

Article

Interpretations of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* in Everyday Lives of Salafis in Germany

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Abstract: Salafis' everyday lives, social relations, and attitudes towards both Muslims and non-Muslims are often shaped implicitly or explicitly by the theological concept of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* ("loyalty and disavowal"). It indicates whom to be loyal to on the one hand, and whom to disavow on the other hand—or from which persons, deeds, and practices one should distance oneself. However, within the highly heterogeneous spectrum of Salafi orientations, beliefs, and religious practices, interpretations of *al-wala'* and *al-bara'* differ as well as its actual relevance and its implications for concrete life situations. This article explores how Muslims in Germany who identify themselves with non-violent, so-called 'purist Salafism' perceive and practice social relations, social closeness, or separation in their everyday lives by drawing implicitly or explicitly on principles of loyalty and disavowal. Based on qualitative interviews and participant observations (data gathered between 2014 and 2018), we shed light on how individuals' ideas of loyalty and disavowal intersect with issues of identity, belonging, inclusion, and exclusion. The article thus shows how local interpretations and implementations of a Salafi core concept are strongly interwoven with realities of everyday life.

Keywords: Salafism; *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*; lived religion; Islam in Europe; Islamic dress codes

1. Introduction

"Well, *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* is important for everyone. There is nobody who says that it is unimportant. There are only different views on the interpretation and understanding of what loyalty and disavowal actually mean. [...] Many verses from the Quran are misinterpreted and misunderstood. That is why there are these extreme cases."

Interview with Murad, 10 July 2017

This is how Murad, a preacher in a mosque and one of our interview partners, put it in a nutshell when we asked him about *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* ("loyalty and disavowal")—a theological concept which has often been described as a core element of Salafi doctrines (see, e.g., Wagemakers 2014; de Koning 2013a). Before diving deeper into the possible meanings and functions of this concept, it is important to note that the label "Salafi" is problematic for various reasons, especially because it may make Salafis appear as a homogeneous group; and also because Salafism is increasingly equated with (violent) radicalism.¹ Many referred to as Salafis reject the label, others use it to denounce other Muslims and

¹ Salafis strive for a return to a 'pure' Islam, which in their opinion was practiced during the first three generations of Muslims, which they see as role models and try to imitate. They advocate a literal interpretation of Quran and Sunna and an application of the religious guidelines in all spheres of life, purified from religious innovations (*bida'*, sg. *bid'a*). For a deeper reflection on possible meanings of "Salafi(s)", see e.g., Wagemakers (2008) and Damir-Geilsdorf and Menzfeld (2017).

still others refer to themselves as Salafis, albeit sometimes only in certain contexts (de Koning 2013b, p. 57). However, because the interlocutors we are quoting in this article use the term as self-designation and/or follow concepts that are generally categorized as ‘Salafi’ (see, e.g., Wagemakers 2008, 2018; Meijer 2009, pp. 3–13; Nedza 2014, pp. 86–100), we decided to talk about them as Salafis.

One of these concepts that are usually associated with Salafi orientations is the main topic of this article: *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*, or loyalty and disavowal. As Wagemakers (2009, 2014, 2018), for instance, points out, its importance can be observed among individuals and groups of different orientations, ranging from the majority of non-violent and so-called ‘purist Salafis’ to violent Jihadists. Briefly summarized, *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* can be described as an instruction that Muslims, through their attachment to God, on the one hand should understand and implement their loyalty towards other Muslims, and on the other hand should distance themselves from unbelief and unbelievers, as well as from persons and actions that would harm Islam. While the basis of the concept goes back to the pre-Islamic period and was initially only adopted by marginal early-Islamic groups as well as Shiites, it has developed in contemporary Salafis’ views from a “pious instrument to ward off religious innovation” into a “litmus test to separate the ‘true’ Muslim from the rest” (Wagemakers 2008, pp. 3–4). However, as Murad mentioned, there can be considerable differences in the meaning of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* and how it should be implemented through loyalty and support to a “we”—group of believers—and through disavowal and dissociation from persons perceived as non-believers or following ‘wrong’ religious convictions; and/or a non-Islamic environment (see, e.g., de Koning 2013a; Shavit 2014; Kursani 2018; Chaplin 2018; Damir-Geilsdorf et al. 2018).

In the Quran itself, the term *wala’* does not appear at all and the term *bara’* only in Sura 43, 26, in which Abraham distances himself from the worship of beings other than God. Several further verses in the Quran as well as passages in the Hadith, the transmitted sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, describe, however, how believers should behave towards their brothers and sisters in faith and towards the unbelievers or un-Islamic practices. In some of the verses, derivatives from the same word roots of *wala’* and *bara’* occur. Based on this, several Muslim theologians and legal scholars have dealt with the topic in the past and present. These include, for example, the Hanbali legal scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1350) and his teacher Ibn Taimiyya (1263–1328), who—without using the term *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*—warned Muslims to distance themselves from rituals and customs of Christians and Jews in order not to resemble non-Muslims in forms of worship (Wagemakers 2014, p. 66). Ibn Taimiyya (n.d., p. 208), who lived at the time of the Mongol invasion, further warned that Muslims should ally themselves with other Muslims in conflict situations, even if the others had done them wrong, because “injustice does not separate the bond of faith”.

It was not until the twentieth century that *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* became a fixed term by Saudi scholars, describing the concept of “being loyal and believing in every way to Islam and its followers and keeping a distance from anything (or anyone) deviating from it” (Wagemakers 2014, p. 67). The respective scholars thereby refer to different passages in the Quran and Hadith as well as the writings of former legal scholars, in particular the writings of Ibn Taimiyya and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1798), who called on the Arabian Peninsula to return to a strict monotheism and to turn away from inadmissible innovations (*bida’*, sg. *bid’a*), which he saw in particular in Sufi practices. The master’s thesis on *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* by Muhammad ibn Said al-Qahtani (born 1956), a professor at the Saudi Umm al-Qura University, has been especially influential. Published in 1984, it has since been translated into several languages and is also disseminated on the Internet via various Salafi websites.

However, different groups and individuals refer to different passages in the Quran and Hadith and, furthermore, multiple connotations of the Arabic terms *wala’* and *bara’* as well as multiple meanings of derivations which stem from the same basic consonants (roots) of the terms contribute to the diversity of the interpretations of this concept. Usually *barā’* occurs in the sense of “being free [from something negative]”, “having nothing to do with” (Ibn Manzur 1968, pp. 31–33). *Walā’*, on the other hand, has, among other things, the meaning of being a “supporter”, “ally [against enemies]”, “protector”, but also of being a “friend”, “helper”, “being close to someone” or “following someone” (ibid., pp. 409–12).

