

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Khawarij in
Modern Islamic Historiography

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Islamic Studies

by

Hussam S. Timani

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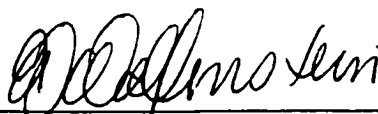
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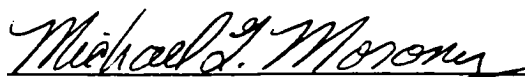
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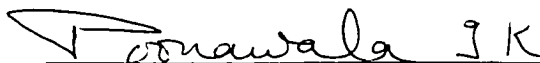
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2002

FOR MY MOTHER

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Note on transliteration

Transliteration of Arabic words and phrases generally follows the system adopted by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. I have omitted diacritics except for the *hamza* and the *'ayn*. All Arabic words, except for proper names and standard English forms, are italicized.

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“The Concept of Intellect (*al-‘Aql*) in Medieval Islamic Thought,” a paper presented at the 1st annual meeting of the Institute of Druze Studies (IDS), University of California, Los Angeles, June 11-12, 1999.

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Review of *The Druzes in the Jewish State: A Brief History*, by Kais M. Firro. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) (August 2000): 432-434.

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Review of *Al-Saqifa: Inqilabun Abyad* [*Al-Saqifa: A White Revolution*], by Najah al-Ta‘i. *Al-‘Usur al-Wusta* (October 1998): 62-63.

Review of *Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism, and the State*, by Sondra Hale. *Jusur*, the UCLA Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (Vol.14, 1998): 71.

Review of *Fi Usul Tarikh al-'Arab al-Islami* [*Origins of Arab-Islamic History*], by Muhammad Hassan Shurrab. *Al-'Usur al-Wusta* (October 1998): 62.

Review of *Tahqiq Mawaqif al-Sahaba fi al-Fitna min Riwayat al-Imam al-Tabari wa al-Muhaddithin* [*The Positions of the Companions on the Civil War from the Reports of al-Tabari and the Transmitters of Hadith*], By Muhammad A. Mahzun. *Al-'Usur al-Wusta* (April 1998): 27-28.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Khawarij in Modern

Islamic Historiography

By

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This dissertation discusses the Khawarij in modern Islamic scholarship. Chapter one discusses the rise of the Khawarij and the historical events that took place from the accession of 'Uthman until the death of 'Ali. A great deal of attention was given to 'Ali's reign since the Khawarij made their first appearance during his rule and in the midst of the battle of Siffin. Also, special attention was given to the events that took place after the death of 'Ali to show how the

Khawarij survived by making the *hijra* to the Maghrib region to escape persecution on one hand, and to establish a base to continue their propagation afterwards, on the other hand.

Chapter two discusses the western historiography of the Khawarij. It seems that earlier scholars who wrote their histories of the group at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were more concerned about who the Khawarij were than why they rebelled. In contrast, later writers touched on the causes that led the Khawarij to deviate from orthodox Islam. A number of western historians who saw similarities between the Khawarij and modern fundamentalists were prompted to give the Khawarij a lengthy analysis and discussion in their works.

Chapter three discusses the Khawarij in modern Arab/Muslim historiography from three different perspectives: first, Arab historians told the history of the Khawarij as it was transmitted with criticism or favoritism. Second, the story was told based on Khariji poetry. Scholars who touched on the poetry exposed a positive history of the group. Last, the history of the Khawarij has been rewritten based on four different ideologies: nationalism, Marxism, Islamic fundamentalism, and Islamic feminism.

Chapter four discusses the similarities between the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra. Both groups believed in God's governance (*hakimiyyat Allah*) and

objected to men's authority. They also shared two additional ideological concepts: *takfir* and *hijra*. Both groups denounced other Muslims as infidels and established their own societies. They performed the *hijra* to dissociate themselves from the infidels, with a plan to return to reclaim the society and establish an Islamic State.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze the vast modern and contemporary literature on the Khawarij, and then to argue that this seventh century movement has been used by the Arab/Islamic heritage (*turath*) writers to promote and reflect modern ideologies and religious beliefs. The historiography of the Khawarij is composed of two layers: 1) the premodern, which is strictly narrative, and 2) the modern and contemporary, which is interpretive. This study, however, concerns itself with the latter.

Chapter one of this study will concentrate on the historical background of the Khawarij, and will rely on the works of premodern historians such as al-Shahrastani, al-Baghdadi, al-Tabari, al-Baladhuri, al-Minqari, al-Mubarrad, and Ibn Khaldun.

Chapter two will attempt to show how modern and contemporary western scholars have used and dealt with their sources. Although premodern Islamic historiography is vague in regard to the origins of the Khawarij and does not concern itself with such an issue, modern and contemporary scholars, nonetheless, have engaged in a debate as to whether the Khawarij came from delinquent bedouin tribes (*a'rab*) or from influential and advanced ones (*muhajirun* or *hadar*). These conflicting reports on the Khawarij will be discussed at length in the project to show the inconsistency of Khariji history in western scholarship,

which provides an ambivalent and, to some extent, unfavorable discussion of Khariji history. Scholars have been preoccupied not only by the Khawarij's important role in early Islamic history, but also by their distinguished religio-political philosophy. The sources for this chapter will include the works of R.E. Brunnow, Julius Wellhausen, William Montgomery Watt, Fazlur Rahman, Eli Salem, Michael Morony, M.A. Shaban, Jeffrey T. Kenney, and Chase Robinson.

Chapter three will review the *turath* literature on the Khawarij, and will provide a history of the modern intellectual interpretations of the Khawarij. This chapter will argue that modern Arab/Islamic scholars have used the Khariji image in the *turath* either to reject or advocate modern ideologies. Selected *turath* scholars will be consulted, their works will be discussed, and their sources will be examined. The *turath* literature reveals four ideological approaches in the modern Arab/Islamic scholarship to Khariji history and politics. First is the nationalist approach, which stresses the Arabness of the Khawarij. Ahmad Amin, a leading *turath* writer, writes that most of the Khawarij were bedouins extremely biased to their own [Arab] ethnicity (*shadidu al-'asabiyya li jinsihim*). He adds that the Khawarij appealed only to people of Arab ethnicity and shut the doors of their movement against everybody else. This theory suggests that the Khawarij were '*urubiyyun* (Arab nationalists) whose views and ideologies were Arab - rather than Islamic - oriented.

Amin's views would suggest that the Arab nationalist tendency had already existed in the first century of Islam, and should not be regarded as a purely modern phenomenon in the Arab world. Nationalism is, indeed, a powerful force that has been instrumental for political mobilization. It can also be seen as a form of ethnic favoritism, giving rise perhaps to racism, and as a social process through which people are united as a unique force against "the others." Thus, in discussing Amin's nationalist approach, a definition and a discussion of nationalism in general and Arab nationalism in particular would be necessary to determine if Amin's understanding of nationalism would apply to the Khawarij.

Second is the egalitarian approach of Hussein Mruwah, who emphasizes the egalitarian behavior of the Khawarij. Mruwah, known for his leftist views, writes that the Khawarij consisted of peasants who revolted against landowners. Mruwah points out that the Khawarij supported the peasants' uprisings in Basra against al-Hajjaj, and their movement attracted both the peasants of the countryside and the workers of the cities. In this view, Mruwah argues that the Khawarij led a social revolution of the working class against Islamic capitalism. Mruwah's views on the Khawarij are not different from Marxism. One main Marxist idea suggests that the economic base determines the political and ideological superstructure, and it is the development of the economic structure that produces social change.

Third is the Islamist approach of Mahmoud Isma'il who shows that the fundamentalist behavior of modern movements is not a recent trend, but can be traced to the Khawarij. For instance, Isma'il asserts that the Khawarij were devoted Muslims whose aim was to defend Islam against the Quraysh and Sufyanid aristocracies on the one hand, and against an invasion by foreign cultures on the other. In this view, Isma'il shows the similarities between the Khawarij and contemporary modern fundamentalist movements. He claims that the revolts of the Khawarij in the past resemble very much the rise of modern-day Islamic fundamentalism. For example, in early Islam, the Khawarij revolted against the religious institution of the Quraysh because it tolerated the un-Islamic deeds of the political regime of the Sufyanid family. Following the steps of the Khawarij, modern-day fundamentalists have also shown dissatisfaction with the religious institution of al-Azhar due to its tolerant attitude toward western-oriented regimes in the Arab world. Al-Azhar, in fact, has tolerated the implementation of western laws in Islamic societies and the adoption of western cultures and values by Arab governments. Therefore, modern fundamentalists have also rejected the religious and governmental institutions.

The fourth approach is represented by Islamic feminists who argue that early Islam allowed women freedom to engage in battles. Unlike orthodox Muslims, the Khawarij permitted their women to fight alongside men and made

jihad a duty for women. Muslim feminists such as Leila Ahmed used Khariji history to promote women's role and status on the model of early Muslim women. Thus, chapter three will argue that Amin, Mruwah, Isma'il, and Ahmed provided a new reading of the Khawarij, which advocates a positive image of the group in the *turath* literature. The works of Arab/Muslim scholars are significant because 1) they represent different trends and ideologies, and 2) they have written extensively on the *turath* in general and the Khawarij in particular. Chapter four will discuss the legacy of the Khawarij among contemporary Muslim extremists. A discussion of the similarities between the two groups will shed light on economic, political, and ideological factors that led to the emergence of both groups.

This project compiles and assesses the modern literature on the Khawarij. Modern scholarship still lacks any critical work that addresses the influence of the Khawarij on the *turath*. In this work I discuss the importance of the Khawarij in the *turath*, and provide profiles of, and pertinent information about, the *turath* writers who have either concerned themselves with the study of the Khawarij or have incorporated the Khawarij in their work on the *turath*. In doing so, this study will explore the main issues that have concerned modern and contemporary scholars who have studied the Khawarij, and will shed light on the importance of such issues.

This study will be a breakthrough in the field of Islamic studies because 1) it makes available to western scholars a large body of literature that is published in Arabic, and 2) it shows how modern scholars have offered different interpretations and analyses in regard to the Khawarij's origins, emergence, and causes for revolts. This work on the modern literature dealing with the Khawarij will be primarily based on sources published in Arabic, in addition to what is available in English, French, German, and Farsi.

