all people},[29] and the Prophetic saying, as reported by al-Tirmidhī {behave with people with good morals}.[30] Friendships should be established, and covenants and deals should be concluded. All of this is approved by reason and accepted by the Prophet's conduct.[31]

In the absence of religious persecution, ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah advocates for regular interactions with non-Muslims rather than separating Muslims from European societies. He makes use of two sets of loyalty ethics. First, he endorses the ethics of virtue, which he has already mentioned, restating that a Muslim should act and speak in a way that is respectful of non-Muslims, as the Prophet did. The ethics of friendship follow from the ethics of virtue, which consists of having cordial

interactions and preserving positive ties with non-Muslims. He thus supports an Aristotelian-Conservative theory of loyalty which states that friendship and affection serve as the basis for loyalty.[32] As Fletcher puts it, "loyalties crystallize in common projects and shared life experiences" since friendship "rests on loyalty, and requires an implicit understanding of continuity and reciprocal reliance, caring, relations and shared histories. And so, loyalty does not arise in the abstract but only in the context of particular relations."[33]

On the other hand, the pursuit of the public interest, which calls for collaboration to bring about advantages and prevent harm to others, is another moral justification for maintaining positive ties with non-Muslims. The ethical stance used by ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah in his argument regarding loyalty to non-Muslims may offer a means of bridging the doctrinal gap—and corresponding differences in beliefs—that Salafism emphasizes between Muslims and non-Muslims. It might also be a means of evading Islamic legal regulations for behavior in non-Muslim countries, which typically advise against assimilating into society. By emphasizing values, ethics also help to reconcile the traditional Islamic concept of *walāʾ* (loyalty) with the contemporary idea of citizenship.

1.3. ʿAlī al-Qaradāghī: loyalty as faith and fairness

ʿAlī Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Qaradāghī is the president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars and a central figure of authority in reformist Islam. He was born in 1949 in the Qara Dagh area of the Sulaymaniyah Governorate in Iraqi Kurdistan. He is a Kurdish–Iraqi Sunni and holds Qatari nationality; his family, which provided several religious scholars in the area, claims to be descended from al-Ḥusayn, son of ʿAlī. Al-Qaradāghī underwent his basic religious education in Qara Dagh, and then moved to Sulaymaniyah and Baghdad to expand his learning. He obtained his undergraduate degree in Sharia in 1975 at the Great Imam College in Baghdad, an M.A. in Comparative Jurisprudence from the Faculty of Sharia and Law at Al-Azhar University in 1980. He then went on to obtain his Ph.D. in Sharia and Law from Al-Azhar University in 1985 – with a dissertation in the field of contracts and financial transactions.

He joined the Faculty of Sharia at Qatar University in 1985 as Assistant Professor, and in 1995 he was promoted to the rank of Professor. He published more than 30 books and over one hundred research papers, most of which are on the subject of Islamic financial transactions, banking and economics, and Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Qaradāghī is active in a number of international Islamic organizations; he is Chairman of the Supreme Consultative Council for Interfaith Rapprochement of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Jeddah) and Vice President of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (Dublin). He is also on the board of a number of Islamic banks and Islamic insurance companies inside Qatar, including the Qatar Islamic Insurance, and outside Qatar, including the Dubai Islamic Bank, Bahrain Investors Bank and First Investment in Kuwait.[34]

Al-Qaradāghī states in the introduction to his text on *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*, published in 2020, that so long as faith endures, Muslim believers remain faithful to one another. And when someone disobeys God, their loyalty does not come to an end. In a similar manner, loyalty continues among believers even when they quarrel. Even if they murder a Muslim, the believers still have loyalty and a sense of brotherhood. Loyalty does not terminate just because of a disagreement.[35] He asserts that there is no doubt that a Muslim must detest sins, especially those committed by believers or his brothers in faith, and so he abhors them.[36] However, according to Islamic law, al-Qaradāghī adds, a Muslim's detestation of sins is not permitted to turn him against other believers; instead, he loves them out of faith and prays for them, urging them to modify their disobedience using all methods at their disposal and in accordance with their abilities.[37] Al-Qaradāghī, therefore, bases his argument for Islamic loyalty on the mutual trust among Muslims. The year 2020, when the text was released, is rather notable for the fallout from Muslim-upon-Muslim strife in the Middle East that eroded mutual confidence. The tumultuous decade of 2010–2020, marked by the Arab Spring and its aftermath, the war in Iraq, among other factors, had deepened the political, ethnic, and religious splits among Muslims in the Middle East. Thus, al-Qaradāghī aims to restore trust between Muslims and emphasizes their shared communitarian identity as Muslims rather than focus on their piety.