The complexity of meaning nuances can be seen, for example, in various interpretations of the term *awliya'* (plural of *wali*; with the same root as *wala'*) in the Quran, such as Quran 5:51: "You who believe! Do not take the Jews and Christians as friends/protectors (*awliya'*)! They are each other's friends (*awliya'*). Whoever of you joins them belongs to them. Behold, God guides not the wicked in the right way." While *awliya'* is reproduced in many Quran translations with "friends" and many Salafi scholars employ the respective verses to warn Muslims to not befriend unbelievers (Wagemakers 2008, p. 5; Shavit 2014, pp. 73–74), the term *awliya'* can be also understood as "allies" against enemies. Therefore, depending on the interpretation, various instructions for relations with Jews and Christians can be derived from this verse (Pink 2010). Al-Tabari (d. 923), for example, explains in his Quran commentary that *awliya'* here means alliance partners (Arabic *halif*) in the fight against Muslims (al-Tabari 1954, pp. 274–78), but Ibn Baz (1910–1999), the former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia who became a respected authority in different Salafi milieus, explains this verse as follows:

"[...] that every Muslim should know that it is not permitted to be friends with or love polytheists. For anyone who obeys God and his Messenger and declares Him—the Majestic and the Exalted—One and Only, must treat the unbelievers as enemies and hate them for the sake of God's will." (Ibn Baz 2014, p. 18)

In contrast to Ibn Baz's interpretation, the Egyptian Dar al-Itfta', a state-run Islamic institution assigned to issue religious edicts, stresses in a *fatwa* (legal opinion) from 2014 that *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* is not a doctrine of faith, but above all a matter of the heart and not of deeds. In their opinion, faith produces in the heart of the believer "love, friendship, affection and support for all true believers and disavowal and dissociation (*bara'a*) from the beliefs and thoughts that contradict what he believes in" (Dar al-ifta' al-misriyya 2014). An openly hostile attitude towards non-Muslims would result only if these attacked the identity, community, and homeland of Muslims. Otherwise, it would contradict the Quran, which in various passages such as Quran 2:85, Quran 16:90, and Quran 60:8 requires being just and good to all (ibid). Another *fatwa* of the Egyptian Azhar University, one of the highest religious authorities in Sunni Islam, states explicitly that *wala'* means assistance (Arabic *nasra*) in peace and war, but that it does not contradict Islam to cultivate friendships with non-Muslims, to stand by them or to form alliances with them (Bawabat al-Azhar 2016).

Wagemakers (2008) shows that Salafi scholars employ *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* also to frame a political and religious threat to Islam and Muslims. The latter is characterized by a portrayal of non-Muslims "as potential enemies of the purity of Islamic rituals and customs" (Wagemakers 2008, p. 5). Furthermore, a clear delineation between an in-group of 'true' believers and an out-group, whom one disavows, is among Jihadists often connected to the contested concept of *takfir* [accusing others of unbelief (*kufir*)]. In this combination, *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* can also be employed to accuse Muslim rulers of unbelief and as a legitimization to fight them (Damir-Geilsdorf et al. 2018; Kursani 2018, p. 304).

However the individual (and always historically, culturally, and sociopolitically embedded) interpretations and arguments may run, interpretations of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* and its implementation in everyday practices are heterogeneous and strongly intertwined with perceptions and negotiations of belonging, identity, exclusion, and inclusion. For Salafis in Germany, living in a mostly non-Muslim sociocultural environment in which many non-Muslims as well as Muslims oppose Salafi views and practices presents complex and sometimes ambiguous demands they have to navigate. They have to balance and negotiate attachments and belonging, distinctions and boundaries not only on a theological and abstract level, but also on a micro-level in everyday activities. Writings of Salafi scholars in Saudi Arabia or other majority-Muslim countries who propagate *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* in the form of a strict disavowal from un-Islamic practices and distance from unbelievers (portrayed as enemies of Islam), or even call upon to express open enmity towards infidels as proof of loyalty towards God (de Koning 2013b, p. 59), can hardly be implemented in daily routines and everyday lives of Salafis in Western countries. Salafis in non-Muslim societies go to school or have jobs and have to interact constantly with non-Muslims such as colleagues, neighbors, landlords, or employees in offices and shops. Several German Salafis also have non-Muslim family members. As it has been pointed out

by recent studies, Salafis in non-Muslim majority societies often mitigate some implications of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, propagated in Salafi scholarly writings, or try to devise pragmatic solutions to be able to function in society (see, e.g., [de Koning 2013b](#); [Shavit 2014](#); [Kursani 2018](#); [Chaplin 2018](#)).

When our interview partner Tarek, a 55-year-old dental technician who says of himself that he is proud to be Salafi, tried to explain the meaning of *wala'* and *bara'*, he first underlined that *bara'* means to be innocent of something un-Islamic. Stressing that he is not a religious expert, he then searched for an online explanation by Ibn Baz. Interestingly, he re-interpreted Ibn Baz' statement (quoted above) about hating unbelievers without criticizing the scholar:

"Well, we always have to deal with unbelievers and in Islam one should not hate persons. I think it means that one should say 'I hate what you do, the bad deeds', but to hate unbelievers as persons—I don't think that is what is meant by *bara'*. This is my opinion. I hate what a person does such as drinking alcohol or being unfaithful to a spouse, but I don't hate him as a person and human being. But that's my personal opinion of the meaning of this, as I mentioned I am not a Muslim scholar, only an ordinary person, and I know that there are people who say that hate should also refer to the persons."

Interview with Tarek, 10 July 2017

We will now turn to showing how Salafis in Germany who ascribe themselves to non-violent *salafiyya* draw implicitly or explicitly on principles of loyalty and disavowal when it comes to everyday situations that involve questions of closeness and distancing. Our data is based primarily on qualitative interviews and participant observations which we conducted between 2014 and 2019. We focus in particular on three social dimensions that interpretations of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* may influence: How Salafis identify people they should be loyal to among Muslims; how they distance themselves from non-Muslim practices and persons; and how they conduct their everyday lives by navigating the complex and sometimes ambiguous demands that living in a non-Muslim sociocultural environment may present. Questions of leaving the non-Muslim country of residence and questions of visibility in non-Muslim societies, of pedagogy and family life, but also debates on belief and unbelief will be touched on.

2. Identifying Persons Who Are 'on the Right Path'

Inherent interdependencies exist between the conceptual complexes of loyalty/disobedience and faith/disbelief. It may draw a sharp dividing line between different Salafi groups when it comes to answering the question: To what extent should I distance myself from unbelievers, or from ideas and actions that could erode faith? The intention to condemn people who believe in a 'wrong' manner is thus not necessarily centered on contact with non-Muslims. On the contrary, it is more or less strongly negotiated in the keeping of distance from fellow Muslims and fellow Salafis, namely from those who are conceived as misguided.