Chapter One

The Khawarij in History

It is best to begin by discussing the historical development of the Khawarij under the reigns of two caliphs: ‘Uthman b. ‘Affan (r. 644-656) and ‘Ali b. Abi Talib (r. 656-661). The focus will be on the politics of ‘Ali, under whom the Khawarij made their first appearance. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how the Khawarij emerged by relying mostly on primary sources. Also, to understand better why modern historians have written the history of the Khawarij the way they did, a discussion of the Khariji history based on primary sources will also be included. The sources for this chapter encompass the two most important works on early Islamic history: *Ta’rikh al-rusul wa’l-muluk* of al-Tabari (d. 923) and the *Ansab al-ashraf* of al-Baladhuri (d. 892). Al-Tabari renders his accounts on the authority of Abu Mikhnaf; al-Baladhuri narrates on the authority of various sources: they said (*qalu*). The primary sources also include The *Nahj al-Balagha*, compiled by al-Sharif al-Radi and ascribed to ‘Ali. This work is controversial because it is considered a Shi‘i oriented source. *Al-Fitna wa waq‘at al-Jamal* of Sayf b. ‘Umar (d. 796) is also a valuable source, although it is deemed unreliable by many early historiographers, including al-Tabari. *Al-Kamil* of al-Mubarrad (d.

897) and *Waq'at Siffin* of Nasr b. Muzahim al-Minqari (d. 827) are useful and valuable sources on Khariji history.

Although most modern scholars assert that the arbitration at the Battle of Siffin (656-57) was the main factor for the emergence of the Khawarij, others claim that the movement's roots go back to the caliphate of 'Uthman b. 'Affan, indicating that the unjust policy of the third caliph, such as nepotism and the unequal distribution of wealth, motivated the proto-Khawarij to revolt and seek a change in the system.¹ At any rate, it intrigues scholars to see a group like the Khawarij emerge with a strong set of beliefs and grow in popularity without the guidance of a single dominant political leader. The Shi'a emerged behind 'Ali b. Abi Talib who was a very important and influential figure in the first century of Islam and established an ideology and a body of thought.

The Khawarij not only rose suddenly, but they also stunned the Islamic community with their characteristic religio-political values. Therefore, the uniqueness of the Khawarij can be attributed to their religio-political thought and their sudden emergence.

THE KHAWARIJ: AN OVERVIEW

¹ Abdullah Mahroush, *Al-Zahira al-adabiyya fi shi'r al-Khawarij* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Amana, 1988), 41.

In Arabic, the term Khawarij, a derivative from the Arabic verb *kharaja*, means ‘to go out’ or to secede. They were called Khawarij because they seceded from ‘Ali’s camp after the Battle of Siffin. It is also said that the Khawarij gave themselves the term because it dissociated them from the unbelievers (*kuffar*) by making the emigration (*hijra*) to God and his messenger. “Verily, those who have believed, and those who have emigrated (for Allah’s religion) and have striven hard in the Way of Allah, all these hope for Allah’s Mercy. . . .”² They were also called al-Haruriyya in attribution to a place called Harura’, where they retired after they defected from ‘Ali’s army. Also, some historians called them *muhakkima*, those who say “*la hukma illa lillah*” (judgment belongs to God only) when ‘Ali accepted the arbitration of men to end the Battle of Siffin. “Mankind were one community and Allah sent Prophets with glad tidings and warnings, and with them He sent down the Scripture in truth to judge between people in matters wherein they differed. . . .”³ They were also called *shurat*, or those who sold themselves to God. “And of mankind is he who would sell himself, seeking the Pleasure of Allah. . . .”⁴ Thus, all their names were taken from the Qur’an except al-Haruriyya.

² Surah 2:218.

³ Surah 2:213.

⁴ Surah 2:207.

The Khawarij emerged as an opposition force to the arbitration after the battle of Siffin. Although they emerged as religious zealots who adhered strictly to the Qur'an and the Sunna, the Khawarij later adopted a political doctrine which concerned itself with the caliphate. They validated the caliphates of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman's early reign, and 'Ali until the arbitration. They believed that the caliphate was a right to every free Arab, but later they modified their opinion and made the caliphate a right to every Muslim - free or slave. They contradicted the Shi'a who said that the caliphate is restricted to the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*). Towards the end of the Umayyads' rule, the Khawarij split into five major groups and some twenty subgroups. The five major factions were al-Muhakkima al-Ula, al-Azariqa, al-Najdat, al-'Ajarida, al-Ibadiyya, and al-Sufriyya.⁵ In spite of their ideological, political, and tribal differences, the Khariji splinter groups shared similar views regarding the unbelief (*ikfar*) of 'Ali, 'Uthman, the arbitrators, the people of the Camel,⁶ and those who were satisfied with the arbitration.

Al-Baghdadi writes, on the authority of the Mu'tazili Abu al-Qasim al-Ka'bi (d. 319 A H.), that all the Khariji splinter groups proclaimed the unbelief of (*ikfar*) of 'Ali, 'Uthman, the arbitrators, the people of the Camel, and whomever

⁵ Al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq baynal firaq* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 49.

⁶ The people of the Camel were those who fought against 'Ali in the battle of the Camel in 656 in Basra. The battle of the Camel will be discussed later in this chapter

agreed to the appointment of the arbitrators. They also proclaimed the *ikfar* of Muslims who committed a grave sin, and advocated revolt against a tyrant *imam*.⁷ Al-Baghdadi adds that Abu al-Hasan al-Ash‘ari (d. 324 A.H.) disagrees with al-Ka‘bi that the Khawarij proclaimed the *ikfar* of Muslims who committed a grave sin.⁸

THE EMERGENCE OF THE KHAWARIJ

There is a controversy as to when and how the Khawarij first emerged. The primary sources tell us that it was at the Battle of Siffin that the Khawarij first emerged as rejectionists to the arbitration between ‘Ali and the Syrians. Al-Mubarrad reported that the first Khariji sword to have been drawn in Siffin was the sword of ‘Urwa b. Udayya who said: “What kind of arbitration is this? Is there a better arbitration than God’s?”⁹ Then a man from the Khawarij shouted his famous motto: ‘no judgment but God’s’ (*la hukma illa lillah*).¹⁰

Modern historians have argued that the emergence of the Khawarij can be attributed ultimately to the unjust policy of ‘Uthman, such as distributing the wealth amongst his relatives and clan. The Arab tribes from whom the Khawarij

⁷ Al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farq*, 50.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kamil*, Vol.2 (Cairo: Al-Istiqlal Publishing, 1951), 116.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

made their first emergence and who had fought on behalf of the Prophet felt that they were deprived of their share in the newly established Islamic *umma*.

Resenting 'Uthman's policy on one hand, and unsatisfied with their deteriorating social and economic status on the other, the Khawarij rose in revolts to change the status quo. Moreover, recent analyses by contemporary Arab historians have argued that the roots of the Khawarij were detected during the life of the Prophet; while others saw their emergence in pre-Islamic Arabia (the *jahiliyya*).¹¹

THE REIGN OF 'UTHMAN

Islamic historiography and history have been unfavorable to 'Uthman, whose rule of twelve years ended amid rebellion and the violent death of the caliph. Unlike his predecessors, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (r. 632-634) and 'Umar b. al-Khattab (r. 634-644), 'Uthman was seen as a weak and unjust ruler. "The historical sources contain lengthy accounts of the wrongdoings (*ahdath*) of which he was accused."¹² These wrongdoings, therefore, were the ingredients for the dissatisfaction and opposition against his rule. The importance of discussing 'Uthman's reign is to discover whether those who were dissatisfied with his conduct and later revolted against the caliph were the proto-Khawarij who

¹¹ The different views on the emergence of the Khawarij are discussed at length in chapters 2 and 3.

¹² Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 78.

emerged in full force during ‘Ali’s reign and continued to be militarily active throughout the Umayyad caliphate (661-750).

‘Uthman pursued a different line of rule and implemented a policy that was favorable to his close kin.¹³ For instance, according to al-Tabari, ‘Uthman divided “his properties” and wealth amongst the Umayyads. Al-Tabari adds that the caliph gave each man of Banu al-Hakam 10,000 dirhams, which amounted to a total of 100,000 dirhams.¹⁴ Al-Baladhuri gives a slightly different account as he says that ‘Uthman made a gift of 100,000 dirhams to his nephew Sa‘id b. al-‘As.¹⁵ Al-Zuhri reports that ‘Uthman granted his cousin Marwan b. al-Hakam a fifth of the war booty of Ifriqiyya and gave other close relatives money from the treasury. When criticized by prominent leaders such as ‘Ali, al-Zubayr, Talha, and others, ‘Uthman argued that he gave his clan money that did not belong to the treasury.¹⁶

Moreover, ‘Uthman granted the *sawafī*, the extensive former crown lands and domain estates in the conquered territories, to Mu‘awiya, his governor in Syria.¹⁷ He also granted land concessions (*qatī‘a*) from the former domain land of the Persian kings in Iraq to the following individuals: Musa, son of the Companion

¹³ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁴ Al-Tabari, *Ta’rikh al-umam wal muluk*, V. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), 652.

¹⁵ Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-ashraf*, Section 4, v. 1 (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979), 515.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 512.

¹⁷ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 82.

Talha, who was a major beneficiary of this policy; ‘Abd Allah b. Mas‘ud, Sa‘d b. Abi Waqqas, Khabbab b. al-Aratt, Usama b. Zayd, al-Zubayr, Talha, ‘Ammar b. Yasir, and some tribal leaders. This policy, therefore, provoked many Muslims to rise in protest against ‘Uthman accusing the caliph of mishandling the Muslims’ treasury (*mal al-Muslimin*).

The Kufan sources tell a different story. According to Sayf b. ‘Umar, although his accounts may not be reliable,¹⁸ the money that ‘Uthman gave to his clan and family was not *mal al-muslimin*; rather, it was his own. Sayf, without indicating an isnad, transmits the accounts attributed to ‘Uthman as the following:

They said: I love my family and therefore I grant them [money] . . . I give them from my own funds, and I don’t make *mal al-Muslimin* my own property or the property of anyone else. I gave the largest sum of money from my own treasury during the lives of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, and ‘Umar, although I was at that time in need. Now, when I gave to my relatives and clan what belonged to me, the heretics (*al-mulhidun*) said what they said.¹⁹

Sayf b. ‘Umar adds that ‘Uthman divided his money and property among the Ummayyads. He gave 100,000 dirhams to members of his own family and the

¹⁸ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Sayf’s accounts were doubted by al-Tabari.