Regarding disavowal, *barā*', al-Qaradāghī argues that it targets specific acts rather than people.[38] Al-Qaraḍāwī ignored this crucial distinction which al-Qaradāghī adds to the reformist discourse: Islamic ethics place more emphasis on behaviors and attitudes than it does on people as a whole. So, there is no hatred toward a group of people or an individual, only a distance that is expressed via behavior or attitude.[39] To that end, al-Qaradāghī argues, the Prophet Muḥammad made every effort for more than twenty years to deal with the polytheists who disobeyed the covenants and expelled the Muslims. However, when it became evident to him that they were determined to oppose him, he disavowed them.[40] Al-Qaradāghī joins al-Qaraḍāwī in asserting that there is little doubt that it is forbidden for a Muslim to have loyalty to, love for, and support for those who combat Islam since the majority of God's teachings are centered on denouncing violent polytheists who waged war against Muslims.[41]

Al-Qaradāghī is more concerned with the claims of disavowal directed toward other Muslims. He attributes the division and rise of mistrust among Muslims to the Salafi movement's dissemination of an absolutist interpretation of the *al-walā' wa-l-barā*' concept. To counter Salafism, he utilizes the accusation of religious innovation known as *bidʿa* (Salafism typically accuses its opponents of introducing new religious concepts). Al-Qaradāghī asserts that certain Salaf scholars consider it heresy for Islam to have as its official motto *al-walā' wa-l-barā*', loyalty and disavowal. In so doing, he references early Muslim Sunni scholars such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d.855 CE), an important figure of authority for Salafis and conservative Sunnis, and who rejected the making of loyalty and disavowal a defining concept in Islam.[42] He continues by saying that before the Kharijite movement, which tried to excommunicate Muslims who committed serious faults as well as their adversaries by urging the obligation of disavowing them and the imperative of combating them, this expression (of loyalty and disavowal) was not employed by Muslims as a rallying cry. Al-Qaradāghī asserts that it is forbidden to use this concept as a catchphrase and a weapon to denounce Muslims and declare them to be unbelievers.[43]

Al-Qaradāghī uses this concept of loyalty of righteousness to describe the Islamic norm of relations with peaceful non-Muslims, much

like al-Qaraḍāwī. Al-Qaradāghī makes it clear that this norm is Quranic, and therefore authoritative, and requires Muslims to show loyalty of righteousness and charity towards peaceful non-Muslims. He bases his claim on two Quranic verses, specifically Q 60:8-9 (He does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you for your faith or driven you out of your homes: God loves the just. But God forbids you to take as allies those who have fought against you for your faith, driven you out of your homes, and helped others to drive you out: any of you who take them as allies will truly be wrongdoers).[44] Disavowal is therefore restricted to those who started battling Muslims for their religion and drove them from their homes.[45]

In his conclusion, al-Qaradāghī calls for a Muslim ethics of balance (*fiqh al-mīzān*). This ethical perspective is based on two distinct scales: the scale of war, hostility, and eradication, which requires severity and disavowal to ward off and eradicate enemies, and the scale of peace and coexistence, which calls for righteousness, justice, and benevolence.[46] Moreover, he criticizes the Salafi movement's imbalanced view of allegiance and disavowal, which views non-Muslims as adversaries in and of themselves.[47] Additionally, al-Qaradāghī adopts a realist perspective toward international relations in which violence occurs and calls for a suitable response of self-preservation. Here, al-Qaradāghī exclusively encourages the disavowal of hostile non-Muslims who start wars against Muslims.[48] Similar to al-Qaraḍāwī, this conclusion suggests that international interactions should be approached from a political perspective rather than a theological one. Political conflict, or its lack thereof, is what determines loyalty; political loyalty can stem from more than just following the Islamic faith.