Some Salafis interpret the concept *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* with a focus on intra-Muslim debates on loyalty and disavowal. One way to understand it was provided by Yusuf, who is active as a preacher in a mosque community that tends to rely on 'Madkhalite'² scholars:

² 'Madkhalis' or 'Madakhila' is a term that other groups use for a Salafi spectrum around the Saudi Sheikh Rabi' b. Hadi al-Madkhali (born 1931). The term is generally understood in Salafi milieus, but usually has pejorative connotations for the persons it refers to. They rather simply call themselves Muslims or Salafis. They differ from other Salafi groups especially with regard to the strong reference to certain religious authorities they turn to (cf. [Pall and de Koning 2017](#), pp. 82–84). In addition, they are characterized by emphasizing the concept *djarh wa-ta'dil*, i.e., criticism and praise towards persons, based on arguments of the high religious authorities recognized by them. References to opinions of acknowledged high authorities are thus used to deduce to whom one should ascribe or deny religious authority. The *djarh* exercised by them, i.e., the making of arguments against persons in order to deny them religious authority, is directed in particular against followers of the Muslim Brotherhood (see in detail [Meijer 2011](#)).

“[For example, the Madkhali] partly have their own concepts of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* [...] In *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* they concentrate very strongly on inner-Islamic *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*. You will notice that a non-Muslim is greeted and a Muslim who does not follow their understanding of the Sunna, for example, can be boycotted.”

Interview with Yusuf, 18 October 2018

Yusuf explains during another meeting in reference to the German preacher Abu Nagie, whom he classifies as ‘Takfiri’³ and thus as misguided:

“I also don’t give him *salamu alaykum* [i.e., refuse to greet him] and such. If I give him *salam*, then other people, young people, will see that I give him *salam* and think that he is on the right path. That would be a *tazkiya* [recommendation], a *da’wa* [invitation; religious missionary act] for him. I would also never appear at a lecture by such a [Takfiri] person. When I’m seen there, it automatically means that everyone who knows me, and sees me as trustworthy, automatically sees him [the Takfiri] as trustworthy too. That is the basis.”

Interview with Yusuf, 1 July 2017

Our interlocutor Djamal, a committed parishioner from another ‘Madkhali’ mosque community, explains regarding the subject of unbelief accusations in relation to *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*, that he would only in very rare cases personally declare Muslims unbelievers, following the Saudi scholar Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1798). These reasons would be if they either deliberately did not pronounce the *shahada* [creed]; if they called themselves unbelievers; if they claimed the *sharia* was not binding; or if they knew of a duty in Islam (for example ritual prayer) and understood it, but claimed that it did not apply to them. In the case of purely theological differences, however, it appears to him as unacceptable to refer to persons who adhere to another form of Islam as unbelievers—and thus to count them among the groups which must be clearly rejected.

Djamal, like many other Salafis, is especially annoyed by young persons who have not yet achieved what he regards as proper religious knowledge, but who nevertheless are bold when it comes to accusing others of unbelief lightly. He disqualifies especially those premature accusers with the negative term ‘Takfiris’ and says about them:

“They have no differentiated thinking. There is a difference between the special and the general takfir [i.e., accusation of unbelief]. [But] for them all things are great kufr⁴ [unbelief that excludes from the community of faith], they do not distinguish. [...] With these completely blatant Takfiris, the takfir is a compulsion that goes so far that if they do not pronounce the takfir on the one who is Muslim from the beginning, but who is allegedly apostate, they believe that they themselves are apostates. Although that is not their task, to pronounce the takfir.”

Interview with Djamal, 22 July 2017

In this sense, Djamal positions himself against those people who judge quickly about others’ faith. Even about non-Salafi groups like the Sufis that differ strongly in faith principles and faith practice, Djamal says that—although he would keep himself away from them personally—he could not deny that Sufis could be Muslims and believers:

³ Groups are called ‘Takfiris’ or ‘Kharijites’ if they, from the viewpoint of their opponents, lightly practise *takfir*, i.e., accuse other Muslims of unbelief (and thereby often legitimize rebellion or even militant *jihad* against rulers who are declared sinful or renegade).

⁴ Islamic jurisprudence distinguishes between “greater kufr” (*kufr akbar*), which excludes the concerned person from the community of believers on the one hand, and “minor kufr” (*kufr asghar*) on the other hand, which is rather associated with sinful behavior.

“No, one must not pronounce the [concrete] takfir. People may be protected out of ignorance. I wouldn’t pray behind a Sufi imam who goes to graves. I wouldn’t do that. Whether he is kafir [an unbeliever] or not—I’m not going that far because I don’t have the ‘ilm [knowledge], I can’t be his judge. I can’t instruct him, I just wouldn’t pray behind one like that.”

Interview with Djamal, 22 July 2017

Ali, a preacher within the purist spectrum of German Salafis, but not ‘Madkhali’, emphasizes the importance of distancing oneself from people who carelessly pronounce unbelief accusations—and, no less important, the necessity of distancing oneself from those who lightly criticize supposed or actual unbelief accusers as ‘Takfiris’:

“I am in the middle. The way of the middle. The Prophet always says: ‘The best thing in any matter is to go the middle way without exaggerating’. That is, both groups exaggerate. Both sides have become fanatical. The biggest problem is that Muslims have to learn that there is no Pope for us. We don’t have any person you must follow. You are free in your decision”.

Interview with Ali, 7 January 2018

However, even apart from the harsh debates about whom to recognize as a believer or as an unbeliever, distinctions are made as to whom loyalty and to whom disavowal are commanded. Regarding *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*, it is decisive for many Salafis which path of faith in the sense of ideological conviction somebody chooses: i.e., which *manhaj* [proper ideological program, methodology] a person follows. For many Salafis, it is not only the daily practice that distinguishes a rightly guided Muslim (i.e., one of their own spectrum) from a misguided person. Rather, it is the inner conviction that makes a difference and makes people belong to those on the ‘right path’. If the *manhaj* is proper, this may even count as more valuable than practicing all religious duties without possessing the correct *manhaj*. For Djamal, for instance, the omission of the prayer, although one believes in its obligatory character, is not a criterion for exclusion from the faith, but merely a sin:

“If one commits sins, faith also weakens. But for me, faith is first and foremost important. [...] Someone who would be criminal, in the mafia, gangster rapper or whatever, and his actions are a catastrophe, but he orients himself by the pure ‘aqida [doctrine of faith]—he would be much better for me than someone who seems fully pious, but his ‘aqida is falsified. [...] It is more important for me to hold on to the pure ‘aqida than to pay attention to sins.”

Interview with Djamal, 22 July 2017

Yusuf declares on the subject in general:

“You have to understand that, he can be Salafi and still not practice. You can be Salafi and not practising. This goes back to what you believe and not necessarily what you do. [...] The actions are not as important as the *manhaj*, the methodology and the understanding of religion.”