¹⁹ Sayf b. ‘Umar, *Al-Fitna wa Waq‘at al-Jamal*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Nafa’is, 1993), 56.

Banu al-Hakam, as mentioned above, and granted equal amounts to the Banu al-'As, Banu al-Ays, and Banu Harb.²⁰

The Muslims' dissatisfaction with 'Uthman started to mount during the second half of his reign when he began to pursue favoritism, i.e., appointing his clan and kin to influential positions and removing officials who had been appointed by 'Umar. 'Uthman's kin came to dominate the caliph as he grew weak and ineffectual. 'Uthman's nepotism was evident since the beginning of his reign; however, the opposition was not a serious threat until the second half of his rule. In 656, insurgents from Egypt arrived in Medina and surrounded 'Uthman's house. The caliph shaken by the insurgents made a public statement of repentance on the advice of 'Ali. Al-Tabari reports on the authority of al-Waqidi that 'Uthman came out and gave a speech repenting his misdeeds. He said:

I have not done anything that I was ignorant of, but my conscience had misled me and my guidance had gone astray. I heard the prophet say: 'Whoever committed a mishap should repent, and those who continued in their misdeeds are the farthest from the path [of Islam].' I was the first to abide, and I ask God for forgiveness and repentance.²¹

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

²¹ Al-Tabari, *T'arikh*, v. 2, 659.

Al-Baladhuri reports on the authority of Abu Mikhnaf that ‘Uthman came out of his residence and confessed to his ill deeds in a public speech by saying: “I swear to God that if a slave puts me back on the right path, I will follow him.”²²

Did ‘Uthman repent as al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri reported? Or did the caliph defend himself against the accusations of mishandling the *mal al-muslimin* and attack his accusers as Sayf reported? Al-Tabari’s and al-Baladhuri’s account of ‘Uthman’s repentance are not mentioned by Sayf, who gives us a totally different interpretation of ‘Uthman’s speech. In Sayf’s report, ‘Uthman never made any apologies nor confessed to any misdeeds. Rather, the caliph insisted that he provided to his relatives from his own funds and attacked those who accused him of mishandling the *mal al-muslimin*. The tone may sound defensive though, but still ‘Uthman does not repent in Sayf’s account. To what extent, therefore, can Sayf’s report be authenticated? There are a few reasons to doubt Sayf’s report in regard to ‘Uthman’s speech. First of all, Sayf is known for his unreliable accounts and his tendentiousness. Second, Sayf’s account is doubted since it contradicts the account of two major and reliable historians, viz. al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri. Third, ‘Ali’s request from ‘Uthman to address the insurgents and repent, which was reported by Sayf himself, refutes Sayf’s report and

²² Al-Baladhuri, *Ansab*, section 4, v.1, 554.

authenticates al-Baladhuri's and al-Tabari's accounts of 'Uthman's repentance, as stated earlier.

The Egyptians, satisfied with 'Uthman's declaration, left Medina to return a few days later. Their return was provoked by a letter purportedly written by 'Uthman instructing his governor in Egypt, 'Abdallah b. Sa'd, to punish the leaders of the rebels upon their arrival in Egypt. Al-Baladhuri reports on the authority of Abu Mikhnaf that the Egyptians, while on their way back to Egypt, encountered 'Uthman's slave with the letter. The letter said, according to al-Baladhuri, "Kill Abu 'Amru b. Budayl and cut off the hands of Ibn 'Udays, Kinana and 'Urwa and let them die in the pools of their blood, and then tie them to the palm trees."²³ Al-Baladhuri adds that it is reported that Marwan wrote the letter without the knowledge of 'Uthman.²⁴ When the rebels confronted 'Uthman, he replied that he neither wrote the letter nor ordered its contents nor had any knowledge of it. Ironically, other rebels from Kufa and Basra made a simultaneous return with the Egyptians and joined them in the siege of 'Uthman's house.²⁵ The rebels prevented 'Uthman from leading the prayer and from entering the mosque, and demanded that he surrender his reign so they could appoint a new caliph.

²³ *Ibid.*, 555.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Al-Tabari, *T'arikh*, v.2, 653.

According to Ibn Khaldun and al-Tabari, the Egyptians were led by Abd al-Rahman b. 'Udays al-Balawi, Kinana b. Bishr al-Laythi, Sawdan b. Hamran al-Sakuni, Maysara or Qaytara b. Fulan al-Sakuni, and al-Ghafiqi b. Harb al-'Akki. The Kufan leaders were Zayd b. Sawhan al-'Abdi, al-Ashtar al-Nakha'i, Ziyad b. al-Nadr al-Harithi, and Abdullah b. al-Asam al-'Amiri. On the Basran side were Hakim b. Jabala al-'Abdi, Zurayh b. 'Abbad, Bishr b. Shurayh al-Qaysi, Ibn al-Mahrash, and Hurqus b. Zuhayr al-Sa'di (also a later Khariji leader).²⁶ More radical elements arrived from the provinces, and on Friday, 17 June 656, 'Uthman was slain.

THE POLITICS OF 'ALI

Upon the killing of 'Uthman, the Muslims turned to 'Ali to lead the community. 'Ali was reluctant to accept the caliphate because he did not want to inherit a community divided against itself. Al-Tabari reports on the authority of Ja'far b. Abdallah al-Muhammadi, who reports on the authority of a chain of transmitters that goes back to 'Ali's son, Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya:

The Companions approached 'Ali and told him that 'Uthman was killed and the community needed an imam. The Companions said: We don't find today a more rightful person than you. Ali replied: I ask you not to impose the caliphate on me. I feel more comfortable being a governor than being an *imam*. They said: no, we will not leave until we pay allegiance to you.

²⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *T'arikh Ibn Khaldun*, V.2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1992), 568; Al-Tabari, *T'arikh*, V.2, 652.

‘Ali replied: let then the allegiance be public in the mosque and with the consent of the Muslims. The Muhajirun and the Ansar entered the mosque and paid allegiance to ‘Ali, and so did the people.²⁷

According to Sayf b. ‘Umar, after the killing of ‘Uthman, the Islamic state was left for five days without an *imam*. The Egyptians wanted ‘Ali to be the next caliph, while the Kufans and the Basrans preferred al-Zubayr and Talha, respectively. Afraid of the ugly consequences of ‘Uthman’s assassination, all three leaders showed no interest in the caliphate. The Muslims then wasted no time in asking Sa’d b. Abi Waqqas and ‘Abdullah b. ‘Umar, who in their turns refused to accept the leadership of the community.²⁸ At that point, and after mounting pressure, ‘Ali entered the mosque and accepted his nomination to the caliphate. The official ceremony took place on June 18, 656. According to Sayf, Talha did not pledge allegiance voluntarily; al-Ashtar dragged him along while he demanded: ‘Leave me until I see what the people do.’²⁹ Al-Ashtar refused to let him go until he paid allegiance. Sayf reports that both Talha and al-Zubayr gave their pledges with the sword on their necks (*baya ‘u wal sayfa ‘ala riqabihim*).³⁰ But soon after they pledged allegiance against their will, Talha and al-Zubayr broke their own oaths and left Medina for Mecca, where ‘A’isha was.

²⁷ Al-Tabari, *T’arikh*,., 696.

²⁸ Sayf, *Al-Fitna*, 91, 122.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

Hence, while one of the two major problems, i.e., choosing a caliph, was solved or seemed to be solved to most people (at least at Medina), the other obstacle that faced the community was the fate of the murderers of ‘Uthman: a decision that haunted ‘Ali during his reign and was a factor in his failure to lead a united community. Was the third *imam* a tyrant and, therefore, his killing justified? Or was he killed unjustly? The eminent Companions of the Prophet argued that ‘Uthman was unjustifiably killed and believed that ‘Ali must punish the murderers. Others went so far as to accuse ‘Ali of instigating the murder of ‘Uthman. One of the leaders of these accusations was Safwan b. Umayya b. Khalaf al-Jumahi, a leader of the Mekkan Quraysh, who addressed ‘Ali: “Surely your kinsmen, the ‘Abd al-Muttalib, are the ones who killed ‘Uthman in incontrovertible truth. . . .”³¹ Marwan b. al-Hakam proclaimed: “If you, ‘Ali, have not struck the murdered man openly, you surely struck him in secret.”³² The attackers, on the other hand, argued that they had killed ‘Uthman because he was not a just ruler and, therefore, justice should not be sought for his killing.

‘Ali, torn between two arguments and unwilling to jeopardize his position, refused to delve further into the matter. He realized that the killers of ‘Uthman were in control of Medina; therefore, he had no choice but to set aside the issue of punishing the murderers. ‘Ali’s reluctance to bring ‘Uthman’s murderers to

³¹ Madelung, *The Succession to the Caliphate*, 156.

³² *Ibid.*

justice was later used by Mu‘awiya as propaganda to pit the Syrians against ‘Ali, who now had the task of bringing Mu‘awiya and the Syrians under his rule.

Before marching to Syria, ‘Ali had to strengthen his influence in Medina by going through a major reform in the caliphate. On his mind also was a major task: how to win the backing of ‘A‘isha, Talha, and al-Zubayr, or at least how to silence them. Thus, these were not easy tasks. ‘Ali realized that succeeding ‘Uthman was not a matter of one caliph replacing another; ‘Ali was a different ruler with a completely different agenda. On ‘Ali’s mind, first and foremost, was his desire to dismantle ‘Uthman’s nepotist regime. One of the first moves that ‘Ali made was the replacement of all ‘Uthman’s governors except Abu Musa al-Ash‘ari, who had been chosen by the Kufan rebels.³³ The second issue on ‘Ali’s agenda was to rule justly among all Muslims. He declared: “The poor are dear to me until I gain their rights, and the well-to-do are weak until I deprive them of their arrogance.”³⁴ In a letter to Malik al-Ashtar, whom ‘Ali appointed as governor of Egypt, ‘Ali writes: “Be fair with God and with the people, especially those amongst your clans, as you wish others to be fair with you.”³⁵

THE BATTLE OF THE CAMEL

³³ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁴ Muhammad Abdu, *Nahj al-Balagha*, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), 217.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 438.

