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## THE DIFFERENT AND SIMILAR ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL SALAFISM AND NEO-SALAFISM

GELENEKSEL SELEFİZM İLE NEO-SELEFİZMİN FARKLI VE BENZER YÖNLERİ

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**Abstract**

There are quite important conflicts in the Muslim world especially in recent years. Because of different organizations and groups, these conflicts get more complicated every day. There are a lot of different organizations which allege that they make jihad for the sake of Allah. These organizations mostly fight against other Muslims in order to gain power in their regions. These groups are named as Jihadi Neo-Salafis / Jihadi Modern Salafis by authorities. Therefore, it is important to differentiate Traditional Salafism from Neo-Salafism. It is because first term Salafis were right people who try to find the best way to approach Allah without any negative intentions like gaining reputations or political advantages. However, Neo-Salafis mostly represent a notion that evolved from Wahhabism to Kharijism. Neo-Salafism is a common name of radical, fanatic and exclusionist Islamic groups around the world. Neo-Salafi scholars interpret the Qur'an especially verses about jihad in an extremist way. For example, in Sa'di's commentary book, he does not state about the minimum requirements of jihad declaration, and types of jihad.

**Keywords:** Neo-Salafism, Salafism, the Qur'an, Exegesis.

**Öz**

Özellikle de son yıllarda Müslüman dünyasında giderek artan önemli çatışmalar yaşanmaktadır. Bu çatışmalar, farklı düşüncelerden gruplar sebebiyle her geçen gün daha karmaşık bir hâl almaktadır. Allah yolunda cihad ettiğini ileri süren pek çok farklı örgüt mevcuttur. Bu örgütler ise kendi var oldukları bölgelerde güçlerini artırmak için genellikle diğer Müslüman örgütlere karşı çatışma hâlinindedir. Bu gruplar otoriteler tarafından "Cihadçı Modern Selefiler" veya "Cihadçı Neo-Selefiler" olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu sebeple geleneksel Selefizm ile Neo-Selefizm arasındaki farklılıkları anlamak oldukça önemli bir husustur. Çünkü ilk dönem selefiler, Allah'a ulaşma noktasında hangi yaklaşımın en doğru olacağını bulmaya çalışan doğru insanlardır. İlk dönem Selefilerde herhangi bir art niyet ve güç veya siyasi avantaj kazanma gibi isteklerin varlığından söz edemeyiz. Ancak Neo-Selefizm, daha çok Vehhabilik ve Haricilik gibi radikal, fanatik ve tekfirci yaklaşımlardan evrilmiş ve bu kavramların dünyadaki ortak adı hâline gelmiştir. Neo-Selefi akademisyenler ve ilim adamları Kur'an-ı Kerim'i özellikle de cihad ile alakalı ayetleri çok aşırı bir şekilde tevil etmişlerdir. Örneğin es-Sadi'nin tefsir kitabında, cihad için olması gereken asgari gerekliliklerden ve cihad türlerinden bahsedilmemiş, cihadın cephede savaşmak anlamı vurgulanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Neo-Selefizm, Selefizm, Kur'an-ı Kerim, Tefsir.

### Extended Abstract

*There are quite important conflicts in the Muslim world especially in recent years. There is a heart wrenching human tragedy in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and other Islamic countries. It can be said that there are a lot of reasons behind this situation. However, the most important reason is the presence of different groups and organizations that aim to gain power and reputation by showing themselves as mujahids. Because of different organizations and groups, these conflicts get more complicated every day. There are a lot of different organizations which allege that they make jihad for the sake of Allah. These organizations mostly fight against other Muslims in order to gain power in their regions. These groups are named as Jihadi Neo-Salafis / Jihadi Modern Salafis by authorities. Another important issue with these Jihadi Neo-Salafi groups is that they ignore other types of jihad and simplify it as armed struggle. The concept of jihad involves different types of making effort for the sake of Allah and Islam. However, Neo-Salafis abuse jihad by simplifying it in order to gain power, and show themselves as true Muslims.*