Interview with Yusuf, 1 July 2017

He explains this conviction theologically by referring to a hadith, thereby also shedding light on the importance of intra-Muslim practices of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*:

“This is an important concept to understand. They take it from the athar [ancestors]: ‘It is better to eat with a Jew or Christian than with a religious innovator’. And that’s what one of the salaf said. So a fasiq [a person who violated religious law because of his corrupted character] who has the same *manhaj* and the same ‘aqida [doctrine of faith] is better than a muftadi’ [a person commencing unlawful religious innovation] who prays and fasts day and night and does everything.”

Interview with Yusuf, 1 July 2017

Though this does not refer to each and every Salafi person, for many of our interlocutors, the chosen *manhaj* thus constitutes the correct belief and correct way of living much more than the mere fulfillment of faith duties (such as prayer, etc.) could ever do. At the same time, the interpretation and application of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* are strongly interwoven with concepts of how to identify the 'true' believer and generate not only fundamental distinctions among Salafis, but also various individual ways of keeping distance from fellow Muslims who are conceived as gone astray.

3. Questions of Distancing from Non-Muslims and Their Practices

"I don't want them [my children] to celebrate Saint Martin, I don't want them to go to church, I don't want them to celebrate Christmas and Easter. Then of course you have to offer them [the children] alternatives. I also tell them why we don't celebrate Easter, [...] but you can't keep the children completely away either. At school, they do handicrafts a long time before. [You can say:] Okay, you don't go to the Christmas celebration, but you can't say you don't go to school all December. These are again conflicts that bother me and that affect the 'aqida [doctrine of faith]. I think of music as haram, but I'm relaxed about it, too, but I don't want the kids to hear that trashy stuff or where occultism comes in or anything. [...] I'm always so careful about kufr [unbelief]. I'm very cautious about bid'a and kufr, because I also believe I can't forbid everything to the children, that's just the way of life here."

Interview with Djamal, 10 March 2017

Djamal's quote shows how complex moving between fitting in and distancing oneself can be when Salafis live with their families in social contexts that run counter to certain Salafi beliefs. Many German-speaking Salafis are concerned about a form of disavowal that on the one hand does not overstrain their own children, but on the other does not endanger their faith through too much conformity. Especially when it comes to raising children, there is a great fear that non-Islamic influences could affect the faith of the children. In Yusuf's case, positions on the separation from non-Muslims are also intertwined with the issue of disavowal from Muslims who allegedly believe wrongly:

"I wouldn't have a problem with [my children still] being young playing with non-Muslims [...] [or] being older and having contact with non-Muslims. But they need to know what their religion is and be convinced, that is the important point. I also think non-practising Muslims are sometimes worse for a child than non-Muslims. My non-practising Muslim friends have led me to worse things than my German non-Muslim friends."

Interview with Yusuf, 18 October 2018

Because of the challenges encountered in dealing with non-Muslim practices, various Salafi preachers recommend moving to an Islamic country as being the best option. One example is the well-known German convert Pierre Vogel (alias Abu Hamsa), who is known as an influential preacher within the German Salafi scene. When asked whether it is religiously allowed to live in a non-Islamic country, Vogel answers in one of his numerous online preaching videos on YouTube:

"The land, [...] where people reign with man-made laws, is not a land of Islam and it is a duty to make the hijra [emigration] from there. But of course, only if you have the opportunity to find another country where you will be welcomed, where you can go, where sharia rules." (Vogel 2018)

Thus Vogel also acknowledges that emigration is by no means a viable option for everyone. So, if one has to stay in a non-Islamic country, then he/she must have the necessary faith and knowledge in order to be able to ward off "the desires that wait there for one" and "the false arguments that are brought to one's ears", according to Vogel (2017a). In order not to be misled, one should thus acquire enough religious knowledge. In his opinion—as for many of our interlocutors—the duty to ensure an appropriate religious shaping begins already during childhood, and should be an important concern

for parents. Vogel therefore calls for the establishment of Muslim kindergartens in Germany, so that Muslim children can learn the Quran instead of Saint Martin's and Christmas songs. It is important to guide the children to the right direction when they are young, explains Vogel, because

"[...] this is where it starts. The first moment it starts, because a young tree you must support a little, protect, otherwise the wind comes—Saint Martin songs and so on, and then this tree grows crooked. And a tree that's crooked, you won't get straightened out that quickly. And so the brainwashing starts, and it affects your heart [...] and when you want to pull it [the tree] straight again, your daughter is already dancing in the nightclub on the pole and has run out of the house at night." (Vogel 2017b)

However, since Salafis cannot live completely isolated from non-Muslims in Germany, most of them decide to arrange themselves and compromise with the ambiguities of everyday life in different ways. Yet others consider emigration to a majority Muslim country to be the best choice, especially when it comes to raising their children. For example, Yusuf considers life in an environment that does not conform fully to his beliefs to be difficult yet tolerable. But others, such as Nour, are increasingly concerned with the idea of emigrating. The young mother feels so severely discriminated against in Germany because of her headscarf that according to her own statement she would prefer to not leave the house anymore. For her, the idea of emigrating, especially since the birth of her daughter, has become within reach, although she knows she has to wait until her husband finishes his studies as she herself is a stay-at-home mother:

"Well, I've never been more ready to leave than I am now. At least I want to give it a try. Of course not now, not until a few years from now, but I firmly believe that I would like to emigrate abroad, so I don't want to stay here, [...] because I also have a daughter and I want her to be covered too."

Interview with Nour, 21 September 2018

But although Nour seems to be very determined, she hesitates for fear of the practical implementation. After all, she has some acquaintances who took this step only to return to Germany a short time later, disillusioned. A similar kind of disillusion happened to Ismail, a 36-old German convert, who was deterred by the reality in Yemen, because he was not willing to give up his accustomed standard of living and he thought life in Yemen was too chaotic and messy for his taste:

"I was in Yemen and I wanted to emigrate there too [...] I was there just for the trip. But with the intention of moving there forever. But the differences are so immense when you, like me as a German,—I grew up here, got to know and love this society, this standard here and then suddenly I am in a country like this [Yemen]. You really have to be able to lower your needs to the point where you can say, okay, all I need is a roof over my head and enough to eat and drink. And because that wasn't the case with me, it wasn't an option for me."

Interview with Ismail, 26 March 2017

However, for other Salafis it is out of the question to emigrate because they simply feel at home in Germany. Said, a 51-year-old tailor of Algerian origin, who once moved to Germany for his studies, now—30 years later—considers it his home: "For me home is where I feel comfortable [...], so my home is here, here in Germany" (Interview with Said, 18 October 2014). In particular Salafis who were born and raised in Germany often cannot imagine living elsewhere:

"Well I haven't thought much about [emigrating], I would need time no matter where I would be moving, but the problem is just that I grew up here, I speak this language, I think in German [...], of course I read the Quran or the things you have to say in Arabic for prayer, of course I say these in Arabic, but when I do du'aa [invocations] it's in German. I feel in German [...], I laugh in German, I cry in German, that's why I function most efficiently here."