Upon receiving the news of the killing of 'Uthman, 'A'isha declared in Mecca: "'Uthman was unjustifiably killed and I will seek revenge for his blood.'"³⁶ 'A'isha was not alone in her call for 'Uthman's vengeance. To her side came Talha and al-Zubayr, from whom 'Ali had repossessed the provinces of Yemen and Bahrayn and consequently refused to grant them Basra and Kufa as they had anticipated. Resenting 'Ali's policies, Talha and al-Zubayr enticed 'A'isha to wage a war against 'Ali for sheltering the murderers of 'Uthman. To place the full responsibility for the murder of 'Uthman on 'Ali served the purpose of the triumvirate 'A'isha, Talha, and al-Zubayr, as well as the Meccan rebels. Apparently, the aim was not to avenge 'Uthman's blood, but to remove 'Ali from the caliphate. With 'A'isha, Talha, and al-Zubayr in the lead, the Meccans refused to swear allegiance to 'Ali. Mecca was now in open rebellion against Medina. Encouraged by Mu'awiya's refusal to swear homage to 'Ali, 'A'isha, accompanied by Talha, al-Zubayr and six hundred Meccans³⁷, marched to Basra with the intent of mobilizing the Basrans against 'Ali. On the way to Basra more rebels joined 'A'isha, increasing their number to three thousand.

When the rebels approached Basra, 'Ali's governor 'Uthman b. Hunayf sent envoys to inquire about their intentions. They met with 'A'isha who claimed that they had come to avenge the blood of 'Uthman and to remove 'Ali from

³⁶ Al-Tabari, *T'arikh*, v. 3, 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

power. On the advice of the envoys, 'Uthman b. Hunayf called on the people to resist the rebel army. The next day fierce fighting ensued between the two armies, but soon this was followed by a brief agreement to halt the fighting until 'Ali arrived. Waiting for 'Ali's arrival was not in the favor of the rebels. Al-Zubayr on the advice of Talha broke the agreement and seized 'Uthman b. Hunayf as he was leading the prayer in the mosque.³⁸

Underestimating 'A'isha's power, 'Ali's only attention was on Mu'awiya, the governor who refused to acknowledge 'Ali's caliphate. As he was about to march to Syria to subdue Mu'awiya, 'Ali received news that his governor of Basra, 'Uthman b. Hunayf, had been arrested and his aides were murdered. Now, 'Ali's attention turned to Basra, where some twenty thousand men, on the order of 'A'isha, encamped on the outskirts of the city awaiting his arrival. 'Ali left Medina on October 25, 656.

'Ali arrived in Basra with the intention of reaching a compromise. 'Ali is said to have sent first Ibn al-'Abbas to negotiate an accord with al-Zubayr, since the latter was given the general command of the Basran army. To fight a bloody battle against the Prophet's cousin seemed immoral to al-Zubayr. His son 'Abd Allah, in contrast, was determined to avenge the blood of 'Uthman. Thus, 'Abd Allah b. al-Zubayr and Talha stood behind 'A'isha who wanted the removal of

³⁸Sayf, *al-Fitna*, 129.

‘Ali and a *shura*. After several attempts by ‘Ali to reach a settlement, the two armies clashed on Thursday, December 8, 656. Al-Zubayr abandoned the battlefield quite early and set out on the route to the Hijaz. Three men followed him, and it is reported that ‘Amr b. Jurmuz al-Mujashi‘i killed him in Wadi al-Siba‘. The killers had justified their act by accusing al-Zubayr of pitting the Muslims against each other. Talha, on the other hand, was mortally wounded.³⁹

With Talha and al-Zubayr killed, ‘Ali emerged victorious, and the armed conflict, which cost the Muslims between ten and fifteen thousand men,⁴⁰ came to an end. ‘A’isha, on the order of ‘Ali, left for Medina accompanied by a group of 40 Basran women, who were chosen by ‘Ali.⁴¹ ‘Ali now moved the capital of the Islamic caliphate from Mecca to Kufa⁴² and renewed his campaign against Mu‘awiya.

THE BATTLE OF SIFFIN

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 179; al-Tabari, *T’arikh*, 3rd Vol., 58.

⁴¹ Sayf, *al-Fitna*, 183.

⁴² The main reason that led ‘Ali to move the center of the caliphate from Medina to Kufa was that ‘Ali had enjoyed popular support in Kufa, which he lacked in Medina. For instance, when ‘Ali decided to launch his attack against Syria (Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya wa l-nihaya* [Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma‘arif, 1966], 241), he called on the Medinans to join him, but they refused.

As the conflict with ‘A’isha, Talha, and al-Zubayr was settled in his favor, ‘Ali now had to deal with Mu‘awiya who was a much more serious threat to his caliphate. Underestimating Mu‘awiya’s influence amongst the Syrians, ‘Ali first ruled out all the options for a military attack. Instead, he made several attempts to convince Mu‘awiya to abort his rebellion and to render his allegiance. Although seven months had passed since ‘Ali’s accession to power, Mu‘awiya was steadfast and refused to recognize ‘Ali as the Commander of the Faithful. Moreover, ‘Ali’s victory at Basra spurred Mu‘awiya to step up his campaign, charging ‘Ali with the murder of ‘Uthman. The bloody shirt of the murdered caliph was displayed in Damascus and used as a political device to incite the Syrians and rally them against ‘Ali. Mu‘awiya’s hostility against ‘Ali was not aimed at avenging the blood of ‘Uthman, rather it was his only means to hold on to the rule of Syria. As Wilferd Madelung puts it, “‘Uthman had meant little to him, had done nothing to aid him, and he felt no personal obligation to seek revenge.”⁴³

With Mu‘awiya making every effort to hold on to Syria, ‘Ali was very patient with the Syrian rebels and decided to continue negotiating with Mu‘awiya. As his envoy, ‘Ali sent Jarir b. ‘Abd Allah al-Bajali to Syria with instructions to ask Mu‘awiya only for his oath of allegiance, while making it clear that he, ‘Ali,

⁴³ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 186.

would not accept him as a governor.⁴⁴ ‘Ali went on to state that the public pledge of allegiance in Medina was binding on him in Syria. In his letter, ‘Ali stated that as he legitimately fought Talha and al-Zubayr because they had broken their allegiance, which was equal to refusing it, Mu‘awiya must now pledge his allegiance, otherwise he would fight him. Jarir conveyed the letter to Mu‘awiya and, as instructed, asked him to pledge his allegiance to ‘Ali. Mu‘awiya now had to tell the Syrians that ‘Uthman had been murdered by his kinsman ‘Ali in order to gain the backing of the people. Mu‘awiya rose and gave a speech declaring himself the next-of-kin of ‘Uthman. He insisted that ‘Uthman was killed wrongfully and recited a verse from the Qur’an which said: “Whosoever is slain unjustly, we have appointed to his next-of-kin authority.”⁴⁵ Therefore, Mu‘awiya proclaimed himself the responsible kinsman (*wali*) of ‘Uthman b. ‘Affan. The people of Syria approved his claim as they rose and pledged allegiance to him as the *wali* of the Commander of the Faithful ‘Uthman.⁴⁶

Although Mu‘awiya was for the moment satisfied with the Syrian response to his speech, he, nonetheless, needed more support from outside Syria. Mu‘awiya immediately wrote to ‘Amr b. al-‘As informing him of Jarir’s letter from ‘Ali and

⁴⁴ Al-Minqari, *Waq‘at Siffin* (Cairo: The Arab Institute, 1962), 27-8.

⁴⁵ A.J. Arberry, trans., 5th ed., *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1973), 305.

⁴⁶ Al-Minqari, *Waq‘at Siffin*, 31-2.

asking him to come to Syria to further discuss the matter with him.⁴⁷ ‘Amr wasted no time in striking a bargain with Mu‘awiya: he would back the Umayyads in their fight against ‘Ali, while Mu‘awiya would guarantee him Egypt for life. On that basis, ‘Amr swore allegiance to Mu‘awiya. This alliance between ‘Amr and Mu‘awiya impacted the course of the political and military confrontation between ‘Ali and the Syrians.

Mu‘awiya not only struck a deal with ‘Amr, but also rallied the Yemenites of northern Syria to his side. On the advice of ‘Amr, Mu‘awiya pinned the blame for ‘Uthman’s murder on ‘Ali and sought the backing of Shurahbil b. al-Simt al-Kindi, the son of an influential, notable Yemenite in Hims. Mu‘awiya presented the matter to Shurahbil with the charge that ‘Ali had killed ‘Uthman. When Mu‘awiya met with Shurahbil in Damascus, he told him that Jarir b. ‘Abd Allah came to Syria to seek their allegiance to ‘Ali. Mu‘awiya added that he would pledge allegiance to ‘Ali only if he had not killed ‘Uthman. Shurahbil went out and spoke to his men, who assured him that ‘Ali had indeed killed ‘Uthman. Shurahbil returned to Mu‘awiya and declared that “the people will accept nothing but that ‘Ali has killed ‘Uthman. By God, if you pledge allegiance to him, we shall drive you out of Syria or kill you.”⁴⁸ Now with ‘Amr b. al-‘As and all the people of Syria on his side, Mu‘awiya went to see Jarir in his lodgings. He had a

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

proposal that ‘Ali grant him Syria and Egypt and their revenue, and in return he would recognize ‘Ali’s reign and address him as caliph.⁴⁹

Mu‘awiya had kept his proposal to Jarir strictly secret. Had his offer to ‘Ali become known to the people of Syria, Mu‘awiya’s whole campaign would have come to a halt. Jarir transmitted Mu‘awiya’s offer to ‘Ali who rejected it at once. He replied to Jarir warning him that Mu‘awiya was planning to claim Syria’s independence. ‘Ali’s final words to Jarir: “Either Mu‘awiya would pledge allegiance or you should return home.”⁵⁰

‘Ali attempted to no avail to subdue Mu‘awiya; thus he marched to Syria in late March 657 with an army of 50,000 men.⁵¹ Learning of ‘Ali’s approach, Mu‘awiya wasted no time in sending his forces to fight the invading army. For two months the armies stood opposite each other. During that period, several messages were exchanged between ‘Ali and Mu‘awiya. ‘Ali wrote Mu‘awiya another letter inviting him to pledge allegiance and deliver himself and his followers from error. Mu‘awiya replied that only the sword shall decide between them.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 151.