Al-Qaradāghī's reasoning often seeks to moderate Salafi rhetoric regarding loyalty to sinful Muslims and non-Muslims. *Fiqh al-mīzān*, or the ethics of balance, also refers to the ethics of moderation. His main points center on the need to temper the loyalty and disavowal dogma and upon treating both Muslims and non-Muslims fairly. Because sinful Muslims still share a Muslim identity with other Muslims, he does not permit their banishment; peace should bind together Muslims and non-Muslims.

This perspective may be explained by the context in which his text was published. The perception of Islam with regard to its interactions with non-Muslims suffered significant harm due to radical Islamism, which was particularly violent in the years 2013–2020, and was notably utilizing the dogma of loyalty/disavowal as a pretext to kill both Muslims and non-Muslims. It is also important to note that al-Qaradāghī wrote a significant book in 2018 called *Fiqh al-mīzān* (*Ethics of Balance*) in which he argues that in all aspects of religion and interpersonal transactions, balance should be maintained according to the values of justice, wisdom, and reason.[49] Between 2003 and 2020, the Muslim world (especially in the Middle East) experienced excesses that were brought about by both internal and external variables, including the complicity of some Islamic discourses in supporting terrorism. Al-Qaradāghī's balance draws on al-Qaraḍāwī's *wasaṭiyya* approach, and sets out to clarify that the core of Islam is one of moderation. *Wasaṭiyya* is a normative phrase that can imply either "the approach of the middle way" or "the way of moderation." Although these expressions suggest various things, many Muslim thinkers and religious organizations refer to their own perspective as "Islamically mainstream." Al-Qaraḍāwī's *wasaṭiyya*, which is the school of Islamic thought that has gained the most traction, asserts that it shuns both the overly tolerant (modernism) and rigid viewpoints (Salafism).

2. Discussion

Al-Qaraḍāwī, ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah and al-Qaradāghī, who represent a reformist stance on disavowal and allegiance, provide a coherent and authoritative Muslim discourse on the foundation of loyalty, its forms, and its flexibility to assist Muslims in reconciling multiple loyalties in non-Muslim contexts. Nonetheless, in a secular nation-state setting, this viewpoint has its own limits.

2.1. The foundation of loyalty

Roger Scruton, the British conservative philosopher, made the observation that as time passes, liberal thinkers and social scientists increasingly

attribute loyalty to political obligations, whereas conservatives and ear-lier sociologists believed that it is more likely to be based on friendship or virtue.[50] Carl Schmitt has reduced political actions and motives to the specific political distinction between friend and enemy,[51] while John Kleinig poses the question of whether loyalty is a practical disposition or only a sentiment.[52] This explains why, despite Muslims' best efforts, many groups would prefer to label Muslims as strangers and enemies, expecting Muslims to exhibit sentiments of loyalty and friendliness in addition to the duties outlined in their citizenship contract. Supporting a liberal interpretation of loyalty as the political duties of citizenship—that is, as a pragmatic attitude—is insufficient for conservatives in Western nations who demand a commitment based on sentiments and friendship.

We have seen how Sunni reformism rests its understanding of loyalty primarily on the existence of war or peace, rather than on the acceptance or rejection of Islamic belief or the legitimate religious and political system. However, Sunni reformism makes a distinction between loyalty to Muslims and non-Muslims. The former is based on community membership (solidified by the factor of religion), whereas the latter is based on whether or not non-Muslims attack the Muslim community. As long as they maintain cordial ties with non-Muslims, the norm is that loyalty to them is morally binding. Thus, political commitments to Muslims (because of their common communitarian unity) and non-Mus-lims (because of their peaceful interactions) serve as the foundation of loyalty.

Although al-Qaraḍāwī stresses that loyalty must be both a sincere attachment and a practical support—that is, both a feeling and a practical disposition—if we take into account the entirety of a person's relation-ships with both Muslims and non-Muslims, loyalty becomes evident as a practical disposition. Put another way, discord breeds disloyalty while harmony fosters loyalty. According to al-Qaradāghī, there should be mutual trust among Muslims and a communal sense of belonging that transcends disagreement. This would favor loyalty as sentiment over practical disposition. On the other hand, it is still practical as well since religious bonding and communitarian life between Muslims imply a set of obligations to be fulfilled. He makes it plain that, when it comes to

non-Muslims, loyalty is a practical disposition one should adhere to in times of peace. For ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah, a Muslim should act and speak in a way that is respectful toward non-Muslims and cultivate friendships with them, which entail friendly interactions and maintaining positive ties. He clearly supports the ethics of virtue and friendship as the foundation of relations with non-Muslims.

2.2. Implications of loyalty

Sunni reformism places a strong emphasis on the idea of *hostis* (public enemy), which Schmitt described as a fighting collectivity of people against another collectivity in a similar way. As Schmitt puts it "never in the thousand-year struggle between Christians and Moslems did it occur to a Christian to surrender rather than defend Europe out of love toward the Saracens or Turks. The enemy in the political sense need not be hated personally."[53] Thus, Sunni reformism concurs with other Muslim Schools of thought that links should be held together by allegiance to the Muslim community, although they disagree with Salafism in the ties to be maintained with non-Muslims (Salafism insists on the disavowal of non-Muslims). In other words, Salafism views non-Muslims or sinful Muslims as *inimicus* more than as *hostis* (the public enemy).[54] That is to say, the enemy is a rival in a struggle (of beliefs), a personal foe that one should despise. The three religious scholars under study here hold the opinion that hostility directed towards Muslims is the reason loyalty towards non-Muslims comes to an end. Hostility is defined by ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah precisely as the religious persecution of Muslims. The premise for the three scholars is that non-Muslims breach first the code of friendship, alliance, and loyalty that Muslims have formed with non-Muslims although hostility could manifest in many kinds of attacks. Therefore, it would be unjust to ask Muslims to adhere to this loyalty code.

For al-Qaraḍāwī, ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah and al-Qaradāghī, the fundamental condition of interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims is one of peace and cooperation. As a result, in this instance, no disavowal should be maintained. It becomes evident to disavow non-Muslims when

they assault Muslims. Al-Qaradāghī believes that disavowing Muslims is abnormal and should not happen at all. Al-Qaraḍāwī and al-Qaradāghī both advocate for a set of moral principles governed by justice, where loyalty is seen as secondary to a strong sense of treating others fairly.

2.3. Forms of loyalty

Sunni reformists do not exhibit strict forms of loyalty that exclude multiple or adaptable allegiances. They do not believe that adherence to strict beliefs is a prerequisite for community membership either. Because this framework permits loyalty to both Muslims and non-Muslims simultaneously, there is space for a range of loyalties. Therefore, by incorporating non-Muslims into its circle of political allegiance based on cordial relations and peace, Sunni reformism offers a more inclusive kind of loyalty. This makes it possible for millions of Muslims who live outside the Muslim world to maintain many allegiances (although that could be difficult in some circumstances). This flexible loyalty does not make one less loyal to Muslims because it maintains justice as the cornerstone of human relationships. Out of a concern for justice both Muslims and non-Muslims who are not hostile should expect each other's loyalty.

2.4. The realm of Islam vs the realm of hostility

The fact that none of the three legal discourses under consideration have addressed the question of loyalty to non-Muslims from the framework of the traditional division of the abode of Islam vs. the abode of war is one of their key contributions. Salafism generally contends that one should migrate from non-Muslim lands—the home of war and disbelief—to Muslim lands—the abode of Islam—by virtue of one's disavowal of non-Muslims. This viewpoint is consistent with traditional *fiqh* conceptions of Muslim-Non-Muslim relations, in which religious affiliation divides territory, but reformist jurists have abandoned this idea. They successfully integrated the concepts of statehood, citizenship, ethics, and political responsibilities into their perception of Muslim loyalties. Secularization may help to explain this shift from law to ethics and

politics. Since Muslim countries' rejection of *fiqh*-based Islamic international law in the 19ᵗʰ century, territorial division based on Muslim or non-Muslim status is no longer applicable. Furthermore, one of the many effects of globalization may be the blurred borders between Muslim and non-Muslim nations due to the millions of Muslims and non-Muslims who travel back and forth between the two worlds, as well as the common organizations, agreements, and areas of interest that bind them together.

As demonstrated by the European Council for Fiqh and Research (ECFR), the Assembly of Muslim Jurists in America (AMJA), the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Sunni reformism was among the first Muslim intellectual attempts to overcome the dichotomy of the abode of Islam vs. the abode of war. Some of them declared the West to be *dār al-'ahd*, or "the territory of treaty," and approached Muslim existence in the West within the framework of international treaties and covenants that recognize and protect Muslims and their religion, whereas others viewed the division between the abode of Islam and abode of war as anachronistic.[55]

2.5. Limits to the Sunni reformist perception of loyalty

The discourses of Sunni reformism on loyalty offer ample opportunities for collaboration in both domestic and international affairs. However, these discourses are hampered by two primary limits. Firstly, they do not prioritize loyalty to the state. Conversely, modern states, Muslim and Western alike, expect their citizens to be loyal to them, sometimes in an exclusive manner. Certain states who wage wars in the Middle East force Muslims to choose a side in the conflict by imposing a clash of loyalties upon them. Therefore, encouraging transnational allegiance to the *umma* might be perceived as weakening the contractual allegiance to the state and the country. It is seen sometimes as dubious to disregard state allegiance as the primary form of political loyalty when transplanted into a non-Islamic environment.[56] Sunni reformism does not negate the validity of allegiance to homeland or state, even though

it is subordinated to loyalty to religion. Exceptional rules govern allegiance to states, particularly secular states. For instance, in the wake of September 11, al-Qaraḍāwī permitted American Muslim soldiers to fight Muslim nations under the banner of the allegiance of these soldiers to the United States. Even in this instance, it was the preservation of Islam in the United States and warding off suspicion that supported this argument, rather than the requiring of an initial political loyalty to the government's policies as such.[57] In some circumstances when states pursue power and narrow interests, disregarding virtue and friendship in international relations, the tension between religious and political commitments can be at odds with the transnational loyalty to the *umma* promoted by Sunni reformists.

A second limit that needs to be highlighted in connection to the reformist approach is the idea of collective disavowal in situations where Muslims and non-Muslims are at war. Although the three scholars do not support hostility toward an aggressive nation as a whole, they do not make it clear that relations between civilians should not deteriorate to the point where people reject one another outright, because this would be in violation of the principle of fairness. Stated differently, if a Muslim country is at war with a non-Muslim country, then why should Muslims be hostile towards non-Muslims in general, civilians and soldiers alike? Although governments and armies' aggressive and hostile actions undermine trust, it is unreasonable to penalize a whole population collectively for hostile activities committed by its government and army.

Furthermore, minority Muslims in the West have not really made much of an impact on society or politics. The marginalization of Muslims in European societies raises concerns about the inclusion and commitment of the European liberal state, aside from the securitization limit (i.e., the securitization of Islam and anti-terror campaigns reducing trust in Muslims). Laws and governments in Europe claim Muslim citizens, but their impact on the political and social fabric is negligible. Muslims typically come from the most vulnerable socioeconomic classes, while in the West, security-military agencies and powerful economic corporations define policy. Even though the Muslim vote is becoming more significant in elections, especially in France, it is still insufficient to shape

policies that are friendly to Muslims. The more states support hostile policies toward Muslims in the Middle East, for instance, the more the distance grows between Western governments and their Muslim citizens. This causes some to blame Muslims and doubt their allegiance. For example, the manner in which European governments have handled protests and speeches regarding the Gaza war, as well as how Muslims have responded to this, is also important. In the case of France, for instance, the far left won important legislative elections in July 2024 by appealing to Muslims and mobilizing them around the conflict in Gaza. However, this was exploited by other right-wing and conservative groups to charge Muslims and the far left of being followers of foreign interests and Islamist agendas.[58]

Perhaps one of the most significant obstacles to mutual loyalty between Muslims and non-Muslims is the foreign policies of Western states in the Muslim world. Western states are accused by many Muslims of endorsing aggressive Middle Eastern policies, cooperating with terrorist organizations and military interventions (Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Libya, etc.). The fact that Muslims in Europe have an affinity with Middle Eastern countries also causes distrust in European states. In this regard, Imène Ajala has examined the foreign policy allegiances of French and British Muslims, specifically with regard to Palestine. In these cases, Muslims are increasingly seen as a threat from within and as the "other," creating concerns about their loyalty. The 9/11 attacks further solidified the problematization of Muslims in Europe under the security paradigm.[59] Ajala also calls attention to how ethnic group politics are rejected by the French political system. It is significantly more difficult for ethnic communities to mobilize and exert influence under a framework that is strongly centralised and unfriendly to the expression of particular interests.[60] Even though French foreign policy did not alter much in recent years, Ajala's work helps us appreciate the extent to which allegiance to French foreign policy has come to be seen in terms of loyalty to the French state. This makes any disagreement with this policy appear as a sort of betrayal.

Whether or not Western secular states persecute Muslims for their religious beliefs is another contentious subject. While Western secular

states safeguard religious freedom and do not generally interfere with people's religious views, some claim that Muslims have been persecuted by France (via the "headscarf ban") and Britain (via PREVENT). While there may not be any interference with religious beliefs in private, there may be restrictions when it comes to Muslim schools, attire, public discourse, political activities, etc. For example, there is disagreement on how the French government deals with its Muslim citizens. Some, such as Edwy Plenel, would even accuse the French government of persecuting Muslims in France and engaging in Islamophobia.[61] Numerous organizations, thinkers, and activists are fighting Islamophobia in France, and endorse this position. Others are more nuanced. They acknowledge attacks on mosques and Muslims, as well as the obvious ethnic and religious tensions within French society. However, they maintain that, aside from far-right political forces, the French state is generally tolerant and does not actively target its Muslim minority, and is far from being an Islamophobic or anti-Islamic state.[62] Yet, these acts of Islamophobia against Muslim in France are not seen by France's reformist Muslim discourses in France as grounds for disloyalty.[63]

Conclusion

Three Sunni reformist legal discourses (by al-Qaraḍāwī, ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah, and al-Qaradāghī, respectively) on loyalty have been critically analyzed in this article. Al-Qaraḍāwī stresses the notion of multiple loyalties as well as the hierarchy of loyalties wherein allegiance to Islam is paramount, even when in times of peace, loyalties can be reconciled. ʿAbdallāh b. Bayyah bases his idea of loyalty on virtue and friendship with non-Muslims, endorsing the complementary attachments between religion and citizenship in the West. As for al-Qaradāghī, he emphasizes that treating non-Muslims fairly is essential to allegiance, with the exception of those who are hostile towards Muslims. His position serves as an example of how Sunni reformism frames loyalty in terms of conflict and peace as well as promoting justice in interactions with other communities. In particular, Sunni reformism encourages loyalty to non-Muslims who do not persecute Muslims. Muslim reformists encourage flexible

loyalties as well. Compared to Salafism, it is more pragmatic and less normative. It recognizes that allegiances to one's family, ethnicity, religion, country, and so forth are complementary, hierarchical, or situational. Reformist Muslims also have a tendency to be inclusive, treating non-Muslims fairly as neighbors or as fellow citizens of the same country. Since they can survive in vast empires, far-off places, and pluralist cultures, flexible loyalties are able to adapt to diversity. Although it is still significant, the religious component is neither absolute nor separate from other types of allegiances. Here, loyalty is viewed in terms of ethics rather than belief since it is more of a virtue with multiple facets than only a religious teaching or dogma to be blindly followed.

Endnotes

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