I would always have to adapt in other places over a long period of time, there would be a lot I wouldn't understand".

Interview with Djamal, 10 March 2017

For German converts, the question also arises as to how to deal best with non-Muslim relatives. Various preachers, such as Ali, emphasize how important it is to treat one's non-Muslim relatives in a good way:

"Paradise lies [beneath] your mother's feet' [famous hadith]. No matter if she's a Muslim or not. Even if she drinks alcohol at home and sins, you still can't take away her beer bottle. You can't even break it. That's what Islam says."

Interview with Ali, 7 January 2018

These constant negotiations, which Salafis are continually subjected to when dealing with non-Muslims and non-Muslim practices, can also be seen in the case of Ismail, a convert himself. At some point, he came to the realization that an overly harsh treatment of his non-Muslim relatives was ineffective or even counterproductive:

"Back then, when I was very strict with [my relatives], it only ended up making me distance myself from them, but it didn't lead to any positive change. [...] And now I am more likely to say, of course, if a person claims Islam, but does not practice it, I detest him inwardly, but when it comes to my action towards him, I explain it to him, I tell him that it is wrong. If he still fails to respond, then I leave him to Allah subhanu wa ta'aala [may He be glorified and exalted]. Let him answer to Allah subhanu wa ta'aala. But if he is my relative or my family, what am I supposed to do? Boycott? If I boycott him, he won't become any better."

Interview with Ismail, 26 March 2017

de Koning (2013a, pp. 78–79) argues that when Salafis fail to put into practice what might be considered as a religious duty like the disavowal of non-Muslims, they risk being considered insincere and inauthentic, thus, they remove the ambiguities through legitimizations grounded in Islam or based on their everyday lives in the secular environment. de Koning (2013b, p. 60), for example, describes how the call of a preacher to hate non-Muslims—since according to him this is part of Islam—was rejected by some Salafis, who argued that Islam is not a religion of hatred and that a friendly treatment of non-Muslims is considered *da'wa*. But this does not only happen in predominantly non-Muslim contexts, as Chaplin (2018) for example shows. He describes how, during his ethnographic study in Indonesia, he established friendly relations with two Salafis who, while regularly attending sermons that warned against befriending non-Muslims, saw no contradiction in their own implementation of the commandment. Rather, they reinterpreted this warning as a call to caution instead of a ban (Chaplin 2018, p. 16). For the German context, something very similar can be illustrated below through the examples of Tarek and Murad. In Tarek's view, it is unavoidable to have contact with non-Muslims in Germany, and so he refers the disavowal of non-Muslims purely to the rejection of their deeds:

"There are many who always have to do with kuffar [unbelievers], in school, in university, they study together. [...] I hate what you're doing—this binge drinking or cheating. That's bughdh [hate], I don't like that about him. But as a person [I don't hate him], that's a human being. What I don't like [are] his deeds."

Interview with Tarek, 7 May 2017

Murad shares Tarek's view and argues that it simply makes no sense for Muslims to have to distance themselves from non-Muslims or to hate them, but to be allowed to marry Jews and Christians:

"I cannot hate a woman I am allowed to marry and I can marry a Christian as a Muslim. And then, on the other hand, if I disavowed her [...]. I would be schizophrenic if I were to think

so. And Islam does not teach us ambivalence. If I marry a non-Muslim woman, a Jew or a Christian, then I renounce her faith. Her faith is, then, not my faith. But that doesn't mean that I hate her. But I don't like her religiosity at this moment because I didn't accept it."

Interview with Murad, 10 July 2017

Nour also doesn't seem to see any religious objections in meeting privately with other non-Muslim mothers, for example, and others such as Ahmad consider dealing with non-Muslims as a kind of *da'wa*:

"So if somehow they're sitting in their totally German, non-Muslim circle and somebody starts to mock Islam, maybe that person who knows me or [...] some other Muslim might make a statement that says, 'Okay, but there's person XY, he isn't like that'."

Interview with Ahmad, 21 September 2018

On the other hand, however, he describes how he distances himself more and more from society which he perceives as exclusionary:

"I want to remind myself again and again of the rational aspect, and that one does not forget: Not everyone [in Germany] is like that. If you throw them [non-Muslims] all into the same pot, you're just like those you condemn. But sometimes emotions come over you and then ... That's why you withdraw, at least on the inside. That you just don't want to have anything to do with certain people. Or with most of them. Or just want to stay together with your peers."

(ibid.)

But at the same time, he also recognizes that his inner distancing as well as physical withdraw is sometimes not based on Islamophobic resentments in his environment, but on his intrinsic attempt to avoid those situations in which he perceives a conflict with his Islamic principles:

"My inner distancing is also a conscious decision of mine. I can't blame society for that. Certain things are not compatible with Islam. For example, mixed genders at work. [...] Summer festivals or Christmas celebrations [at work]; such locations or events are incompatible with Islam for me ... The distancing is my idea; really everyone—from colleagues to the boss—say: 'Come on, be a part of us'. But then I say for myself: 'Okay, I don't want to.' I tell you that in all honesty, that somehow this really comes from me, a segregation that comes intrinsically from me."

(ibid.)

Looking at the quotes above, we can conclude that there are crucial interactions between how Salafis experience their non-Salafi surroundings, on the one hand, and how they interpret vital concepts as *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, on the other hand. German practices and circumstances that seem to contradict Salafi belief totally, as well as non-Muslims' lack of understanding for Salafi ways of religiousness (or even hostility towards Salafis), may result in highlighting the duty to disavow from certain persons and situations. At the same time, however, the need but also the wish to get along with non-Salafis provokes some interlocutors to dive deeper into religious doctrines that allow for coexistence and non-provocativeness, which in turn makes their lives in a society with a non-Muslim majority easier. Thus, the local and situational context turns out to be crucial for any Salafi's decision about which attitude towards non-Muslims is adequate.

4. How Visible Should You Be?

While most of our interlocutors clearly distance themselves from non-Muslim religious traditions in Germany, such as Christmas and Saint Martin, as well as from persons or actions that, in their

opinion, do not conform to the ‘right faith’, they have different opinions as to whether and how *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* should also be implemented by a visual differentiation from the non-Muslim environment. Some of them see clothing habits that correspond to their understanding of Islam not only as a necessary adherence to religious rules, but also as decisive for clearly showing their religious affiliation to the outside world. This can be traced back to Salafi warnings to not imitate infidels in dressing as part of applying disavowal, referring to statements of the Prophet transmitted in the Hadith such as “whoever imitates a people is one of them”, “these are the garments of the infidels; do not wear them” and “trim the moustache and leave the beard to grow. Be different from the pagans” (see in detail [Shavit 2014](#), pp. 76–77). Ahmad, for instance, wears a *jalabiyya*⁵ and a headgear when going to Friday prayers and jeans and shirts in his daily life. This adjustment of attire in different situations may be interpreted as a pragmatic compromise to function in society as [de Koning \(2013b, p. 60\)](#) explains, who also observed different dressing practices of Salafis in the Netherlands when going to the mosque or being at work.

However, Ahmad always makes sure that his trousers end above his ankles. For him, his trouser length and beard demonstrate his religious affiliation to the public, and thus are also a kind of “religious identity marker” ([Duderija 2014](#), p. 127): “It is like football players who show their affiliation with a team by wearing a jersey” (Ahmad, 16 August 2015) (see also [Damir-Geilsdorf and Menzfeld 2016](#)). He is in his early thirties, born in Germany as the child of a Muslim father and a German mother. He started to live according to his Salafi *manhaj* after graduating from high school. Before he decided what the right clothes would be for him, he had been comparing different opinions about dressing correctly for almost a year, because he did not simply want to adopt unreflectively clothing habits of other members of his mosque community. Like many other Salafis, he is convinced that wearing trousers ending above the ankle is a necessary application of the Prophet’s warning in the Hadith “The part of an *izar* [lower garment] which hangs below the ankles is in the fire” ([Al-Bukhari 2000](#), p. 1197).

At one time, Ahmad read in a treatise that the hadith with the warning about the robe dragging on the ground refers to long drags on robes that seemed noble at that time, and thus is a warning not to appear arrogant through clothing. Such explanations (which might lead to not implementing the exact wording of the hadith) seem unnecessary for Ahmad, who stresses explicitly that he is not interested in asking for a reason when it comes to certain religious rules:

“I try to implement what convinces me the most. It is not about the ‘why’, but about the ‘if’. This means that one could conclude from the context that one should not appear arrogant through one’s clothing. That’s a reason, but I don’t need it at all. If it is clear to me that the Prophet saws said: ‘Don’t wear that’, then there is no debate about it at all for me, then I stick to it. For me it is no longer about the ‘why’, because He knows better. You have to build up this acceptance at some point, which is not always easy, certainly. But the question of ‘why’—I do not question God. He knows better what is good for me—better than me, because he knows me better than I know myself.”

Interview with Ahmad, 16 August 2014

While Ahmad emphasizes that it is “not about which fashion one likes, but whether it is Islam-conform”, Khalid finds it “great for us men” that beards and shorter pants have become fashionable in the current Hipster fashion. Khalid is a German convert and strongly involved in an international Salafi charity organization. Before his conversion, he was first in the Antifa movement [left-wing, partially anarchist, youth movement]. Afterwards, he worked as a HipHop artist: “Many of us just come from this HipHop world, from before, and we are . . . we have a little bit like this street

⁵ A *jalabiyya* is a traditional Arabic long, shirt-like garment that reaches down to the ankles with full sleeves. In the MENA-region there are several names for it (for example *thawb* in Saudi Arabia and *djellebia* in North Africa) as well as local differences such as different widths of sleeves, a neck with or without a collar and a hood which is typical for a Moroccan *djellebia*.

image.” (Khalid, 24 August 2017) He changed his personal clothing style when some typical Salafi clothes were perceived increasingly negatively among the non-Salafi German population:

“In the beginning, about five years ago, we walked around a lot with the Islamic *qamis*⁶—a Pakistani *qamis* and stuff like that. When ISIS came, we took it off piece by piece and dressed like we used to in our HipHop days. Partially, not all over, but partially. Because as long as it is legitimate regarding Islam, why should I wear something that frightens the population here? We have seen so many pictures of ISIS and when I walk around in such a long black shirt I give a completely different impression from what I really am. Why should I frighten a grandma that I walk past?”

Interview with Khalid, 24 August 2017

Khalid’s change in attire shows the dynamic interdependencies of an individual’s interpretation and application of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* with various factors in everyday reality. These include in his case (changing) societal factors such as increasing fears of and hostility towards Salafis (see also quotes of him below) in the majority non-Muslim German society as well as his personal concerns, moral frameworks and interests. While he at first considered the Pakistani *qamis* an appropriate way to show his religious affiliation to his surrounding, thus probably functioning as an identity marker and means to distinguish himself from non-Salafi environments, he modified his clothing practices after the appearance of IS and numerous pictures of IS-fighters in German media wearing similar clothes as he does. He strongly distances himself from IS and realized: “I give a completely different impression from *what I really am*.” Therefore, he changed his attire in order to “not frighten the people” in the society, in which he lives and wants to keep friendly relations to non-Muslims. At the same time, the way he dresses now, e.g., “a little bit like this street image”, “partially” HipHop style and resemblances to Hipster style in which beards and shorter trousers have become fashionable which he regards as “great for us men” comply with his personal fashion taste.

Like Khalid who apparently associated the Pakistani *qamis* with ‘authentic’ Islamic clothing, many German Muslim clothing stores and Muslim fashion websites offer clothing that is oriented towards the customary clothing on the Arabian Peninsula or the Indian subcontinent, which can be seen—as Tarlo (2017, p. 161) argues in another context—also as a form of self-Orientalism. However, for Khalid who now dresses more ‘Western style’, it is important that his pants at the front of his crotch are cut wider than normal pants: “That’s the man’s rule, for example, but it still looks different than if I were wearing Afghan trousers. You can’t tell us apart from the Hipsters today. [...] With women the rule is also so similar that their clothes should be cut wide. And what the beard is for us the headscarf is for them.” (Khalid, 24 August 2017).

Danyal describes his efforts to make himself clearly known as a Muslim on the one hand, but not to appear too foreign on the other hand, as follows:

“I just like these fashionable things. Of course, I wear jeans that are a bit wider and shorter, but I always buy things that are fashionable—but not expensive. I just like it and this has something to do with my personality and my surroundings. I don’t want to look so strange. I am self-confident as a Muslim and I don’t want to pretend that I am not Muslim. I don’t want to appear that I am not Muslim, but I also don’t want to seem that strange somehow.”

Interview with Danyal, 19 July 2018

In this quote he describes three different factors which shape his way of clothing: It is his interpretation and application of his *manhaj* to wear “of course” wider and shorter trousers; furthermore, he wants to show that he is Muslim; and clothing himself in the way he does has also to

⁶ A *qamis* is a traditional outfit originating in the Indian subcontinent with various local styles. As a long shirt or tunic with long sleeves, it is often combined with trousers with legs that are wide at the top and narrow at the ankle.

do with his “personality” and his “surrounding”. He “just like[s] these fashionable things” and does not “want to look so strange” in German society. Here, we can see again how in lived Salafism different concerns and considerations influence the interpretation and application of a religious concept.

For Tarek in turn, who is of Tunisian origin and has been living in Germany for 30 years, being committed and following the path of the *salaf salih* does not require at all any distinct external appearance, especially not in the form of an imitation of Saudi clothing style:

“Being Salafi does not mean having a long beard and wearing a Saudi garment. That goes against my ‘urf [tradition; customary law]. There is no bid’a [illegitimate innovation in religion] in the clothes. Everyone can wear what he wants, as long as it does not contradict Islam. According to the hadith, there are only two things for a male that are forbidden: Gold and silk. Those who have shaved heads and long beards . . . they are not what the companions of the prophets were. They [the salaf] had long hair.”

Interview with Tarek, 7 May 2017

Almost all the Salafi men we spoke to pointed out that it is much more difficult for women to dress in Islam-compliant clothing in German society than it is for men. They argued that Salafi women’s specific dress codes as, e.g., veiling are more conspicuous in contrast to what non-Salafi or non-Muslim women in Germany wear. Thus, women are considered to be more exposed to attacks. In fact, many of our female, veiled interviewees told us about frequent insults and foul language they have been confronted with in public space in one way or another. Furthermore, in particular young women encountered criticism and resistance from their parents and relatives when they changed their clothing to cover more of their body and/or faces. Ceyda, an 18-year-old student at a vocational college, would have liked to wear a *niqab* [a veil covering the face while leaving the eyes uncovered] outside her school for about half a year, but does not dare to do so because her parents are strictly against it. Her parents are both Muslim and her mother wears a headscarf, but they consider a face veil to be wrong and exaggerated. Therefore, when wearing a *niqab* on rare occasions, such as seminars in her mosque where she can meet and exchange with other like-minded young women, Ceyda usually comes by car:

“I always try to borrow my parents’ car on such occasions. It is better to come by car so that no relatives see me on the street and tell my father [that I am wearing a niqab]. I really enjoy meeting here⁷ other niqabi-sisters that I know, and those from different towns and even other European countries.”

Interview with Ceyda, 18 December 2017

She explains that her parents’ objections are mainly due to their fear of disadvantages for her in German society. Other young female interview partners experienced this in a similar way. They also described a conflict between, on the one hand, their conviction that they should respect and obey their parents according to Islam and, on the other hand, their conviction that their clothing practices, which contradict their parents’ wishes, are an essential requirement to follow religious duties. Asye, a 23-year-old woman born in Germany with parents of Turkish origin, wears a *khimar*⁸ and *jilbab*⁹ now. However, her Muslim parents did not want her to wear a headscarf at first:

“I spent a year preparing, so I bought clothes that were decent and they [parents] said from the beginning: No, don’t do that and so on, you will have a lot of disadvantages. [...] Three months after I started to wear a headscarf, I also got my first khimar. I wanted to wear it

⁷ The talk took place during a seminar of several days held in her ‘home mosque’ by an invited guest preacher from Saudi Arabia. It was attended by several hundred people, including some from countries other than Germany.

⁸ A *khimar* is a veil which covers head, neck and shoulders. Usually it is a cloth which comes down to the waist, with a hole cut out for the face.

⁹ Long and loose-fit outer garment.

right away, but then I waited three years [...]. My mother really yelled at me for getting it. [...] I had to get her used to it first. [...] In the beginning I was, yes, subordinate. But over time I just said it was my own way. I have the Islamic evidence for it, so why should I be ashamed of it?"

Interview with Asye, 18 September 2017

Nadya describes her conflict with her father as follows:

"For my father it would be enough if I wore a headscarf and that was it, but for me personally it just doesn't work. Well, I think it's right and they have a different opinion about it, it's complicated sometimes [...]. I see that [only wearing a headscarf] is haram, that it's forbidden, and he sees that it's allowed; it's sometimes a problem, but you can always talk about everything. [...] I mean, we don't harm anyone by dressing like that. If you were to harm someone and violate other people's rights, well, I could understand the objections, but we don't harm anyone by dressing like that."

Interview with Nadya, 18 September 2017

Khalid in turn says that his wife used to want to wear *niqab*, but then they both realized that it was a hindrance for her in German society: "I don't recommend it [to wear *niqab*] to a woman in Germany either. I even think that you are limited in your public life and a Muslim should also fit into society and participate in it." (Khalid, 24 August 2017) Moreover, he fears that the hostility and negative glances to which *niqab* wearers are exposed could also lead to the hardening of their own hearts:

"I think it's a bit difficult in Germany. I also think that [it] has a difficult psychological effect on you, when you are insulted so often. Perhaps then you will lose a little of your mercy, perhaps you will develop such hatred that at some point you will no longer be so merciful yourself."

Interview with Khalid, 24 August 2017

It is important to him to be a part of the neighborhood. He proudly tells that he and his family are greeted by many non-Muslim people on the street: "They like me, even the grandmas". Ahmad, in contrast, feels a strong exclusion and rejection by the non-Muslim majority society. Although he has hardly any personal conflicts with, for example, colleagues at work, he has often experienced how his wife is subjected to discrimination because of her headscarf. He also perceives an increase in anti-Muslim racism, mirrored among other things in Islamophobic remarks in online reader comments of newspaper articles: "It really doesn't matter what a newspaper article is about. If it's pro-Islamic, it's torn to pieces in commentaries, and if it's anti-Islamic, then it's very popular." He is particularly annoyed by the omnipresent insinuations against Muslims "even before we have opened our mouths. There are certain Islamic principles. [...] homosexuality is wrong in this respect, but that doesn't mean that I have a direct problem with a homosexual person or that I see him in a degrading way or something". He has a similar opinion about persons criticizing the headscarf:

"They [veiled women] are accused of letting themselves be oppressed, and men are accused of having an image of women that does not fit in with the 21st century. This is also typically Western, perhaps. Such arrogance to say 'you believe this and that and you think this and that' is typical of the 'white man'—if you can say so. Who are you to tell us what the [headscarf] represents for us, just because it represents it for you? [...] Allah protects me from looking at a woman and protects her from my looks, which is the highest level of respect you can have for the opposite sex. It is a biological reality, that men have the urge to look at a woman, or feel attracted. That's what Allah has imposed on us, it's in our fitra [natural disposition] and it's just like that. Therefore, we just try to take precautions so that nothing gets on the wrong track. [...] If I lower my gaze in front of a woman and don't look at her at

work or anywhere else, many people interpret it in such a way that I don't respect women. But it's exactly the opposite. I respect her so much that I don't see her as an object [...] When I'm forced to be naked, on a beach or in France or somewhere: Is this your kind of respect towards women or how am I supposed to understand it? It's so paradoxical."