After several days of limited skirmishes with envoys going back and forth between the two camps, 'Ali declared that the Syrians had failed to respond to his summons to the Book of God. The time for battle had arrived.⁵³ The two armies clashed in battle on July 26, 657 near the Euphrates at a place called Siffin. After four days of continuous fighting with tens of thousands of men being killed on both sides, 'Ali was gaining the upper hand when, on the advice of 'Amr b. al-'As, Mu'awiya ordered his army to raise the Qur'an on their lances. 'Ali realized the trap and vowed to continue his assault against the Syrians. Mu'awiya's call for God (*Allah*) to decide between the two armies deceived 'Ali's soldiers, especially the Qur'an Readers⁵⁴ who were the loudest of all: "We are called to the Book, and we cannot decline it."⁵⁵ They threatened that unless 'Ali agreed to stop the battle, they would desert his camp and even kill him as they killed 'Uthman.⁵⁶ The

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁵⁴ The Qur'an readers (*qurra'*, sing. *qari'*) were to be found among the Syrians and the Iraqis alike. Most of the Qur'an readers supported 'Ali. The readers, or the Qur'an reciters, did not really study the Qur'an; they recited its verses. They were also known as those who prayed. It is reported that the Qur'an readers were the most active during the revolt against 'Uthman. They made speeches in battles to rouse the Muslim armies. In the Battle of the Camel, and at Siffin, the Qur'an readers were the most prominent. The banners they followed were God, the Qur'an, the Sunna, the law, and the tradition. They showed extreme piety, and the Qur'an was always on their lips. It is believed that the Khawarij came from the circle of the Qur'an readers. A lengthy discussion of the Qur'an readers is provided in the following chapter.

⁵⁵ Al-Minqari, *Waq'at Siffin*, 489.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 490.

unfortunate caliph called upon al-Ashtar, who was gaining in the battlefield, to abandon the fight and return. Al-Ashtar unwillingly returned and was dismayed with the behavior of 'Ali's soldiers.

As the fight came to a halt, 'Ali sent al-Ash'ath to inquire about Mu'awiya's motives behind raising the Qur'an. Mu'awiya answered that "we should return to the will of *Allah* as set forth in the Book."⁵⁷ Therefore, two men were chosen to decide according to what is in the Qur'an: 'Amr from the Syrians and Abu Musa al-Ash'ari from the Iraqis. 'Ali objected to the nomination of Abu Musa claiming that "Abu Musa is no match to 'Amr and his traps . . . and he is not trustworthy. He abandoned me in the battle of the Camel and disappointed my people."⁵⁸ Again, 'Ali was pressured to accept Abu Musa as his representative.

The two arbiters sat down and forged a treaty on behalf of 'Ali and Mu'awiya. The arbitration agreement was written and signed in August 2, 657.⁵⁹ The treaty, as reported by al-Minqari, bound them to follow the judgment of the Qur'an; and, where the Qur'an was silent, they were to apply 'the just, uniting and not dividing, *sunna*.' The treaty also bound them to put their weapons aside and to seek peace and stability upon themselves, their money, their people, their property, and upon Abdullah b. Qays and 'Amru b. al-'As, so they could be fair judges.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 493.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 499.

⁵⁹ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, 243.

They were to make a decision by Ramadan, seven months after the agreement, but could move the date if needed. In case of the death of one of the arbitrators, the commander of his party was to choose a man of the same merits to replace him. They would meet in a place equidistant from Damascus and Kufa. If they chose a different place, only those who were satisfied with the location could attend. The arbitrators were free to take with them their witnesses, who would also sign the agreement. The arbitrators agreed to meet in Adhruh in the presence of 'Ali and Mu'awiya in addition to four hundred men on each side.⁶⁰

The Siffin arbitration agreement - referred to in Arabic as the arbitration document (*wathiqat al-tahkim*) – is preserved for us in two distinct versions.⁶¹ Al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri give only one version of the agreement, which is believed to be the most authentic one. Al-Minqari is the only early source to address both versions. Martin Hinds, who studied both versions of the document, tells us that “Version A of the document is preferable to Version B.”⁶² Obviously, Hinds preferred the Version that was addressed by two of the most reliable early

⁶⁰ Al- Minqari, *Waq'at*, 510.

⁶¹ See Martin Hinds, “The Siffin Arbitration Agreement,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 17 (1972), 93-113.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 95

historians, al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri.⁶³ Another reason for Hinds preference lies in the fact that Version A was given on the authority of Abu Mikhnaf in the case of al-Tabari, on the authority of various sources in the case of al-Baladhuri, and on the authority of ‘Umar ibn Sa’d in the case of al-Minqari. On the contrary, what makes Version B spurious for Hinds is that it was transmitted by a pro-‘Alid chain (*isnad*), and that al-Dinawari (d.895), in his *Al-Akhbar al-tiwal*, is the only early source to address Version B.⁶⁴

Madelung, who studied ‘Ali and Siffin in his *The Succession to Muhammad* fails, to indicate the significance of the difference between the two versions. He only provides a summary of the agreement based on al-Minqari version. The summary reads as follows:⁶⁵

[The treaty] reflected primarily the sentiments of the peace party. The two sides committed themselves to adhere to the Book of God. The two arbitrators, who were named, were to follow strictly the rules of the Qur’an. Whatever they could not find a rule for in the Qur’an, they were to apply ‘the just, uniting and not dividing, sunna,’ evidently meaning good practice acceptable to both sides. What they were to judge was not rightly so as not to throw them into division and war. This was obviously the primary concern of the peace party, who were otherwise prepared to give the arbitrators a free hand. They were to make judgement by Ramadan, seven months after the agreement, but might either advance or defer the date. They should meet at a place equidistant from Damascus and Kufa, but

⁶³ Ibn A‘tham (d.819) in his *Kitab al-futuh*, al-Jahiz (d.869) in his *Risala fi’l-hakamayn wa-taswib amir al-mu‘minin ‘Ali*, and Ibn Qutayba (d.889) in his *Al-Imama wa’l Siyasa* also give Version A of the document.

⁶⁴ Hinds, “The Siffin Arbitration Agreement,” 103.

⁶⁵ The texts of the two versions are given at the end of this chapter in Arabic and English.

could meet elsewhere by mutual agreement. No one was allowed to attend their meeting except by their choice, and they were free to choose the witnesses who would sign their decision.⁶⁶

The decision was to be delivered seven months after the agreement, as mentioned above. Thus, 'Ali retreated to Kufa, and Mu'awiya to Damascus. Apparently, the truce brought no hope for a compromise or lasting peace. Unable to subdue Mu'awiya, 'Ali conceded defeat, and Mu'awiya had everything to gain. When the text of the agreement was read out in the presence of the two armies, the Syrians showed satisfaction. The Qur'an readers, from both sides, were the first to object to the agreement. They met between the lines and "agreed to 'revive what the Qur'an revived and to deaden what the Qur'an deadened.'" ⁶⁷ In 'Ali's army, two young brothers from the 'Anaza tribe - numbering four thousand men - came forward with the call: "No judgment except God's." ⁶⁸ Thus, for the first time the Khariji battle cry was raised. Others in Ali's army similarly objected to the arbitration of men in the religion of God. Now more people came forward exclaiming: "No judgment but God's." ⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Madelung, *The Succession*, 243.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 517.

⁶⁹ Among those who objected to the arbitration agreement were: Salih b. Shaqia of Murad, The Banu Rasih of Azd, 'Urwa b. Hudayr of Tamim, and the Yemenite Yazid b. Qays al-Arhabi, 'Ali's former governor of al-Mada'in.

‘ALI AND THE RISE OF THE KHAWARIJ

Realizing the trap of Mu‘awiya, and not accepting ‘Ali’s defeat, the elements who forced ‘Ali to accept the arbitration went to the helpless *imam* and demanded he renew the fight against Mu‘awiya. ‘Ali could not withdraw after he pledged his faith, and therefore refused to apologize for a slip (*‘athra*) he had made. Discontent with Ali’s passive attitude *vis-a-vis* the Syrians, some twelve thousand men, who later came to be known as the Khawarij, retreated to Harura’. ‘Ali tried to summon them back to his camp, but they insisted that they would only return under one condition: that ‘Ali should publicly acknowledge and express regret for the slip he made.

Unwilling to submit to their demand, ‘Ali was now going to march to Syria without them, but his army insisted that they should first attack the Khawarij, who slaughtered Abdullah b. Khabbab b. Aratt, the son of the oldest adherent of the Prophet. ‘Ali, now torn between two enemies, yielded to the demand of his men and marched against the Khawarij. Using the same tactics that he used at the battles of the Camel and Siffin, ‘Ali tried to settle his quarrel with the Khawarij peacefully. In vain he tried to convince the Khawarij to turn in the murderers of Abdullah b. Khabbab, and in vain he tried to persuade them to believe that his point of view was the same as theirs, and that he was going to let the sword decide against the common foe. ‘Ali’s pleas, however, failed to intimidate the Khawarij,

who not only refused to recognize 'Ali as their *imam*, but also committed themselves to a *shura* after victory.

To win the rebels back, 'Ali sent his cousin 'Abd Allah b. al-'Abbas to appeal to them. The Khawarij stood their ground and insisted on renewing the fight against the Syrians. Al-'Abbas kept arguing with the Khawarij until 'Ali joined him and interrupted his discourse with them. 'Ali convinced the Khawarij that he halted the fight and submitted to the arbitration in response to their demand. The Khawarij acknowledged that they had done an act of infidelity for which they repented before God. "Repent as we repented, and we shall pledge allegiance to you. If not we shall oppose you."⁷⁰ 'Ali then promised that he would renew the war after a six-month period. On this basis, the Khawarij renewed their allegiance to him.⁷¹

To fulfill his promise to the seceders, 'Ali put off the preparations for the arbitration, a move that sent Mu'awiya complaining about the delay. The mounting pressure from the Syrians forced 'Ali to proceed with the arbitration. As soon as 'Ali made his decision to appoint Abu Musa al-Ash'ari as his representative in the arbitration, the Khawarij came to 'Ali protesting and urging him to put the arbitration aside and to proceed with them to fight the Syrians. 'Ali replied that he had made a treaty with Mu'awiya and was bound by it. The rebels

⁷⁰ Al-Tabari, *T'arikh*, v. 3, 110.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

now met in the house of ‘Abd Allah b. Wahb al-Rasibi, who later became a Khariji leader, left Kufa, and reassembled to fight the misguided Muslims.