*The acts of violence make an impactful contribution to the concept of Islamophobia. Islamophobia spreads rapidly around the world. As a matter of fact, some Western politicians abuse Islamophobia in order to gain support. Jihadi Neo-Salafism is the main reason of Islamophobia because of the acts of violence. Modern Salafi scholars make some extremist interpretations to support the acts of Jihadi Neo-Salafi violence. Under the name of Salafism and jihad, they have taken advantage of violence, and organize attacks on other legal or illegal groups. The actions of these groups provide a suitable environment for the enemies of Islam. Islam and Muslims are accused of suicide attacks, decapitations, enslavements and destructions because of jihadi organizations.*

*Discussing topics like the reasons, place and target of violence that is caused by Neo-Salafi organizations (especially jihadi wing) can make this article a very comprehensive work. Especially the topics that are related to foreign powers which supports these organizations require great effort. These topics can be discussed in the studies in the future. In this paper, the similar and different characteristics of traditional Salafism and Neo-Salafism will be discussed.*

*It is important to differentiate Traditional Salafism from Neo-Salafism. It is because first term Salafis were right people who try to find the best way to approach to Allah without any negative intentions like gaining reputations or political advantages. Salafism means following "Salaf" which means ancestors in Arabic. It is hard to determine a starting point for Salafism. At first, Salafism is considered as a concept which refers to the general approach of early Islamic era in terms of belief related topics. Rather than being a sect, Salafism can be considered as a perspective that aims to conserve early Islamic approach. Salafism was a religious information production method at first. In addition to this, Salafism evolved into a systematic ideology thanks to the efforts of Ibn Tamiyyah (d. 1328) and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1350). According to Ibn Tamiyyah, it is obligatory to follow Salafs because their provisions are more propitious than other scholars. It can be said that Salafis also argue that the problems of Muslim countries and regions can only be solved by applying the messages and ideas of the Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad and first term caliphates. As an information production method, Salafism is defined as following the path of these resources. Therefore, there are different definitions such as "Salafi path", "Salafi method" "Salafi sect" for this way of information production. In Salafism, the interpretations and hadiths of Prophet Muhammad form the major axis. If there is a necessity to adjudicate on a topic, it is essential to take his speeches and behaviors into consideration.*

*However, Neo-Salafis mostly represent a notion that evolved from Wahhabism to Kharijism. Neo-Salafism is quite different than Traditional Salafism in many aspects. Even if Neo-Salafi claim that they follow the path of Traditional Salafism in terms of belief and infidelity, the reality is controversial with their claim. Neo-Salafism is a common name of radical, fanatic and exclusionist Islamic groups around the world. Neo-Salafis also consider cults as a new religion inside Islam so they do not tolerate the actions of cult members like inviting people to their cult. According to Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), accepting a person (this person might be a cult leader, saint, prophet or the epitome of Prophet Muhammad) as a helper in order to reach Allah is polytheism. Like Wahhabis, Neo-Salafis have also destroyed graves because visiting someone's grave is considered as polytheism by them.*

*Salafi scholars interpret the Qur'an especially verses about jihad in radical way in comparison with other commentaries. For example, in Sa'di's commentary book, he does not state about the minimum requirements of jihad declaration, and types of jihad. Neo-Salafism cannot be defined as the continuation of Traditional Salafism. This is because Neo-Salafis especially jihadi wing of it act like modern Kharijites in terms of declaring other Muslims as infidels and fight against them. Even if Traditional Salafism and Neo-Salafism are so different, there are some similarities between these ideologies. For example, they both ignore mind and logic and accept only the Qur'an and Hadiths.*