(ibid.)

As we can see from this example, the effects on non-Muslims may play a crucial role in some interlocutors' decisions on the visibility of their religious orientation. Specific clothing can appear as a marker of difference, even as a form of open disavowal; these effects are recognized by Salafis, and certainly influence which style of clothing they regard as most adequate. The international political situation, mirrored above in the mentioning of ISIS, as well as possible deviances of local customs, problematized by mentioning a frightened elderly non-Salafi, provoke adjustments in appearance—which are sometimes not even seen as a dilemma between religious duties and everyday pragmatics, but rather as a reasonable and sensible way of living religion within the given local circumstances.

For Danyal, as well as for many of our interlocutors, the expected reaction of non-Muslims or non-Salafis on the streets influences the degree of visibility he chooses to show. He is careful not to appear completely strange, as he wants to be recognized as part of the society, even though he does not approve of some of its values and customs. Nevertheless, he is sometimes exposed to Islamophobic hostility on the street because of his beard and his trousers' length. However, he keeps on wearing these markers of religious orientation because he believes them to be vital for an adequate practice of his belief.

5. Concluding Remarks

As the concept of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* decisively informs Salafis about proper persons to associate with and from whom to distance oneself, understanding the concept's everyday interpretations contributes to understanding Salafi-specific ideas of belongingness on the broad and on the narrow scales of sociality. While a continuous diversification of Salafi groups can be observed, but remains under-researched (Biene et al. 2016; Hummel et al. 2016), paying attention to the interpretations of the concept of loyalty and disavowal can contribute to our general understanding of the demarcation lines between different Salafi orientations: This is the case because looking at interpretations of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* clarifies how Salafi-specific mechanisms of belongingness and ruptures between groups work.

Salafi statements about situations that evoke a reference to loyalty and disavowal also shed light on formations of association and belonging, and the establishing of social borders as well. Exploring the individual interpretations of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* helps to grasp why Salafis of heterogeneous groups feel connected to some co-believers, yet may not be willing to be associated with other Salafis. Contemporary empirical research shows how close Salafi ideas of belonging and faith are interwoven, and how these ideas may help to deal with—or overcome—national and cultural boundaries; e.g., when we look at informal Salafi networks (Pall and de Koning 2017; Pall 2013). The ideal of staying close to a group of morally exemplary ancestors guides and inspires Salafis in these situations—even though they have to regularly face challenges and contradictions regarding the ambiguities of their everyday situations versus their perceived ethical-religious duties (de Koning 2013a). As an indicator and group-specifically interpreted guide to a morally favorable life, the concept of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* plays a decisive role in the ongoing processes of defining a community that is supposed to live in the best possible way which is, in fact, one important facet of what Salafis strive for (de Koning 2013a; Wagemakers 2018).

The aim to trace convictions of belonging as they are negotiated on the microlevel among Salafis in Germany can, thus, be seen as the wider frame of the explanations and examples we have provided above. When references to *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* come into play, there are always issues of belonging at stake. Considering this, we showed what finding paths to a favorable life and belonging to a favorable

group as well as being committed to a certain religious lifestyle actually may look like for individual Salafis, and how these paths and commitments can be shaped in the local context, which involves regular contacts with non-Salafis. Questions of conducting or skipping everyday activities at school or at work; ideas about moving to a different, ‘Muslim’ country or deliberately staying in non-Muslim surroundings while practicing Salafi belief; issues of praying with or greeting Muslims who believe in a different way than they do: Our interlocutors had to deal with all these and many more issues, and they navigated these sensitive questions by drawing on specific understandings of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* implicitly or explicitly. Though principles of loyalty and disavowal do not eliminate obstacles and difficulties, but may even create them, they serve as inspiration for conducting what Salafis regard as a moral life, to which they feel attached and committed.

The meaning and effects of Salafi concepts may transfigure and transform in surroundings that force Salafis to deal with dilemmatic opening up in collisions of belief-related principles with the local routines and circumstances of everyday life. The sociopolitical surrounding in Germany with a growing securitization of Islam and Muslims and the equation of Salafism with radicalization or even Jihadism in public discourse may result in a hardening of principles and feelings of exclusion or even hostility. At the same time, it also demands daily dealing with ‘otherness’, and thus may turn adamant principles to pragmatically and locally re-interpreted guidelines of living that fit into the sociopolitical environment that Salafis inhabit. Often, both tendencies can be observed, as we have seen in this article. Effectively, any doctrine becomes alive and, thus, dynamic when it is applied in everyday life and specific sociocultural circumstances; this is one reason why we find so many different interpretations of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*.

As Schielke (2015, pp. 128–48) argues within his case studies of three Egyptian Salafis, everyday lives of people are always embedded in their specific life trajectories, personal and societal settings which can shape their experiences of religious commitment and dedication by ambivalences, dynamics and transformations. Chaplin (2018) shows that ambiguities do not only arise when they are unavoidable in predominantly non-Muslim contexts, but they also arise in a predominantly Muslim environment. Regardless of whether Salafis are living in a country with a Muslim majority or in a country with a non-Muslim majority: The interpretation of religious duties and principles is always a product of interaction between (in the case of Germany: predominantly non-Muslim) sociopolitical and cultural surroundings, on the one hand, and faith doctrines and transnational religious normativities, on the other hand. Furthermore, as the examples in our article show, there are dynamic interdependencies of an individual’s interpretation and application of a core concept such as *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* with various other factors of everyday reality such as personal concerns and considerations and moral frameworks.

Often, it is “the everyday schemes (playing football, gender roles, work–life balance, education and so on) which inform the lives of many people who are also Muslims and not necessarily dogmatism and strict ritual adherence” (Jedtoft 2016, p. 30). While being engaged to live a pious life, people do not walk around in “religious bubbles” (Kloos and Beekers 2018, p. 5) and are always influenced by manifold social interdependencies and societal contexts. In the demands and realities of everyday lives occur manifold dynamic interactions between an individual’s religious and nonreligious concerns, moral frameworks, and practices (ibid.: 9). According to Deeb (2015, p. 96), the everyday is shaped by religious discipline and normativity—but at the same time, religious discipline and normativity are themselves produced through and change via social life. We think that the ubiquitous interjunction of religious and non-religious schemes also applies to individual Salafis’ adaptations of concepts like *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*: Religious concepts have to be understood within the specific circumstances in which they are applied, and their interpretation is never detached from these circumstances. There is no such thing as a Salafi doctrine that looks the same everywhere in the world, and persons who associate themselves with Salafi ideas can at times differ significantly even within one single spectrum as we have demonstrated above. Abstract principles only become effective when applied, and application always means a local and situational re-interpretation.

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