In the meantime, the two arbitrators were meeting at Dumat al-Jandal, a town between Damascus and Kufa. The task of the arbitrators, according to the agreement of Siffin, was to settle the conflict amongst the Muslims comprehensively. Instead, the question that was examined, according to al-Tabari, was whether ‘Uthman had been killed wrongfully or not.⁷² The arbitrators reached the verdict that ‘Uthman was killed wrongfully. The verdict weakened ‘Ali’s position and enhanced the Syrian support for Mu‘awiya. ‘Ali immediately denounced the conduct of the arbitrators and ordered his army to prepare to march to Syria. At the same time, Ali wrote to the Khawarij of al-Nahrawan asking them to join him to fight the Syrians. The Khawarij insisted that unless ‘Ali testified that he had committed an act of infidelity and repented, they would continue to oppose him. ‘Ali refused their demands and decided to march to Syria without them.⁷³

The Kufans wished that ‘Ali would subdue the Khawarij prior to marching against the Syrians. ‘Ali insisted that fighting a people who would be tyrants and kings was more important than the Khawarij. His men agreed, and ‘Ali moved north towards Syria. Ali now received news that the Khawarij were in full control

⁷² *Ibid.*, 111.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 117.

of Kufa and had massacred his envoy al-Harith b. Murra, who was sent by 'Ali to meet with the Khawarij. 'Ali's men urged the *imam* to turn back and fight the Khawarij. 'Ali had no choice but to abort his campaign against Mu'awiya and return to deal with the internal rebels. 'Ali demanded the Khawarij surrender the murderers, but the Khawarij rejected 'Ali's request.⁷⁴

Once again, 'Ali tried to subdue the Khawarij peacefully. He tried to justify his acceptance of the arbitration, but the Khawarij insisted on fighting. On July 17, 658, near a place called al-Nahrawan, Ali ordered his army to attack the rebels, who were greatly outnumbered by 'Ali's men. The Khawarij lost the battle, and 'Ali departed immediately leaving his men to bury their dead kin who had fought on the other side.

The secession of the Khawarij from 'Ali's army shook the foundation of 'Ali's reign and weakened his rule. 'Ali not only had to put off his campaign against the Syrians, but he also had to fight the men who were the backbone of his army. 'Ali's continuous attempts to bring the rebels back to his camp was a sign of weakness and reluctance to go to war against them. He was aware that as long as the Khawarij were not on his side, Mu'awiya would be hard to subdue. However, had 'Ali not committed himself to a fair game and not bound himself to the principles of politics, he could have achieved his aims. 'Ali simply could not

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 120

agree to their demands, i.e., to repent as they repented, or to condone the murders they had committed. Had he done so, he could have won them back and could have avoided the decline of his reign and the dwindling of his support.

After he defeated the Khawarij at al-Nahrawan, 'Ali wanted to proceed with his campaign against the Syrians. As he gave the orders to prepare for the march, his men complained of fatigue and urged him to defer his attack. Yielding to their wishes, 'Ali gave in and returned to Kufa, abandoning the campaign.⁷⁵ While Mu'awiya was preparing for 'Ali's invasion, he received news that 'Ali had called off his march to Syria in order to deal with the rebels in his own ranks. More pleasant news arrived in Syria informing Mu'awiya that 'Ali had annihilated the rebels and had postponed his march to Syria at the urging of his own men.

Mu'awiya now took advantage of 'Ali's weakness and turned his eyes to Egypt. The triumph of Mu'awiya at Siffin encouraged the 'Uthmanids of Egypt to rise in opposition to 'Ali's governor, Muhammad b. Abi Bakr. The 'Uthmanid seceders were led by Mu'awiya b. Hudayj al-Sakuni and Maslama b. Mukhallad, two prominent figures who fought alongside Mu'awiya at Siffin.⁷⁶ Learning of Mu'awiya's plans, 'Ali sent al-Ashtar to Egypt to take over from Ibn Abi Bakr.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

Al-Ashtar was received by Mu'awiya's tax collector, who served him a poisoned drink, killing him instantly.⁷⁷

'Ali immediately wrote to Muhammad b. Abi Bakr asking him to be persistent towards his enemy and to prepare himself for war. Ibn Abi Bakr replied with firm assurance that he would fight the enemy, and affirmed his loyalty to 'Ali. On his part, Mu'awiya wrote a letter to Mu'awiya b. Hudayj al-Sakuni and Maslama b. Mukhallad urging them to carry on their war against 'Ali's governor. Maslama wrote back to Mu'awiya asking him for support. According to al-Tabari, on the authority of al-Waqidi, Mu'awiya received the letter and commanded 'Amr b. al-'As to march to Egypt with six thousand men. 'Amr's army numbered four thousand.⁷⁸

Ali's attempt to prevent Egypt from falling into Mu'awiya's hands failed due to the defection of Ali's troops, who showed no interest in lending support to their brethren in Egypt. 'Amr entered Egypt, and Muhammad b. Abi Bakr, who took the offensive with an army of only two thousand men, was slain and his body was burned inside the carcass of a donkey. 'Amr's victory, given by al-Tabari on the authority of al-Waqidi, occurred July-August 658.⁷⁹ Thus, with the loss of Egypt, the Islamic state was divided into two parts: Mu'awiya ruled Syria and

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 133

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Egypt, while 'Ali's authority was reduced to that of Iraq, the Arabian peninsula, and the province of Fars.

As Egypt ceased to be a thorn in his side, Mu'awiya set forth to conquer Arabia and the cities beyond the Syrian desert. First on the list was Mecca since the Meccans had been the first to oppose 'Ali and were more inclined to cooperate with him than other parts of Arabia. When Qutham b. al-'Abbas, 'Ali's governor in Mecca, learned that the Syrians were approaching the city, he informed the Meccans of the threat and urged them to show their willingness to resist the Syrians. However, when the Meccans appeared reluctant to fight the invading troops, Qutham decided to leave the town. But on the advice of his friends and advisers, Qutham decided to stay.

When the Syrians entered Mecca, Yazid b. Shajara of Madhhij, one of Mu'awiya's northern Syrian army leaders, addressed the Meccans by stating that he had been sent "to order the proper and prohibit the reprehensible" (*al-'amr bi l-ma'ruf wa l-nahi 'an al-munkar*). After they prayed with the Meccans, the Syrians immediately departed. However, about a month later, Mu'awiya launched more serious attacks on upper Mesopotamia, but 'Ali's commanders succeeded in fending off the Syrian raids.

‘Ali now not only had to deal with the Syrians but also had to face the hostile activity of five Khariji splinter groups,⁸⁰ who were determined to follow the example of their brethren killed at al-Nahrawan. In February 659, ‘Ali suppressed the last Khariji rebellion during his reign, renewed his campaign against Mu‘awiya, and planned an attack on Syria for the Spring of 661. To forestall the attack, Mu‘awiya opened a second front by sending a major force to the Hijaz and Yemen.

According to ‘Awanah in al-Tabari, Busr b. Abi Artat left Syria for Medina on the order of Mu‘awiya. ‘Ali’s governor in Medina, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, withdrew to Kufa, and Busr entered Medina without any resistance. Busr continued to Mecca and then to the Yemen. ‘Ubayd Allah b. al-Abbas, who was Ali’s governor in Yemen, hearing that Busr was murdering ‘Ali’s supporters, fled Yemen and sought refuge with ‘Ali in Kufa. Busr entered Yemen and killed a number of ‘Ali’s supporters, including the two sons of ‘Ubayd Allah. ‘Ali immediately sent a relief army of two thousand men under Jariya b. Qudama. A reinforcement of another two thousand later followed under Wahb b. Mas‘ud. As Jarir reached Yemen, the Uthmanids fled to the nearby mountains where they were persecuted by ‘Ali’s partisans. Busr retreated to Syria taking an eastern route through the Jawf towards the territory of the Tamim, thus avoiding the Hijaz

⁸⁰ Al-Tabari, *T'arikh*, v. 3, 153.

where he could have been crushed between an oncoming and a pursuing enemy army. While in pursuit of Busr, Jariya was informed of the assassination of 'Ali.

On Friday, January 26, 661, shortly before 'Ali was set to launch his third campaign against Syria in the winter of that year, a lone Khariji from Egypt by the name of 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Amr b. Muljam al-Muradi struck 'Ali on the head with a poisoned sword as the *imam* entered, or after he had just left, the mosque of Kufa to perform the morning prayer. Ostensibly, Ibn Muljam's motive behind the assassination was to revenge the blood of the Khawarij who were killed by 'Ali's army at al-Nahrawan.⁸¹ The death of 'Ali was a driving force behind the changing mood of the majority of the Kufans and Basrans who now vowed to fight Mu'awiya. Those who remained neutral during 'Ali's lifetime became supporters after his death. Their loyalty to the *imam* stemmed from their distrust of and opposition to Mu'awiya on the one hand, and from their appreciation of 'Ali's honesty and unbending devotion to Islam on the other.

THE KHAWARIJ AFTER 'ALI'S DEATH

Following the death of 'Ali, the Kufans pledged allegiance to al-Hasan b. 'Ali as the next caliph. According to al-Tabari, the first person to pay homage to al-Hasan was Qays b. Sa'ad. Subsequently, the Iraqis followed suit. Al-Tabari

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

adds on the authority of al-Zuhri that al-Hasan had no desire for a confrontation with Syria, but he wanted his dues from Mu'awiya before he joined the united community (*al-jama'a*). Al-Tabari reports on the authority of Isma'il b. Rashid: "The people paid homage to al-Hasan b. 'Ali, who marched with his army to Mada'in. From there al-Hasan sent Qays b. Sa'd to Syria with 12,000 men."⁸² While al-Hasan was in Mada'in, a man shouted: "Oh people, Qays b. Sa'd is killed, disperse." They dispersed and then stole al-Hasan's belongings.⁸³ When al-Hasan lost control of his men, he sent to Mu'awiya asking for a truce. Mu'awiya honored his request and gave him money from the treasury of Kufa. Al-Hasan made a speech condemning the Iraqis for killing his father, and for betraying him and stealing his belongings. Mu'awiya entered Kufa and the people paid allegiance to him.⁸⁴

The Khawarij continued their rebellions during Mu'awiya's rule and became a thorn in the side of the Umayyad state. Their hatred of Mu'awiya stemmed from their belief that the Umayyad caliph had misused the *mal al-muslimin*, lived in castles, acquired guards on the model of the Byzantine rulers, and ascended to the caliphate without the consent of the Muslims. Feeling the threats against his rule, Mu'awiya launched a pre-emptive strike against those

⁸² *Ibid.*, 165.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

splinter groups who threatened the very existence of the Umayyad state. The Khawarij, led by Farwa b. Nawfal al-Ashja'i, attacked the caliph in Kufa and defeated his Syrian army. A second Khariji group under the leadership of Hayyan b. Zibyan entered Kufa in support of their brethren who fought against Mu'awiya.⁸⁵

The growing presence and influence of the Khawarij in Iraq threatened Mu'awiya's rule in that province. The Umayyad caliph had no choice but to appoint Ziyad b. Abihi as governor of Basra in 665 to deal with the rebels. With his iron-glove policy, Ziyad succeeded in quelling the insurgents. The governor of Kufa, al-Mughira b. Shu'ba, followed suit. Thus, with Kufa and Basra free from the Khawarij, Mu'awiya succeeded in suppressing the Khariji rebellions in Iraq.⁸⁶ After the death of Ziyad, his son 'Ubaydallah assumed power. Underestimating 'Ubaydallah's power, the Khawarij renewed their activities thinking that the new governor was going to pursue a lenient and tolerant policy toward the insurgents. The Khawarij were proven wrong. 'Ubaydallah followed his father's strict policy towards the Khawarij and killed a large number of them. Although 'Ubaydallah was not lenient with the Khawarij, the latter fought the governor and were victorious in the battle of Ahwaz where forty Khawarij led by Abu Bilal b.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Adayya defeated two thousand of 'Ubaydallah's men.⁸⁷ Following that defeat, 'Ubaydallah sent a reinforcement of three thousand men who killed Abu Bilal and a large number of his followers.⁸⁸

During the reign of Abd al-Malik b. Marwan (685-705), the Khawarij emerged again as an opposition force to the Umayyad caliphate. Also during that period, three major Khariji groups were formed under prominent figures who, through experience in wars, realized that a reorganization of the Khawarij would guarantee the movement's continuity in a hostile environment. The first political strategy that the Khawarij undertook was the alliance with Abdullah b. al-Zubayr in Mecca. The Khawarij, however, broke their alliance with Ibn al-Zubayr and left Mecca when they realized that Ibn al-Zubayr's policies did not serve their goals⁸⁹ (Ibn al-Zubayr for instance did not agree that 'Uthman deserved to be killed). The Khawarij arrived in Basra under the leadership of Nafi' b. al-Azraq al-Hanzali, Abdullah b. al-Saffar al-Sa'di, Abdullah b. Ibad, and Hanzala b. Bayhas. Once in Basra, the Khawarij were split into four major groups: Azariqa, Sufriyya, Najdiyya, and Ibadiyya. The Khawarij were divided into groups and subgroups based on political, ideological, and tribal differences.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 255; Al-Mubarrad, *al-Kamil*, V.2, 158.

⁸⁸ Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, *T'arikh al-Islam*, V.1 (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1991), 312.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Al-Mubarrad, *Al-Kamil*, V.2, 179-180.

During the reigns of al-Walid b. Abd al-Malik (r. 705-715) and his brother Sulayman b. Abd al-Malik (r. 715-717), the Khawarij became passive and held back their attacks and campaigns against the Umayyads. When 'Umar b. Abd al-Aziz (r. 717-720) ascended to the caliphate, a man by the name of Shawdhab reactivated the insurgency of the Khawarij.⁹¹ Unlike his predecessors, 'Umar refrained from dealing with the Khawarij with a ruthless policy; he offered them the carrot instead of the stick. 'Umar's tolerant policy succeeded in taming the Khawarij. According to a modern historian, during 'Umar's reign, the Khawarij controlled Iraq and the peninsula (*al-jazira*). They also became advocates of the weak and the oppressed and waged their wars against tyrant governors and officials.⁹²

Towards the end of the Umayyad caliphate, the Khawarij became more aggressive, especially when the Umayyads split into two factions following the death of the eleventh Umayyad caliph al-Walid b. Yazid (r. 743-744). A new Khariji leader by the name Abu Hamza al-Khariji emerged and appealed to the Meccans to rise against the last Umayyad caliph Marwan b. Muhammad (r. 744-750). In 746, Abu Hamza marched to Mecca with 700 men and entered the town a year later. Three months later, he marched to Syria to face the army of Marwan. The Umayyads fought the Khawarij in a place called Wadi al-Qura, where Abu

⁹¹ It is not clear where Shawdhab led his insurgency.

⁹² Hasan, *T'arikh*, V.1, 315.

Hamza and a large number of his followers were killed.⁹³ The revolt of Abu Hamza was the last Khariji rising in the Umayyad period and the last Khariji attempt to overthrow the Umayyad caliphate.⁹⁴

THE KHAWARIJ IN THE POST-UMAYYAD PERIOD

Despite their numerous revolts in the heart of the Umayyad state, the Khawarij failed to achieve their goals and, therefore, became a target for persecution. One of the main reasons for failing to reach their goals was the division among their groups and the mounting differences in their views and principles.⁹⁵ This division, which used to reach its peak during their wars with their enemies, was a main factor of their defeat and setback. Their enemies never hesitated to take advantage of their division and to seek their elimination before they regrouped. Violence against the Khawarij continued throughout the entire Umayyad rule except during the reign of 'Umar b. Abd al-Aziz who practiced leniency toward the Khawarij, as mentioned earlier. The Umayyads' success in suppressing the Khawarij led the sect to move away from the center of the Islamic State diminishing their violent activism and pursuing their goals through peaceful

⁹³ Al-Tabari, *T'arikh*, V.4, 331.

⁹⁴ Hasan, *Tarikh*, V.1, 316.

⁹⁵ The Khawarij subgroups held different theological and philosophical views (i.e., the status of a Muslim who commits a grave sin, the killing of non-Khawarij Muslims, and the theory of the caliphate, to name a few).

means, i.e., political organization and propagation (*da'wa*). They moved to the periphery of the Islamic state, in particular to North Africa, or al-Maghrib al-Arabi as known in the present day Arab World and to Uman.

Neither the Azariqa nor the Najdiyya survived in the later Marwanid period. The Azariqa were exterminated and the Najdiyya were defeated in Arabia by al-Hajjaj; while the Sufriyya and Ibadiyya continued their *da'wa* by spreading their propagators (*du'at*) throughout the peripheries of the Islamic state. The Khawarij looked west to the Maghrib where the Berbers welcomed and accepted their egalitarian principles. The Berbers, who were conquered by the Arabs and whose language and culture were Arabized, suffered discrimination by the Arab-oriented Umayyad rulers. Thus, the Berbers, like the Shu'ubiyya movement in the East, saw in the Khariji principles an end to the Umayyads' hegemony and preference for Arab ethnicity. The Kharijij leaders wasted no time in sending their *du'at* west to that region where they later on established their Khariji states.

There are contradictory reports as to when the Khawarij commenced their *da'wa* in the Maghrib. According to Ibn Hawqal,⁹⁶ the *da'wa* was initiated during the battle of al-Nahrawan in 658. Ibn Hawqal argues that two Khariji leaders, Abdullah b. Wahb al-Rasibi and Abdullah b. Ibad, in addition to a number of the Khawarij sought refuge in Mount Nafusa (*Jabal Nafusa*) after their defeat by

⁹⁶ Ibn Hawqal, *al-Masalik wal Mamalik* (Leiden: n.p., 1873), 68.

‘Ali’s army at the battle of al-Nahrawan. They settled in that mountain and made it a place for migration (*dar al-hijra*) for the Khawarij who sought migration from Iraq to avoid persecution. The report by Ibn Hawqal, however, is problematic since Ibn Khaldun tells us that al-Rasibi was killed at the battle of al-Nahrawan,⁹⁷ and that Ibn Ibad was not mentioned among those who survived the battle.

Perhaps the Khawarij who survived al-Nahrawan moved to Jabal Nafusa, but their presence and influence were minimal. It is, however, apparent that the Khawarij’s major migration to the Maghrib region took place during the Umayyad period. In the Maghrib, the Khawarij established at least two Khariji states, as mentioned above. The Sufriyya established the state of Bani Midrar (757-909) in Sijilmasa,⁹⁸ and the Ibadiyya established the state of Banu Rustum (778-909) in Tahert.⁹⁹ These two states played a major role in the politics and history of the Maghrib until they were annihilated by the Fatimids in 909.¹⁰⁰

It is important to mention that the Khawarij’s revolts continued to be active against the Fatimid state, although failed, and their influence left its mark in the Maghrib and ‘Uman. Their influence has, in fact, survived in the Ibadiyya group, whose survival and continuity can be attributed to their practice of dissimulation

⁹⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *T’arikh al-‘Ibar*, V.2, 612.

⁹⁸ Mahmud Isam’il Abd al-Raziq, *al-Khawarij fi bilad al-Maghrib* (n.c., Morocco: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1976), 112.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 210, 299.

(*taqiyya*) and assimilation (*inkhirat*), and to their propagation of principles that were compatible with mainstream Islam.

CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the rise of the Khawarij and the historical events that took place from the accession of ‘Uthman until the death of ‘Ali. The Khawarij are also discussed in the ‘Umayyad and post-‘Umayyad periods. A great deal of attention is given to ‘Ali’s reign since the Khawarij made their first appearance during his rule and in the midst of the battle of Siffin. This chapter also deals with the emergence of the Khawarij and their opposition to ‘Ali. It was argued that the Khawarij played a major role in weakening ‘Ali’s reign, which helped Mu‘awiya to claim all of Syria and to be declared a legitimate caliph of that region. The Battle of the Camel, the Battle of Siffin, and the rise of the Khawarij are discussed in detail for the purpose of showing how events developed and how such events led to the emergence of the Khawarij. Also, special attention is given to the events that took place after the death of ‘Ali to show how the Khawarij survived by making the *hijra* to the Maghrib region to escape persecution and to establish a base to continue their propagation. Unlike the forthcoming chapters, this chapter deals only with the history of the Khawarij. The next chapter will provide an in-depth discussion of the Khawarij in modern and contemporary Western

scholarship, and will shed light on how modern and contemporary historians have viewed and analyzed the Khawarij.

The Text of the Siffin arbitration agreement (Version A) as transmitted by al-Minqari:

This is what ‘Ali b. Abi Talib and Mu‘awiya b. Abu Sufyan have agreed to adhere to. ‘Ali b. Abi Talib has agreed on behalf of the people of Iraq and those Muslims and believers who were with him from his party. Mu‘awiya b. Abi Sufyan has agreed on behalf of the people of Syria and those Muslims and believers who were with him from his party. They have agreed that they will apply the rule of God and what is written in His book. Nothing will bring us together except His book that is between us from its beginning to its end. We apply what the Book saw fit and dismiss what the Book considered void. The arbitrators will apply the rule of God. If the arbitrators cannot find in the book of God what they are looking for, then they should resort to the just, uniting and not dividing, sunna. We entrusted to the two arbitrators ‘Abdullah b. Qays and ‘Amru b. al-‘As God’s covenant so they can apply what they found in the book of God. If they did not find what they are looking for in the book of God, then they should apply the just, uniting and not dividing, sunna. The two arbitrators took from ‘Ali and Mu‘awiya and from the two armies the confidence of the people that they are trustworthy of their money and their people and that the Islamic community will support them in what they will decide for the

Muslims and believers of the two parties. God's blessing on this agreement that we will adhere to its decision. We shall apply its rules and we shall be victorious. This agreement shall bring stability and security among believers, and shall lead them to lay down their weapons wherever they go. The rules of this agreement shall apply to the believers and to their money, their people, their properties, and to their present and absent ones. The duties of the two arbitrators are to adhere to God's covenant and to arbitrate between the Muslims in just and right manners and not to divide between the Muslims or cause any war. They shall postpone the enactment of the agreement until the month of Ramadan; but, if they desired to hasten its application, they may do so. If any of the arbitrators has died, then the leader of his party may choose his replacement with a man who is as just as his predecessor. The place where the arbitrators will conduct their arbitration must be fair to both Syrians and Kufans. If they had agreed on a different place, then only those who wanted to attend shall attend and that the two arbitrators shall take with them those men of their choosing so they will write their testimonies on what the agreement dictates. We are not bound by any rule other than what God has given us. God, we ask your assistance against those who left ungodly rules in the agreement and against those who wanted tyranny and atheism.

هذا ما تقاضى عليه علي بن ابي طالب ومعاوية بي ابي سفيان. قاضى علي بن ابي طالب على اهل العراق ومن كان معه من شيعة من المؤمنين والمسلمين، وقاضى معاوية بن ابي سفيان على اهل الشام ومن كان معه من شيعة من المؤمنين والمسلمين: أنا ننزل عن حكم الله وكتابه، وألا يجمع بيننا إلا آياله، وأن كتاب الله بيننا وبينكم من فاتحته إلى خاتمته: نحي ما أحيا القرآن ونحي ما أمات القرآن. فما وجد الحكماء في كتاب الله بيننا وبينكم فإنهما يتبعانه، وما لم يجداه في كتاب الله أخذنا بالسنة العادلة الجامعة غير المفرقة، والحكماء عبد الله بن قيس وعمرو بن العاص. وأخذنا عليهما عهد الله وميثاقه ليقضيا بما وجدنا في كتاب الله، فإن لم يجداه في كتاب الله فالسنة الجامعة غير المفرقة. واخذ الحكماء من علي ومعاوية ومن الجندين - مما هما عليه من أمر الناس بما يرضيان به من العهد والميثاق والثقة من الناس - أنهما آمان على أموالهما وأهليهما. والأمة لهما أنصار على الذي يقضيان به عليهما. وعلى المؤمنين والمسلمين من الطائفتين كلتيهما عهد الله إنا على ما في هذه الصحيفة، ولنقومن عليه، وإنا عليه لأنصار. وإنا قد وجبت القضية بين المؤمنين بالأمن والاستقامة ووضع السلاح، أينما ساروا، على أنفسهم وأموالهم وأهليهم وأرضيهم وشاهدهم وغائبهم وعلى عبد الله بن قيس وعمرو بن العاص عهد الله وميثاقه ليحكمنا بين الأمة بالحق ولا يردانها في فرقة ولا بحرب حتى يقضيا. واجدُ القضية إلى شهر رمضان فإن أحبا ان يعجلا عجلا. وإن توفي واحد من الحكمين فإن أمير شيعة يختار مكانه رجلا لا يألو عن المعدلة والقسط، وأن ميعاد قضائهما الذي يقضيان فيه مكان عدل بين اهل الشام وأهل الكوفة، فإن رضيا مكانا غيره فحيث رضيا لا يحضرهما فيه إلا من أرادا. وأن يأخذ الحكماء من شاءا من الشهود ثم يكتبوا شهادتهم على ما في الصحيفة ونحن براء من حكم بغير ما أنزل الله. اللهم إنا نستعينك على من ترك ما في هذه الصحيفة، وأراد فيهما إلحادا وظلما.

Chapter Two

The Khawarij in Western Historiography

The Khawarij merit special attention because their significance in early Islam and their influence on modern fundamentalists have led scholars to rewrite their history and reinterpret their views. This discussion of Khariji historiography will reconfirm the argument that “the narratives of . . . historians on the origin of the [Khariji] movement are very confused and contradictory, and seem to have lost sight of the real connection between it and the arbitration. . . .”¹ Modern western historiography of the Khawarij is surveyed chronologically here from R. E. Brunnow, who wrote a dissertation on the Khawarij at Leiden University in 1884, to Jeffrey T. Kenney, who has recently completed his dissertation on the group at the University of California at Santa Barbara. The works of Julius Wellhausen, Elie Salem, W. M. Watt, Martin Hinds, Fazlur Rahman, Michael G. Morony, Chase F. Robinson, and M. A. Shaban are valuable to the subject and are discussed.

These scholars were chosen for two reasons: 1) they wrote book-length studies and whole chapters on the history and emergence of the Khawarij, and 2)

¹G. Levi Della Vida, “Kharidjites,” in M. TH. Houtma, A.J. Wensinck, T.W. Arnold, W. Heffening and E. Levi-Provencal, eds., *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill, 1987), 904.

they came up with various interpretations of the group. The issues that were discussed by these scholars range from whether the Khawarij were of bedouin stock or from notable tribes to whether their emergence was motivated by political, religious, or economic factors.

THE MODERN DEBATE IN WESTERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

R. E. Brünnow (1884) and Julius Wellhausen (1901)

R. E. Brünnow² and Julius Wellhausen³ studied the social origin of the Khawarij and had different views and interpretations as to who the Khawarij were and where they came from. Brünnow traced the origins of the Khawarij back to bedouin stock and desert tribesmen, who had become soldiers not out of commitment to Islam but to share the spoils. Brünnow held that the Khawarij were bedouin Arabs (*Beduinenaraber*) or full-blooded Arabs from the great desert (*Vollblutaraber aus den grossen Wüstenstämmen*).⁴ Once they settled in Kufa and Basra, these soldiers shifted their energies to the religious side of Islam. Brünnow argued that the rise of the Khawarij was a sudden reaction to religious injustice at the battle of Siffin. The Khawarij simply did not accept 'Ali's arbitration over a

²R.E. Brünnow, *Die Charidschiten Unter den Ersten Omayyaden* (Leiden: n.p., 1884).

³Julius Wellhausen, *Die Religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam* (Berlin: n.p., 1901).

⁴Brünnow, *Die Charidschiten*, 8.

religiously established system of rule. Brünnow argued that had the Khawarij been established before the battle of Siffin, they would not have fought each other during the Battle of the Camel. Brünnow added that the Khawarij could not have been associated with the murder of 'Uthman, since they were not powerful or organized enough to carry out such an act.⁵

For Brünnow, the Khawarij were men of piety committed to their religious beliefs: "These people were distinguished from their fellow citizens by a high degree of religious zeal." On the other hand, Brünnow stated that the Khawarij were also "political in nature and totally different from the later theological sects."⁶ The confusion that Brünnow left in his reading of the Khawarij about whether the Khawarij were politically or religiously motivated was clarified by Julius Wellhausen, a renowned Islamicist who dwelt on the historical development of the Khawarij.

Wellhausen's work on the Khawarij was published in 1901 in German under the title of *Die Religios-Politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam*. The book is divided into two sections: one on the Khawarij and the other on the Shi'a. In his section on the Khawarij, Wellhausen turned his critical attention to the theories of his own contemporary and predecessor Brünnow. Wellhausen began his account of the Khawarij by discussing the events at the Battle of Siffin,

⁵ *Ibid*, 7-13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

which means, for Wellhausen, that the Khawarij made their first appearance in Siffin. Not only that, Wellhausen argued that the Khawarij's emergence was purely religious. To support his argument, Wellhausen dug into the early days of Siffin and unraveled the reasons that led the Syrians to adopt a religious motif to stop the battle: that is the raising of the Qur'an.

Wellhausen addressed the accounts of Abu Mikhnaf in al-Tabari and the later scholars who suspected that there were traitors on the Iraqi side with whom Mu'awiya and 'Amr b. al-'As had planned the ruse beforehand. The traitors, writes Wellhausen according to Abu Mikhnaf and the later scholars, were Abu Musa al-Ash'ari and al-Ash'ath. Wellhausen, however, cleared Abu Musa from being a traitor because he was neither for 'Ali nor for Mu'awiya. The charge of treachery remained then against al-Ash'ath, who was much more suited to the role of traitor than Abu Musa, according to Wellhausen. Like Brünnow, Wellhausen put most of the blame on al-Ash'ath for the Iraqis' agreeing to stop the fight. It was al-Ash'ath who forced 'