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The relationship of Muslims with non-Muslims based on the concept of *muwālāt* (loyalty) in the Qurʾān

A contextual analytical study

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**Abstract**

**Purpose** – This paper aims to clarify the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in human society, based on the concept of *muwālāt* (commonly translated as “loyalty”) in the Qurʾān.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The present study follows a contextual and analytical methodology.

**Findings** – This paper concludes that *muwālāt* is not only ideological but can be contractual too. A historical study of the Prophet’s (PBUH) interaction with non-Muslims in Mecca and Medina illustrates that as long as non-Muslims did not behave treacherously or turn to violence, a peaceful relationship was established and alliances and coalitions were formed. And this paper concludes that the categorisation of previous Muslim scholars, which was in terms of prohibited and permitted, is inappropriate.

**Originality/value** – This paper clarifies that the categorisation of previous Muslim scholars, which was in terms of prohibited and permitted, is inappropriate, and *muwālāt* is not only belongs to faith.

**Keywords**  Muslims, Relationship, Alliance, *Muwālāt*, The people of the book, Qurʾān, Non-Muslims

**Paper type** Research paper

1. Introduction

One of the most important contemporary topics of Islamic thought that has brought about a deep conflict and clash among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims (especially in multi-religious countries) is the issue of *muwālāt*. Nowadays, *walaʾ* or *muwālāt* has become the cause of profound social problems in human society. Furthermore, some scholars are committed to a literalist understanding of the Qurʾān and prophetic traditions, arguing that *muwālāt* means that God has commanded Muslims to establish and maintain their friendship and love only with their fellow Muslims while simultaneously disassociating themselves from non-Muslims, who form the majority of the world population today.

According to this hard-line viewpoint based on a literalist reading of the Qurʾān, Muslims must stay away from the customs of non-Muslims and not imitate them. This shallow and literalist understanding of *muwālāt* has resulted in some Muslims devising a problematic concept of *jihād* (*Wagemakers, 2012, p. 100*). Isis (Daʾish) is an example of Muslim extremists who misunderstood this concept. They erroneously based their Jihadic activities on the literalist understanding of *muwālāt* which refers solely to ideological...
loyalty. Not only does this group of Muslims restrict the meaning of muwalāt but they also regard as sinful those who have extended and contextualised it (Shavit, 2014, p. 73).

With the contextualisation of all verses pertaining to loyalty in the Qur‘an and by paying attention to the Prophet’s (PBUH) life and his contracts with the “People of the Book” and the pagans, it becomes clear that muwalāt, as stated in the Qur‘an, is ideological and non-ideological. This shows that muwalāt confines itself to faith and ideology. In the Jahiliyyah era, loyalty and friendship were based on physical and moral (spiritual) factors. However, friendships were also based on ideological and non-ideological factors in certain situations, including loyalty between man and his God or idol; jinns and demons; between tribes; between a master and his servants; and between some Arab polytheists and the People of the Book until the fifth year AH, such as between the tribes of Āws and Bānū Qurayḥah and Khazraj and Bānū Qaynuqā‘.

It is to be further noted that although some people consider love as a part of muwalāt, this understanding relies on a specific interpretation of certain verses and prophetic traditions, or relies on linguistic meaning of muwalāt. This article argues that both love and loyalty have their definitions, albeit intertwined and overlapped. It is not the case that the two are synonymous. This will be established through a contextual induction regarding all the verses pertaining to muwalāt (wala‘) and the Prophet Muḥammad’s method of interaction with non-Muslims.

In summary, the aims of this study can be listed as follows:

- to explain the definition of muwalāt (loyalty) linguistically and idiomatically;
- to explore the evolution of muwalāt specially after revelation;
- to analyse the different theories about wala‘; and
- to establish guidelines for relations between Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

2. Linguistic and idiomatic definitions of muwālāt

Muwālāt (wala‘ or walā‘yah) linguistically has two contradictory meanings. On the one hand, it connotes nearness and closeness (Ibn Faris, 1979, vol. 6, p. 141); on the other hand, muwālāt connotes farness and remoteness (Q 46:29, 2:137). Meanings of muwālāt such as slave, freed slave, slave liberator, friend, confederate, cousin, assistant, neighbour and lover are derived from the first connotation (Ibn Faris, 1979, vol. 6, p. 141; Al-Juhari, 2002, vol. 6, p. 559; Al-Zubaydi, 2001, vol. 4, p. 253). The second connotation of muwālāt is rarely given in Arabic dictionaries and lexicons, and no corresponding nouns or adjectives have been found. However, the second connotation of muwālāt is used in related verbs such as walla‘ (ولي) and tawalla‘ (تولى).

With regard to the idiomatical meaning of muwālāt, the definitions given by scholars are quite similar. Some scholars have based their definitions on its main root which implies “nearness”; for instance, Āl Shaykh (2000, 265) says that “muwālāt is living with somebody, being close to him, loving him, and supporting him against enemies”. Al-Qahtānī (1993, p. 90) additionally says that it is to respect someone. Other scholars have offered a definition based on a combination of the linguistic meaning of muwālāt and the social conditions during a particular period. For example, Qūṭ (1991, vol. 1, p. 387) says that muwālāt is a social alliance which denotes loving, supporting and making social contracts with Muslims.

3. The evolution of muwālāt

Loyalty among the communities of the Jahiliyyah was ideological and contractual. The loyalty between man and his gods was a form of ideological loyalty (see Q 39:3, 29:41-42).
and 13:16[5]. The loyalty between jinns and their worshipers is another example (see Q 34:40-41[6][7]). God has forbidden these types of loyalty.

The second form of loyalty in the Jahiliyyah era was established on the basis of the social contract. The waliāt (loyalty) between a servant and his master in the pre-Islamic era is an example. This type of loyalty continued for several centuries. Another type of contractual loyalty is tribal. Alliances among tribes, such as the loyalty between Aws[8] and Banū Qurayhah[9] and the loyalty between Khazraj[10] and Banū Qaynuqa[11], prevailed during Jahiliyyah. The conditions of these contracts included protecting each other against enemies. After the advent of revelation, some of these loyalties were prohibited. However, this kind of loyalty (muwalāt) was changed after the Prophet’s demise, especially during the time of the fourth caliph.

The first group to consider muwalāt as a fundamental doctrine was the Khaṭrijite sect. They took on this doctrine to emphasise greater loyalty for members of their group and to shun outsiders (Wagemakers, 2008, p. 84). Some Khaṭrijites say that loyalty and disavowal are among the attributes of God (Al-Ashʿarī, 1980, vol. 1, p. 179). According to Khaṭrijite doctrine, loyalty with a sinner is impermissible because a sinner is the same as an infidel. Based on this doctrine, the Khaṭrijites were loyal to the first two caliphs and disavowed the last two caliphs (Jaʿfī, 1986, p. 49).

A similar approach developed in the Shiʿa creed by those who followed Ḥārūn ibn Abī Ṭalīb and preferred him over the other caliphs (Al-Ashʿarī, 1980, vol. 1, p. 65). They adopted muwalāt as the main part of their doctrine (Shahrīstānī, vol. 1, p. 146) and believed that loyalty to Ḥārūn is the basis of the acceptance of deeds and, therefore, that all the deeds and worship of those who do not believe in loyalty to Ḥārūn are unacceptable to God (Al-Majlisī, 1983, vol. 27, p. 167).

A general search in Sunnī sources indicates that the scope of muwalāt takes a different form. The Sunnī interpretation of loyalty has, however, changed variously over the duration of Islamic history. According to Tabārī’s (224-310 AH/839-923 CE) interpretation of Q 3:28[12], Muslims cannot make alliances with non-Muslims against Muslims. They should not support infidels for the advancement of their religion, helping them against other Muslims (Al-Ṭabarī, 2000, vol. 13, p. 313). He highlighted the phrase “against Muslims” in many places.

Some historians, such as al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Ṭābil, have written about this issue. Al-Jāḥiẓ (159-255 AH/776-869 CE) narrated in Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn with regard to muwalāt that: “ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb wrote a letter to Abū Musā al-ʿĀṣī telling him that loyalty to infidels was the worst capital for a Muslim” (al-Jāḥiẓ, vol. 2, p. 33). In Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (246-328 AH/860-940 CE), a discussion between Muʿāwiya and a woman named Darāmīya al-Hajunyah is narrated. In this discussion, Muʿāwiya asked her why she liked Ṭābil and disliked him and why she showed loyalty to him and enmity to him (Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, vol. 1, pp. 352-353). Jāḥiẓ’s narration from ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb shows that the prohibited loyalty is for infidels who are enemies of Muslims. However, Ibn Ṭābil’s understanding is contrary to the Sunnī creed of that particular period. Al-Khallāf (1989, vol. 4, p. 141) narrated from Abī Saʿīd al-Khuḍrī that one of the Prophet’s companions had said that al-walīyah is an innovation (bidʿ ah). This does not, however, mean that all types of muwalāt are an innovation but that transforming muwalāt from a socio-political to an ideological term and being loyal to some Muslims and disavowing others is bidʿ ah.