### Geniş Özet

Özellikle de son yıllarda Müslüman dünyasında giderek artan önemli çatışmalar yaşanmaktadır. Neredeyse her gün; Suriye, Irak, Libya, Yemen ve diğer İslam ülkelerinde yürek burkan insanlık dramına şahitlik etmekteyiz. Bu durumun arkasında pek çok farklı sebebin yattığı söylenebilir. Ancak en önemli sebep; kendilerini mücahid olarak tanımlayan, güç ve şöhret kazanmayı amaçlayarak farklı eylemler gerçekleştiren çeşitli grupların ve örgütlerin bu bölgelerdeki varlığıdır. Bu örgütlerin pek çoğu yabancı devletlerden yardım almaktadır. Bu çatışmalar, farklı düşüncelerden gruplar sebebiyle her geçen gün daha karmaşık bir hâl almaktadır. Allah yolunda cihad ettiğini ileri süren pek çok farklı örgüt mevcuttur. Bu örgütler ise kendi var oldukları bölgelerde güçlerini artırmak için genellikle diğer Müslüman örgütlere karşı çatışma hâlinindedir. Bu gruplar otoriteler tarafından “Cihadçı Modern Selefilere” veya “Cihadçı Neo-Selefilere” olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu cihadçı Neo-Selefi örgütler ile alakalı bir diğer önemli mesele ise cihadın çeşitlerini görmezden gelerek, cihad kavramını yalnızca silahlı mücadeleye indirgemeleridir. Hâlbuki cihad kavramı, Allah ve İslam için gösterilen çeşitli tarzlardaki çabaları kapsar. Neo-Selefilere ise güç kazanmak ve kendilerini gerçek Müslümanlar olarak göstermek için cihad kavramını basitleştirerek onu suiistimal etmektedirler. Yaşanan şiddet eylemleri ise İslamofobi düşüncesine zemin hazırlanmaktadır. İslamofobi tüm dünyada özellikle de Batı toplumlarında hızlı bir şekilde yayılmaktadır. Bunun bir neticesi olarak, bazı batılı politikacılar İslamofobiden beslenerek kendilerine destekçi aramaktadır. Cihadçı Neo-Selefilere ise ilişkili oldukları şiddet eylemleri sebebiyle İslamofobinin yayılmasının en temel sebeplerinden biridir. Modern Selefi ilim adamları ise aşırı bir yaklaşımla yaptıkları tefsirler ile cihadçı Neo-selefi örgütlerin gerçekleştirdiği şiddet olaylarını desteklemekte ve bu örgütlerin eylemlerini meşru bir zemine oturtmaktadırlar. Bu örgütler, Seleflik ve cihad kavramlarını kullanarak diğer yasal veya yasa dışı gruplara ve örgütlere saldırılar düzenleyerek güç kazanmaya çalışmaktadırlar. Bu örgütlerin eylemleri ise İslam düşmanlarının güç kazanması için gerekli koşulların oluşmasına zemin hazırlanmaktadır. Bu sebeple dünyanın pek çok yerinde yaşayan Müslümanlar intihar saldırılarıyla, esir almayla, köleleştirmeyle ve yakıp yıkılmakla itham edilmektedir.

Neo-Selefi örgütlerin özellikle cihadçı grupların sebep olduğu şiddet olaylarının hangi örgütler tarafından, nerede ve kime karşı yapıldıkları gibi hususları bu makalede detaylı bir şekilde ele almak çok genel bir çalışma olacaktır. Özellikle bu örgütlerin var oluş sebepleri ve arkalarındaki yabancı güçler ile alakalı konular başlı başına büyük bir çaba gerektirmektedir. Bu konuların ileride yapılacak çalışmalarda ele alınması daha doğru olacaktır. Bu çalışmada ise geleneksel Selefi anlayışla Neo-Selefilere benzer ve farklı yönleri ele alınacaktır.

Geleneksel Selefizm ile Neo-Selefizm arasındaki farklılıkları anlamak oldukça önemli bir husustur. Çünkü ilk dönem selefiler, Allah’a ulaşma noktasında hangi yaklaşımın en doğru olacağını bulmaya çalışan doğru insanlardır. İlk dönem selefilerde herhangi bir art niyet ve güç veya siyasi avantaj kazanma gibi isteklerin varlığından söz edemeyiz. Selefi Arapçada eskiler, atalar anlamına gelmektedir. Selefizmin ise kelime anlamı olarak ataları takip etme anlamına geldiği söylenebilir. Selefizm için bir başlangıç noktası belirlemek oldukça zordur. Erken İslami dönemde Selefizm, inanç ile alakalı konulardaki genel bir yaklaşım anlamında kullanılmıştır.

Selefizmi, bir mezhep olarak ele almak yerine erken İslami yaklaşımı korumak amacı güden bir bakış açısı olarak değerlendirmek daha doğru olacaktır. Selefizm ilk zamanlar, dinî bilgi üretim yöntemi olarak ortaya çıkmış; İbn Temiyye ve öğrencisi İbn Kayyim el-Cevziyye’nin katkılarıyla, Selefizm sistematik bir ideolojiye evrilmiştir. İbn Temiyye’ye göre, selefleri takip etmek bir seçenek değil zorunluluktur. Çünkü onların hükümleri diğer ilim adamlarına göre daha geçerlidir. Selefiler ayrıca, Müslüman dünyasındaki sıkıntı ve zorlukların Kur’an-ı Kerim’in, Hz. Muhammed’in ve ilk dönem halifelerinin emir, yasak ve tavsiyeleri uygulanarak aşılabileceğini ileri sürerler. Bir bilgi üretme yöntemi olarak Selefizm, bu üç temel kaynağın takip edilmesi olarak tanımlanabilir. Bu sebeple bu yöntem “Selefi yol” veya “Selefi yöntem” olarak adlandırılmıştır. Selefizimde tefsirler ve Hz. Muhammed’in hadisleri oldukça önemli bir yere sahiptir. Eğer bir hususta herhangi bir yargıya varmak gerekirse, Hz. Muhammed’i söz ve davranışlarını hesaba katmak mühimdir.

Neo-Selefizm geleneksel Selefi yaklaşımdan pek çok açıdan farklıdır. Neo-Selefiler, kendilerinin inanç hususunda geleneksel Selefi yaklaşımı takip ettiklerini iddia etseler de gerçekler bu iddialarla tezatlık içindedir. Neo-Selefizm, daha çok Vehhabilik ve Haricilik gibi radikal, fanatik ve tekfirci yaklaşımlardan evrilmiş ve bu kavramların dünyadaki ortak adı hâline gelmiştir. Neo-Selefiler, tarikatları İslam’ın içerisinde yeni bir din oluşturma çabası olarak görüp, tarikat mensuplarının insanları kendi tarikatlarına davet etmelerini boş karşılamazlar. Muhammed bin Abdulvehhâb’a göre bir kişiyi (cemaat lideri, imam, peygamber vb.) Allah’a ulaşmak için yardımcı olarak kabul etmek Allah’a ortak koşmaktır. Vehhabiler gibi Neo-selefiler de mezarları ziyaret etmenin Allah’a şirk koşmak olduğunu düşünerek mezarları yıkmışlardır.

*Selefi akademisyenler ve ilim adamları Kur'an-ı Kerim'i özellikle de cihad ile alakalı ayetleri; diğer pek çok tefsirle karşılaştırıldıklarında radikal sayılabilecek bir şekilde tevîl etmişlerdir. Örneğin es-Sadi'nin tefsir kitabında, cihad için olması gereken asgari gerekliliklerden ve cihad türlerinde bahsedilmemiş, cihadın cephede savaşmak anlamı vurgulanmıştır. Neo-Selefizmi, geleneksel Selefi yaklaşımın bir devamı olarak görmek büyük bir hata olacaktır. Çünkü Neo-Selefiler özellikle de cihadçı kanat-, tıpkı Hariciler gibi bir kişiyi kolaylıkla mürted veya kâfir ilan edebilirler. Geleneksel Selefi yaklaşım ile Neo-Selefizmin birbirine benzeyen en önemli noktaları ise akli ve mantığı görmezden gelerek sadece Kur'an'ı ve Hz. Muhammed'in söz ve davranışlarını esas almalarıdır. Ancak bu husus, iki yaklaşımın birbirine benzediği sonucuna varmak için yeterli olmaktan oldukça uzaktır.*

## Introduction

In recent years, there are really important conflicts in the Muslim world. There is a heart wrenching human tragedy in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and other Islamic countries. It can be said that there are a lot of reasons behind this situation. However, the most important reason is the presence of different groups and organizations that aim to gain power and reputation by showing themselves as mujahids.<sup>1</sup> Under the name of Salafism and jihad, they have taken advantage of violence, and organize attacks on other legal or illegal groups. The actions of these groups provide a suitable environment for the enemies of Islam. Islam and Muslims are accused for suicide attacks, decapitations, enslavements and destructions because of jihadi organizations.

Another important issue with these Jihadi Neo-Salafi groups is that they ignore all types of jihad and simplify it as armed struggle. The concept of jihad involves different types of making effort for the sake of Allah and Islam. However, Neo-Salafis abuse jihad by simplifying it in order to gain power, and show themselves as true Muslims.<sup>2</sup> In order to be able to prevent these organization, it is important to understand their ideology. Neo-Salafism is an extremist version of Traditional Salafism which is accepted as one of the right approaches of Islam.

The acts of violence make an impactful contribution to the concept of Islamophobia. Islamophobia spreads rapidly around the world. As a matter of fact, some Western politicians abuse Islamophobia in order gain support. However, no culture has the luxury of existing in its own world anymore. Therefore, humanity must work together to find common solutions to the problems faced by societies.<sup>3</sup> Jihadi Neo-Salafism is the main reason of Islamophobia because of the acts of violence. Modern Salafi scholars make some extremist interpretations to support the acts of Jihadi Neo-Salafi violence.<sup>4</sup> Discussing topics like the reasons, place and target of violence that is caused by Neo-Salafi organizations (especially jihadi wing) can make this article a very comprehensive work. Especially the topics that are related to foreign

<sup>1</sup> Adis Duderija, "Neo-Traditional Salafi Qur'an-Sunnah Hermeneutic and the Construction of a Normative Muslimah Image", *Hawwa*, 5/2-3 (2007), 289.

<sup>2</sup> Mohamed Ali, *Salafis, Salafism and Modern Salafism: What Lies Behind a Term?* (Singapore: Nanyang Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Harun Çağlayan, "Methods and Varieties of Guidance According to İmām Mātūrīdī", *Ulum* 2/1 (2019), 30.

<sup>4</sup> Assaf Moghadam, "Motives for Martyrdom: Al-Qaida, Salafi jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks", *International Security*, 33/3 (2009), 42-43.

powers which supports these organizations require great effort. These topics can be discussed in the studies in the future. In this paper, how Traditional Salafism and Neo-Salafism were emerged will be discussed, and how Salafi scholars interpret the Qur'an in a sharp way in order to encourage Muslims to participate in jihad will be analyzed.

### 1. Tradition Salafism and Neo-Salafism

Salafism means following "Salaf" which means ancestors in Arabic.<sup>5</sup> It is hard to determine a starting point for Salafism. At first, Salafism is evaluated as a concept which refers to the general approach of early Islamic era in terms of belief related topics. Rather than being a sect, Salafism can be considered as a perspective that aims to conserve early Islamic approach. Salafism can also be defined as an approach which aims to produce information by using certain resources. Therefore, Salafism is accepted as following the path of Prophet Muhammad and his companions by some Muslim scholar. Salafism does not hold with using other resources. It is because Salafis argue that Islam consists of the rules that are set by Allah and his prophet. Therefore, Islam can only be learnt from the Qur'an Prophet Muhammad and his companions who learnt Islam from Prophet Muhammad and his companions.<sup>6</sup> If there is a necessity to get fatwa, it is better to consult the idea of these people, rather than consulting modern imams (Muslim religious leader). It is because first term imams are chronologically closer to Prophet Muhammad and learnt the practices of Islam from the main source.

It can be said that Salafis also argue that the problems of Muslim countries and regions can only be solved by applying the messages and ideas of the Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad and first term caliphates.<sup>7</sup> As an information production method, Salafism is defined as following the path of these resources. Therefore, there are different definitions such as "Salafi path", "Salafi method" "Salafi sect" for this way of information production.<sup>8</sup> In Salafism, the interpretations of the Qur'an and hadiths of Prophet Muhammad form the major axis. If there is a necessity to adjudicate on a topic, it is essential to take his speeches and behaviors into consideration.

There were a lot of scholars who follow Salafi methodology and write books during the second and third century of the hegira. The most important representatives of these scholars are Imam Bukhari, Muslim, Imam Malik, Imam Shāfiī, Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Ahmad ibn Hanbal is the most famous representative of ahlal hadith, and he is considered as the first imam of ahlal hadith. Hanbalism that is formed by his idea can be considered as the

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<sup>5</sup> Mustafa Aydın, *Neo-Selefilik Ekolünün Hadis-Sünnet Anlayışı (Reşid Rıza Örneği)* (Adana: Çukurova University, Institute of Social Science, Doctoral Dissertation, 2018), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Hasan Başmısırlı, *Selefi İdeoloji ve Avrupa'da Radikalleşme Üzerine Etkileri* (Kayseri: Kadir Has University, Institute of Social Science, Master's Thesis, 2017), 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> Selim Öztürk, *Siyasal Selefilik Sudi Arabistan ve Taliban'ın Oluşumundaki Rolü* (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, Institute of Social Science, Doctoral Dissertation, 2018), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Mehmet Zeki İşcan, "Tarih Boyunca Selefi Söylem", *İlahiyat Akademi*, 1/1-2 (2015), 2-4.

substructure of Salafism. Hanbalism places itself against Abu Hanifa (The Great Imam) who puts personal interpretation forward.<sup>9</sup>

As it is mentioned, Salafism was a religious information production method at first. In addition to this, Salafism evolved into a systematic ideology thanks to the efforts of Ibn Tamiyyah and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. According to Ibn Tamiyyah, it is obligatory to follow Salafs because their provisions are more propitious than other scholars. Ibn Tamiyyah and his students mostly emphasized the perspectives and interpretations of Salafs, and indicate their loyalty to Salafs. Because of this, they are called as “Salafi” by people since then. After the effects of Ibn Tamiyyah, Salafism became popular in Islamic world gradually. He defines Salafi methodology as following the provisions of first term Salafi imams who judge in terms of the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to all these definitions, it is important to know that today’s Neo-Salafism (Modern Salafism / Political Salafism) is quite different than Traditional Salafism which Ibn Tamiyyah regiments. It can be said that Modern Salafism shows up in Arabian Peninsula in 18<sup>th</sup> century. Salafism that is considered as information production methodology has become a political attitude because of the efforts of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Abd al-Wahhab aimed to establish a new state in Najd/Arabia. Therefore, he adopted a Salafi perspective to justify his actions by blaming Ottoman Empire’s Hanafi ideology. As a result of his actions, Salafism has evolved into an exclusionary perspective. He used the concept of Salafism for his political goals. Therefore, most of the scholars (especially Ottoman scholars) named his approach as Wahhabism.<sup>11</sup> He reached his goal, and a new Saudi Kingdom was established in Najd. Wahhabism was accepted as official ideology of the government. Thanks to this situation, Wahhabism has spread to other regions.

Salafi scholars only consider the Qur’an and Hadiths as the true sources of Islam. They accept verses and hadiths as equal.<sup>12</sup> It is because they show Surah al-Najm as an evidence of the idea of hadiths are continuations of the Qur’an. Another important starting point of Salafis is this hadith: *“The best people are those of my generation, then those who come after them, then those who come after them. Then, there will come people after them whose testimony precedes their oaths and their oaths precede their testimony.”*<sup>13</sup>

Even if Neo-Salafis allege that they follow the idea of Traditional Salafis, they mostly represent an idea which evolved from Wahhabism to Kharijism. Neo-Salafism is a common

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Ungureanu, “Wahhabism, Salafism and the Expansion of Islamic Fundamentalist Ideology”, *Journal of the Seminar of Discursive Logic, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric*, 9/2 (2011), 142.

<sup>10</sup> Duderija, “Neo-Traditional Salafi Qur’an-Sunnah Hermeneutic”, 290.

<sup>11</sup> İşcan, “Tarih Boyunca Selefi Söylem”, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Duderija, “Neo-Traditional Salafi Qur’an-Sunnah Hermeneutic”, 293.

<sup>13</sup> Ebu Abdillah Muhammed b. İsmail Al-Bukhari, *El-Câmi’u’s-şâhîb*. (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2000), “Ar-Riqaq”, 437.

name of radical, fanatic and exclusionist Islamic groups around the world.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it can be said that Neo-Salafism is not a sect but an ideology. As it is mentioned, early Salafis argued that they only accept the Qur'an, Hadith and first term Salafs, and exclude mind and logic. However, Neo-Salafis follow an extremist path of Wahhabism which is an extremist path of Salafism.<sup>15</sup>

Neo-Salafism is quite different than Traditional Salafism in many aspects. Even if Neo-Salafis claim that they follow the path of Traditional Salafism in terms of belief and infidelity, the reality is controversial with their claim. Ahmad ibn Hanbal who is the pioneer of Salafism, and Ibn Tamiyyah who systematizes Salafism consider practice as a part of faith. However, they only call those who do not pray as sinner rather than calling them as infidel. Traditional Salafi scholars evaluate great sins as sin which do not make sinner infidel.<sup>16</sup> However, Neo-Salafis act like modern Kharijites, and declare all Muslims as infidels apart from Neo-Salafi Muslims.

Jihadi Neo-Salafis fight against Muslims, and take their properties and women as the spoil of war. Therefore, they are a great danger for Islamic brotherhood. Far from considering great sins as a reason for calling a Muslim as infidel, they even consider small sins such as smoking cigarette as a reason to execute people. For example, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) mostly fight against Muslims instead of non-Muslims.<sup>17</sup> Because of this, they are even criticized by Al-Qaeda. Therefore, it can be said that Neo-Salafis have violated the path of Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ibn Tamiyyah. Neo-Salafis also consider cults as a new religion inside Islam so they do not tolerate the actions of cult members like inviting people to their cult. According to Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, accepting a person (*this person might be a cult leader, saint, prophet or the epitome of Prophet Muhammad*) as a helper in order to reach Allah is polytheism. Like Wahhabis, Neo-Salafis have also destroyed graves because visiting someone's grave is considered as polytheism by them.<sup>18</sup>

In general, Salafism can be examined in five terms. In the first term (the first century after hegira), there is not a prominent man but there are a lot of people who give importance to "Salafs". In the second term (the third century after hegira), Ahmad Ibn Hanbal is accepted as the first imam of Salafism. He is the leader of hadith supporters. In the third term (the eighth century after hegira), Ibn Tamiyyah systemizes Salafism as a religious principle. He is accepted as the second imam of Salafism. He uses the terms of "Salaf",

<sup>14</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, "The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad", *Middle East Policy*, 8/4 (Temmuz 2007), 17-19.

<sup>15</sup> Vahid Hosseinzadeh, "Salafism and its Socio-Intellectual Foundations", *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 3/1 (2015), 28-29.

<sup>16</sup> Mehmet Kubat, "Selefiyye İle Neo-Selefilik'in Kesişen ve Ayrışan Yönleri", *İnönü University International Journal of Social Sciences (INIJOSS)*, 6/2 (Aralık 2017), 128-130.

<sup>17</sup> Berker Yıldız, *Selefilik ve Suriye İç Savaşında Selefi Örgütler Arasındaki Çatışmalar* (İstanbul: Yıldız Technical University, Institute of Social Science, Master's Thesis, 2019), 91.

<sup>18</sup> Kubat, "Selefiyye İle Neo-Selefilik'in Kesişen ve Ayrışan Yönleri", 136-137.

“Salafi”, “Salafism” for the first time. The fourth term (the eleventh century after hegira), Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab converts Salafism into a political shape. As it is mentioned above, most people believe that he used Salafism in order to justify his political actions. In the last term (today), Salafism has evolved into a perspective which includes different political ideologies. It is named as Neo-Salafism which supports jihadi organizations and violence.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. How Salafis Interpret the Qur’an

It can be beneficial to analyze how modern Salafi scholars interpret the Qur’an in their commentary books in order to how Jihadi Neo-Salafi organizations justify their behaviors. In this paper, we choose Shaykh Abd al-Rahman al-Sa’di (d. 1956) who is a very important and impactful Salafi scholar. Sa’di was born in al-Qasm in 1889. Because of his intelligence, he improved himself and became famous. Muslims around the world were asking religious questions to him in order to get fatwa.<sup>20</sup>

Two verses which are related to jihad from the Qur’an is selected to analyze how Sa’di interprets them. The first verse is At-Tawbah 9: 19-22: *“Have you made the providing of water for the pilgrim and maintenance of al-Masjid al-Haram equal to [the deeds of] one who believes in Allah and the Last Day and strives in the cause of Allah? They are not equal in the sight of Allah. And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people. The ones who have believed, emigrated and striven in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives are greater in rank in the sight of Allah. And it is those who are the attainers [of success]. Their Lord gives them good tidings of mercy from Him and approval and gardens for them wherein is enduring pleasure. [They will be] abiding therein forever. Indeed, Allah has with Him a great reward.”*

According to Sa’di, some Muslims think and claimed that visiting the al-Masjid al-Haram, maintaining its structure and giving water to the pilgrims are substantial behaviors in the presence Allah so these behaviors are equal to participating in jihad for the sake of Allah. Therefore, Allah stated that there are some differences between them. In the verse water refers to Zamzam water. Faith in Allah and participate in jihad for the sake of him are superior behaviors than providing Zamzam to pilgrims and taking care of the needs of al-Masjid al-Haram. This is because faith in Allah is the foundation of Islam. This is a very essential requirement that can determine the acceptability of prays. Jihad is also quite important that Islam can be protected and expanded thanks to jihad. Therefore, it can be said that jihad is the peak of Islam that helps Muslims to spread the truth and suppress the falsehood.<sup>21</sup>

Even if providing Zamzam for pilgrims and taking care of the needs of al-Masjid al-Haram are righteous deeds, the acceptability of these deeds depends on faith. Also, these deeds do not have the same rank with faith and jihad even if they are accepted by Allah.

<sup>19</sup> İşcan, “Tarih Boyunca Selefi Söylem”, 2-10.

<sup>20</sup> Daoud Mohammad Nassimi, *A Thematic Comparative Review of Some English Translations of the Qur’an* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Institute of Social Science, Doctoral Dissertation, 2008), 80-81.

<sup>21</sup> Abdurrahman Sa’di, *Taysir Al-Karim Al-Rahman Fi Tafsir Kalam Al-Mannan* (Beirut: Al Resalah Publisher, 2005).

Therefore, Allah states that “*They are not equal before Allah.*” in the verse. After this, Allah makes it clear that faith and jihad are superior than these deeds. If a Muslim offers his life or his wealth to spend for jihad and equip the soldiers has more rank than those who does not participate in jihad in the presence of Allah. In the end of the verse, Allah reminds his generosity, kindness and mercy.

The second verse is Al-Baqarah 2: 216: “*Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not.*”

According to Sa’di, Muslims were ordered to refrain from fighting by Allah. It was because they were weak and not ready to fight. Therefore, Muslims migrated to Madinah where they can rest and invite people to Islam. When the number of Muslims was enough for fighting, Allah ordered Muslims to fight. In the verse, it is stated that this is something disliked by them. It is because fighting contains a lot of problems such as fear, hardship, losing some organs and death. However, fighting is still a quite profitable option because what it brings of great rewards such as avoiding from punishment, victory over enemy and other benefits. On the other hand, the verse emphasizes that Muslims may think that refraining from jihad and preferring comfort and console are better for them. If Muslims prefer this, this situation leads to defeat. As a result of defeat, the enemies of Islam gain power for humiliation and degradation. Because Allah is all knowing, he knows what is better for Muslims. Therefore, it is important to follow what Allah ordered for Muslims. He is more merciful to his servants than they are to themselves. Therefore, Allah says “*Allah knows, while you know not.*” These verses all ratify that good practices which may not be liked by Muslims because of the adversity of the situation are beneficial for Muslims beyond any doubt.<sup>22</sup>

### Result

As a result, Neo-Salafism cannot be defined as the continuation of Traditional Salafism. This is because Neo-Salafis especially jihadi wing of it act like modern Kharijites in terms of declaring other Muslims as infidels and fight against them. Even if Traditional Salafism and Neo-Salafism are so different, there are some similarities between these ideologies. For example, they both ignore mind and logic and accept only the Qur’an and Hadiths.

On the other hand, these two ideologies have two main differences. The first difference is that Neo-Salafis interpret the Qur’an and Hadiths in an extremist way. When Sa’di’s commentary book is examined, it can be seen that he does not state about the minimum requirements of jihad declaration. He also does not mention about the conditions of that period. Another important characteristic of Sa’di’s commentary book is that he does

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<sup>22</sup> Sa’di, *Taysir Al-Karim Al-Rahman*.

not mention about the types of jihad. In general, the concept of jihad includes all types of struggles which are endured by Muslims in order to gain the mercy of Allah.

In spite of the fact that jihad is a very wide topic, Sa'di only emphasizes the armed struggle part of it like other Neo-Salafi commentators. In his commentary book, he supports jihad and shows armed struggle as the foundation of Islam. On the other hand, these verses about jihad are interpreted in a soft way by other commentators. They mostly emphasize that jihad does not necessarily mean armed struggle only. They also indicate that jihad can be declared for self-defense when some specific conditions are met.

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