The Sufi thought with regard to muwalāt also differs from the previous views. First, they have advocated the loyalty of a murīd (novice) towards his shaykh (spiritual guide). When the murīd takes an oath (ʿabd) of loyalty and swears obedience, the Shaykh, in turn, promises to solve the murīd’s problems and deliver him from every dilemma whenever he makes a request for help. Second, they have defined wali as a true, sincere believer. Third,
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*waṭl*, as defined by the leader of the Tijāniyyah order, is a person that God distinguishes by handling his affairs and permitting him to witness His Divine deeds and attributes (Ṭabarî, 1988, vol. 10, p. 22).

Most jurists, on the other hand, have focused on contractual *muwalāt*, mostly discussing *waṭl* between a freed slave and his master. For instance, Mālik ibn Anas (93-179 AH/711-795 CE) defined *waṭl* as an agreement between two persons (Mālik ibn Anas, 1994, vol. 2, p. 526 and p. 558). Šafīʿī (150-204 AH/767-820 CE) believed *waṭl* between a freed slave and his lord was not related to faith and religion (Šafīʿī, vol. 4, p. 132). Āl-Šarakhší[13] (Death 490 AH/1096 CE) described *muwalāt* as a contract between two people whom both agree to support each other. He noted that in Jāḥiṣiyah, people would support each other by making alliances (Āl-Šarakhší, 1993, vol. 8, p. 81). In addition, al-Sughdī (Death 461/1068) narrated that *muwalāt* between Muslims and freed non-Muslim slaves was permissible (al-Sughdī, vol. 1, p. 433). However, some Hanbali scholars consider such a concept of loyalty to be an innovation (bidʿah). Ibn Abī Yaʿlā in his explanation of *muwalāt* according to the Hanbali school, says that being loyal to some and disavowing others is an innovation (Yaʿlā, 1987). Thus, all types of *muwalāt* are not innovations.

Decades later, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (543-606 AH/1148-1209 CE) in his interpretation of verses regarding loyalty had yet another view. He stated the following:

> Showing loyalty to infidels has three aspects. The first aspect of loyalty to infidels is to be satisfied with their beliefs and support them in this regard. This kind of loyalty is forbidden, and those who tend towards this method have deviated from the true way of faith (*imān*). The second aspect of loyalty to infidels is to live in respectful coexistence with them, without being satisfied with their beliefs and without providing them with any support. This form of loyalty is not prohibited. The third aspect of loyalty to infidels, which is between the first and second, is to support, help, and show loyalty to them due to kinship or love while holding the belief that their religion is false. Though this kind of loyalty does not swerve a person from *imān*, it is prohibited (Rāzī, vol. 8, p. 192).

A century later, Ibn Taymiyyah (661-707 AH/1263-1328 CE) referred to *muwalāt* extensively as cordial relations. He wrote that though loyalty is related to the heart, it is also shown apparently (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1999, vol. 1, p. 183), and he believes that those who are loyal to non-Muslims have become infidels (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995, vol. 7, p. 18 and vol. 28, p. 192). This understanding of *muwalāt* confuses contractual and ideological *muwalāt*.

Some centuries later, Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (1115-1206 AH/1703-1792 CE), a Hanbali scholar, stated that supporting infidels against Muslims was grounds for apostasy (Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Muhammad, 1996, vol. 9, p. 292). Using the phrase “against Muslims” signifies that Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb’s definition of *muwalāt* is different from Ibn Taymiyyah’s definition. It seems that Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb believes that *muwalāt* is prohibited when non-Muslims invade Muslims.

The Salafi mainstream view with regard to *muwalāt* has been largely influenced by the thought of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb.

4. Contemporary approaches to *muwalāt*

4.1 Literalist understandings of *muwalāt*

A literalist understanding refers to a semantic understanding of some Qur’anic verses and prophetic traditions related to *muwalāt*. Some Salafis influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah’s thought regarding *muwalāt* believe that God forbids all cordial relations or friendships between Muslims and non-Muslims. They believe that any acts of loving, glorifying and supporting non-Muslims make one an infidel (Khalaf, 2001, vol. 2, p. 52). According to this belief, being similar to non-Muslims in dress and speech and going to their countries for
enjoyment and entertainment are signs of muwālāt to infidels, although essential travel such as travel for medical reasons is not prohibited. They additionally maintain that praising non-Muslims, admiration of their modernity, supporting them against Muslims, requesting their help, being kind to them, asking them for forgiveness and even using their calendar are all features of showing loyalty to non-Muslims and, consequently, are forbidden (Al-Fawzan, 1999, pp. 309-313). These people have based their understanding of muwālāt on some Qur'ānic verses, including 3:28[14], 5:51[15], 58:22[16] and 9:23[17], and some prophetic traditions narrated by Ibn Mas‘ūd[18] and Abū Hurayrah[19].

This kind of literal understanding has brought about many problems in human societies, especially multi-cultural societies. Such literal understandings of texts are superficial and shallow and can be criticised in that:

- The conditions of muwālāt at the time of revelation were different from the above-stated beliefs.
- The methodology used by this group to infer the meaning of muwālāt in the Qur’ān is not comprehensive, and other verses are contrary to their idea, including 3:64, 3:113-115 and 5:5.
- A brief glance at the Prophet’s life shows clearly that he did not himself display such interaction with non-Muslims.

4.2 Conceptual understandings of muwālāt
Using the conceptual approach, instead of focusing on the literal meaning of muwālāt in the Qur’ān and prophetic traditions, scholars derive a fundamental basis from applicable verses upon which Muslims can build their relationships with others. For example, al-Qaraḍāwī mentioned in his book, The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam, that the following two verses of the Qur’ān are enough to provide Muslims with comprehensive guidelines for a relationship with non-Muslims:

God 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 (Q 60:8-9).

According to Al-Qaraḍāwī (2004, pp. 209-201), God did not prohibit kindness to non-Muslims but only to those who wage war with Muslims and are hostile to Islam. Islam does not prohibit Muslims from being kind and generous with polytheists; therefore, how can it give a blanket prohibition of kindness to all Jews and Christians — who received special regard in the Qur’ān which never refers to them without saying “O People of the Book” or “O you have been given the book”. Al-Qaraḍāwī’s understanding based on these two verses is that Islam commands Muslims to justice with those who are not hostile towards them. The same approach is adopted by Fethullah Gülen, who emphasises that verses that forbid relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims do not refer to all Christians and Jews. The severe tone of the Qur’ān in some verses is not directed towards people, but towards qualities like improper attitude, erroneous thinking, obstinacy and hostility to Islam (Hakan, 2012, p. 509). Q 60:8-9 were also cited by al-‘Alwānī in his systematisation of Islamic law wasaṭī fiqh al-aqalliyāt as evidence that justice and righteousness are the principles that govern Muslim relations with non-Muslims (Shavit, 2014, p. 80).

These scholars attempted to solve contradictions among problematic verses with regard to muwālāt, concluding that the verses which forbid muwālāt are related to people who are
enemies hostile to Islam and that under peaceful conditions, Muslims must be just and kind to all human beings.

4.3 Contextual understandings of muwālāt

This present study infers a clear contextual understanding of muwālāt by relying on the following specific methodology. On the one hand, it considers all the verses related to loyalty, describing all kinds of loyalty mentioned in the Qur’ān and, while on the other hand, it examines the Prophet’s life and his practical methodology in dealing with non-Muslims to demonstrate that all relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims are not prohibited in Islam. This approach discusses loyalty extensively and comprehensively. Two figures serve to illustrate this point.

Figure 1 depicts the researcher’s perspective of muwālāt, while Figure 2 illustrates other views with regard to muwālāt. As can be seen, others have divided muwālāt into prohibited (undesirable) and not prohibited (desirable). The present study, however, categorises muwālāt with regard to ideology and faith; thus, it divides muwālāt into the two groupings

![Diagram of Concept of muwālāt (loyalty) in the Qur’ān](image)
Figure 2.
Muwālāt in terms of Halal and Haram
of ideological and non-ideological (contractual). Ideological muwālāt is certain and eternal, while contractual muwālāt is internal and based on situations.

4.3.1 Ideological muwālāt. Ideological muwālāt is a relationship of loyalty that does not have any connection to human social life. It refers only to metaphysical and spiritual existence. Although most Salafī scholars, including Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-ʿUthaymīn and Fawzan, considered muwālāt to be only an ideological concept, this article infers that muwālāt must be divided into two categories: ideological and contractual. Ideological muwālāt is further divided into four categories.

4.3.1.1 Muwālāt between believers and God. In the Qur’ān, the muwālāt that exists between believers and God is only ideological. In Q 6:14[20], God mentions that muwālāt must be only for Him. Muwālāt in such verses denotes worship. Consequently, worship must be for God alone. Polytheism is the antithesis to this sense of muwālāt. This means that seeking closeness to anyone other than God through worship, asking for help and showing humility are considered polytheism (Qūṭb, 1991, vol. 2, p. 1057).

Additional illustrative examples include Q 39:3 in which God says:

Be aware! Unquestionably, for Allah is the pure religion. And those who take wālī besides Him [and say], “We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to Allah in position”. Indeed, Allah will judge between them concerning that over which they differ. Indeed, Allah does not guide he who is a liar and [confirmed] disbeliever. (Q 39:3)

In the context of this verse and some other verses, such as 29:41-42[21], it is obvious that muwālāt denotes tawḥīd and is a relationship between God and His servant. When God says that He is the ally (wālī) of those who believe, as in Q 2:257[22], 7:196-197[23], 3:68[24] and 45:19[25], it means that He is a gracious protector and guardian.

4.3.1.2 Muwālāt between polytheists and their idols. This ideological muwālāt was very popular in Jahiliyyah. Polytheists had great cordial and spiritual relationships with their idols. They worshipped them and called upon them for help, especially in difficulties. This kind of muwālāt was prohibited by Islam and, to rectify the people’s conception of worshipping God, the following guidance was provided:

Those who take allies other than God can be compared to spiders building themselves houses – the spider’s is the frailest of all houses – if only they could understand. God knows what things they call upon beside Him: He is the Mighty, the Wise. (Q 29:41-42).

On the Day He gathers them all together, He will say to the angels, “Was it you these people worshipped?” They will reply, “May You be exalted! You are our supporter (wālī) against them! Really, they worshipped the jinn – most of them believed in them” (Q 34:40-41).

These verses clarify that seeking goodness and removal of harm from anyone other than God is forbidden whether it be through worship, prayer or calling upon angels, jinns or idols.

4.3.1.3 Muwālāt between believers and angels. The loyalty between believers and angels in the Qur’ān is ideological. It refers only to a cordial and spiritual relationship. This means that angels provide benefits to believers and repel harms from them in this world and the hereafter by praying for them and seeking forgiveness for them (Q 40:7[26], helping them in difficult situations (Q 3:124[27], 41:30[28], 8:12[29] and welcoming them at the time they enter paradise (Q 16:32)[30].

4.3.1.4 Muwālāt between devils and disbelievers. The muwālāt between devils and disbelievers is utilised in the Qur’ān in many verses. It refers to spiritual and ideological loyalty. In the following verses muwālāt means worshipping and following devils. God says:

Whoever chooses Satan as a wālī instead of God is utterly ruined[. . .]. (Q 4:119)
Fated to lead astray those who take satans as a wali, he will guide them to the suffering of the blazing flame. (Q 22:3-4)

By God, We have sent messengers before you [Muhammad] to other communities, but Satan made their foul deeds seem alluring to them. He is the patron (wali) of these present disbelievers too, and a painful punishment awaits them all. (Q 16:63)

4.3.2 Contractual muwālāt. A survey of the various circumstances related to muwālāt during the pre-Islamic era, the diverse occasions of revelation and the Prophet’s dealings with non-Muslims demonstrate that some types of muwālāt are not ideological but contractual. The muwālāt among believers, among non-Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims indicate socio-political contracts. They are not relevant to faith. Those who claim that contractual muwālāt is a component of tawhīd or associate it with love or any cordial relationship are mistaken.

The following reasons clarify that this type of muwālāt is not ideological:

- **Muwālāt** between the Muslims and Jews and the Muslims and Christians was built and continued until those groups breached their social agreement with the Muslims and attacked them. Had such alliances been ideological, they would have been prohibited from the very beginning of revelation.

- According to Q 8:72[31], only those Muslims who emigrate to Islamic territories have muwālāt with Muslims. Therefore, migration is the reason for such loyalty. It is clear that if this kind of muwālāt had been dependent on faith and ideology, it would have been obligatory for the Islamic government to be loyal to those who had not immigrated.

- Even the hypocrites’ immigration to Madinah during the Prophet’s time required muwālāt (Q 4:89)[32]. Thus, being different or similar in faith or ideology is neither a hindrance nor a reason for muwālāt.

- Different groups of non-Muslims with dissimilar ideologies can have muwālāt among each other for the sake of worldly benefits (Q 8:73)[33]. This suggests that such loyalty is not related to faith.

4.3.2.1 Muwālāt among believers. Muwālāt among believers refers to alliance and social agreement. In this regard, God says, “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” (Q 5:55). However, as mentioned before, the relationship between God and the believers is ideological; therefore, adding God’s name along with the Prophet and the believers in this verse served to show that God accompanies the parties of a social contract. Consequently, Muslims have no right to have an affinity for communities that are active enemies against Muslims. Q 8:72 also shows that this muwālāt is contractual[34]. This verse shows that muwālāt among Muslims is only a socio-political agreement.

Some scholars who refer to verses such as Q 8:72 and 9:71[35] have wrongly inferred that the muwālāt mentioned in these verses includes brotherhood and love. There is no doubt that Muslims should like each other and that there should be a brotherly atmosphere among them. This is proven by many verses and prophetic traditions. Our concern is that such meanings cannot be taken from the terminology of muwālāt.

Another reason for this kind of muwālāt to be considered contractual is the existence of loyalty between Muslims and hypocrites, which is demonstrated by 4:88[36].
4.3.2.2 *Muwālat* among non-Muslims. This component of loyalty includes the relationship and alliance among all non-Muslims including infidels, People of the Book, hypocrites and atheists. These are contractual alliances and do not have any connection with ideology and faith. Thus, there is no problem with peaceful relationships among non-Muslims. However, according to verses Q 8:73 and 45:19, if such *muwālat* includes corruption, violation and hostility, it is undesirable.

4.3.2.3 *Muwālat* between Muslims and non-Muslims. In this section, the social-political relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is discussed in two categories: *muwālat* between Muslims and disbelievers and *muwālat* between Muslims and the People of the Book.

4.3.2.3.1 *Muwālat* between Muslims and disbelievers. *Muwālat* between tribes with different ideologies and faiths was prevalent during the pre-Islamic era as a social contract. With the advent of revelation, such alliances were forbidden by God under specific circumstances. The prohibition of *muwālat* between Muslims and disbelievers, including polytheists, can be observed in some notable Qur’ānic verses such as 9:23[37], and 3:28[38]. From a review of the Prophet’s relations with non-Muslims, it can be concluded that the reason for this particular prohibition was the aggressiveness and hostility of some disbelievers towards Muslims. For example, God says:

> You who believe, do not take My enemies and yours as your allies, showing them friendship when they have rejected the truth you have received, and have driven you and the Messenger out simply because you believe in God [. . .]. (Q 60:1)

God also says in this chapter:

> 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 (Q 60:8-9).

These verses address those who are fighting with, and are hostile to, Muslims. There is no doubt that no one desires to keep a relationship with those who are unjust and disloyal towards them.

Furthermore, an examination of the Prophet’s life reveals that the Prophet did not prohibit relations with non-Muslim communities as long as they honoured their agreements and were not at war with Islam. This can be demonstrated by Prophet Muhammad’s truce with the Khuzā’ah tribe on the day of the conquest of Mecca and his seeking assistance from Saifwān ibn Umayyah in the battle of Hunayn against the Hawāzīn. (Al-Zuhaylī, 1998, vol. 10, p. 163).

4.3.2.3.2 *Muwālat* between Muslims and the People of the Book. This section explains the various conditions of Muslim and Jewish, Muslim and Christian and Muslim and Zoroastrian relations. Some verses of the Qur’ān and prophetic traditions have explicitly warned about loyalties between Muslims and the groups mentioned above. God says:

> You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies: they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them [. . .] (Q 5:51).

The apparent meaning of these verses implies that any meaning inferred from having such an alliance – like friendship, amity, partnership, agreement or treaty – with the Jews or Christians (or Zoroastrians) is unlawful to Muslims.

In fact, the interpretation of the relationship between Muslims and the People of the Book is the same as the relationship with polytheists. From a consideration of the Prophet’s life, we behold good relations between Muslims and the People of the Book, especially Christians. The migration to Abyssinia ordered by the Prophet is the clearest example of this association. When the polytheists of Mecca began their violent behaviour against Muslims, the Prophet said to the Muslims: “If you go towards Abyssinia, there is a king,
whose kingdom does not tolerate any injustice” (Ibn Kathīr, vol. 3, p. 85; Al-Dhahabī, 1987, vol. 1, p. 84). The king of Abyssinia, the Najjāshī, welcomed the Muslim refugees and supported them in the best possible manner against the pagans.

Furthermore, after the arrival of Muslims in Medina, no one was forced to accept Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) signed a number of treaties with the Jews and Christians to form a broad social unity, especially in the face of their common enemy (Ibn Kathīr, 1988, vol. 3, p. 276). That is, they reached an alliance with each other. This alliance continued until the fifth year AH when the event of Bāntū Qurayḥah occurred, and the alliance was revoked (Ibn Kathīr, 1988, vol. 4, p. 139).

Such betrayal and oppression occurred several times by the People of the Book during the Prophet’s life. An example of this hostility occurred at the Battle of Mu’tah between the Muslims and Roman Christians along with their Arab allies. Farwah ibn ʿAmr al-Judhāmī was beheaded after this battle when he converted to Islam (Ibn Hishām, 1991, vol. 5, p. 291). The killing of Saqatir Usquf, who attested that the Prophet Muḥammad was a legitimate prophet, is another example of their hostility (al-Ṭabarī, 1987, vol. 2, p. 131; Ibn Kathīr, vol. 4, p. 304).

With regard to the enmity of the Jews, after the battle of Khaybar, a woman called Zaynab bint al-Ḥarith planned to poison and kill the Prophet. However, the Prophet survived by God’s grace (Ibn Kathīr, 1988, vol. 4, p. 24). Another example is the story of the Jews of Bāntū Naḍīr who planned to throw stones upon the Prophet’s head and terrorise him (Ibn Hishām, 1991, vol. 3, p. 101). The battle between the Jews of Bāntū Qaynuqāʿ and Muslims during the second year AH, the battle with Bāntū Naḍīr during the fourth year AH and the battle with Bāntū Qurayḥah during the fifth year AH are other cases of conspiracy instigated by the People of the Book.

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph, as well as the Ottoman and Abbasid caliphs, employed the People of the Book for governmental duties and positions (Al-Zuhaylī, 1998, vol. 4, pp. 56-58). In addition, the Jews helping the Muslims to conquer Andalusia and Egypt clearly shows the existence of peaceful relations and alliances between Muslims and the People of the Book.

All the evidence mentioned above demonstrates that the relations between the Muslims and the People of the Book were contractual. Thus, loyalty, in this case, is not prohibited unless hostility and betrayal are involved.

5. Conclusions

This article concludes that the term muwā‘alat should be understood based on various circumstances of use in the pre-Islamic era, contextual understanding of all relevant verses in the Qurān and the Prophet Muḥammad’s (PBUH) methods for dealing with non-Muslims. It has been illustrated that with regard to these various considerations, muwā‘alat (loyalty) can be divided into two categories:

1. ideological muwā‘alat, which involves matters of faith and spirituality; and
2. contractual muwā‘alat, which pertains to socio-political relationships.

The latter does not have any connection with cordiality, affection and brotherhood.

Based on the Qurān and the Prophet’s example, some political guidelines can be established with regard to loyalty:

- Establishing contractual muwā‘alat between Muslim countries is preferable; however, it is not necessary. This means that declining contracts with Muslim countries to make contracts with others is not prohibited; however, a contract or agreement with countries which are at war with Muslims is strongly forbidden.
• The governments of Islamic countries must have muwālāt with all groups that are under their territories, except those who betray Muslims. They should pay attention to all groups, assist them and protect them from enemies, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims.

• There is no legislative prohibition for Muslim countries to have various types of relations with non-Muslim countries whether they are of Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu or other persuasions. This relationship should be based on mutual respect and upholding the conditions of the contract.

• There is no obligatory muwālāt for Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries who do not want to immigrate to a Muslim country or for those who voluntarily leave their Muslim communities. However, such Muslims can show their brotherhood and support to their fellow countrymen both materially and immaterially and help them pursue their rights. If such people are invaded unjustly by non-Muslims, and they request the help of other Muslims, the other Muslims are obligated to help them unless there is an alliance between that particular non-Muslim country and the Muslim countries.

• Should a Muslim country invade a non-Muslim country, there is no obligation for other Muslim countries to help the former and there is no prohibition to having relations with that particular non-Muslim country.

Due to the great importance of relations within and between different societies and the current misunderstanding of the term muwālāt, it is suggested that further and more extensive study of the term is essential. The present researchers recommend inclusion of a course in academic institutions regarding the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims based on the concept of muwālāt in the Qur’ān and prophetic traditions.

Notes

1. God says: “We sent a group of jinn to you [Prophet] to listen to the Qur’ān. When they heard it, they said to one another, ‘Be quiet!’ Then when it was finished they turned to their community and gave them warning” (Q 46:29).

2. God says: “So if they believe like you do, they will be rightly guided. But if they turn their backs, then they will be entrenched in opposition. God will protect you from them: He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.” (Q 2:137).

3. God says: “True devotion is due to God alone. [As for] those who choose other protectors beside Him, saying, ‘We only worship them because they bring us nearer to God’, God Himself will judge between them regarding their differences. God does not guide any ungrateful liar.” (Q 39:3).

4. God says: “Those who take protectors other than God can be compared to spiders building themselves houses – the spider’s is the frailest of all houses – if only they could understand. God knows what things they call upon beside Him: He is the Mighty, the Wise.” (Q 29:41-42).

5. God says: “On the Day He gathers them all together, He will say to the angels, ‘Was it you these people worshipped? They will reply, ‘May You be exalted! You are our supporter against them! Really, they worshipped the jinn – most of them believed in them.’” (Q 34:40-41).

6. God says: “Name your adopted sons after their [real] fathers: this is more equitable in God’s eyes – if you do not know who their fathers are [they are your] ‘brothers-in-religion’ and your muwālāt. . . .” (Q 33:5).
8. The Banū Aws (Arabic: بنو أوس; Arabic pronunciation: [bænu; ˈæws], meaning “Sons of Aws”) or simply Aws (Arabic: أوس; also Romanised as Aus) was one of the main Arab tribes of Medina.

9. The Banū Qurayyah (Arabic: بنو قريظة بنو قريطة بنو قريبة; alternate spellings include Quraiza, Qurayzah, Qurayatha and the archaic Koreiza) was a Jewish tribe which lived in northern Arabia at the oasis of Yathrib (presently known as Medina) until the seventh century CE.

10. The Banū al-Khazraj (Arabic: الخزرج) was one of the tribes of Arabia living in Medina during the era of the Prophet Muhammad.

11. The Banū Qaynuqāʿ (also spelled Banū Kainuka, Banū Kaynuka, Banū Qainuqa, Banū Qaynuqa, Arabic: قنوقا) was one of the three main Jewish tribes of Medina in the seventh century CE.

12. God says: “The believers should not make the disbelievers their allies rather than other believers – anyone who does such a thing will isolate himself completely from God – except when you need to protect yourselves from them. God warns you to beware of Him: the Final Return is to God.” (Q 3:28).

13. Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abī Sahl Abū Bakr al-Sarakhsī was an important jurist of the Hanafi school.

14. God says: “The believers should not make the disbelievers their allies rather than other believers – anyone who does such a thing will isolate himself completely from God – except when you need to protect yourselves from them. God warns you to beware of Him: the Final Return is to God.” (Q 3:28).

15. God says: “You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies: they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them – God does not guide such wrongdoers.” (Q 5:51).

16. God says: “[Prophet], you will not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day giving their loyalty to those who oppose God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or other relations: these are the people in whose hearts God has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with His spirit. He will let them enter Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay: God is well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are on God’s side, and God’s side will be the one to prosper.” (Q 58:22).

17. God says: “Believers, do not take your fathers and brothers as allies if they prefer disbelief to faith: those of you who do so are doing wrong.” (Q 9:23).

18. God says: “The strongest handhold of Islam is to have loyalty (wałāyah) to God and also love and hate for God.” (Al-Tabarānī, 1985, Vol. 1, p. 372).


20. God says: “Say, ‘Shall I take for myself an ally other than God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who feeds but is not fed?’ Say, ‘I am commanded to be the first [of you] to devote myself [to Him].’ Do not be one of the idolaters.” (Q 6:14).

21. God says: “Those who take allies other than God can be compared to spiders building themselves houses – the spider’s is the frailest of all houses – if only they could understand. God knows what things they call upon beside Him: He is the Mighty, the Wise.” (Q 2:257).

22. God says: “God is the ally of those who believe: He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light.” (Q 2:257).

23. God says: “My ally is God: He has revealed the Scripture, and it is He who protects the righteous, but those you call on instead of Him cannot help you or even help themselves.” (Q 7:196-197).

25. God says: “...Wrongdoers only have each other to protect them; the righteous have God Himself as their ally.” (Q 45:19).

26. God says: “Those [angels] who carry the Throne and those who surround it celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him. They beg forgiveness for the believers: ‘Our Lord, You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who turn to you and follow your path. Save them from the pains of Hell...’” (Q 40:7).

27. God says: “Remember when you said to the believers, ‘Will you be satisfied if your Lord reinforces you by sending down three thousand angels?’” (Q 3:124).

28. God says: “As for those who say, ‘Our Lord is God,’ and take the straight path towards Him, the angels come down to them and say, ‘Have no fear or grief, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised.’” (Q 41:30).

29. God says: “Your Lord revealed to the angels: ‘I am with you: give the believers firmness; I shall put terror into the hearts of the disbelievers – strike above their necks and strike all their fingertips.’” (Q 8:12).

30. God says: “...those whose lives the angels take in a state of goodness. They will say to them, ‘Peace be upon you. Enter the Garden as a reward for what you have done.’” (Q 16:32).

31. God says: “...As for those who believed but did not emigrate, you are not responsible for their wala'ah (protection) until they have done so...” (Q 8:72).

32. God says: “Believers, do not take your fathers and brothers as allies, if they prefer disbelief to faith: those of you who do so are doing wrong.” (Q 9:23).

33. God says: “The believers, both men and women, are allies to each other...” (Q 9:71).

34. See note 33.

35. References


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Further reading


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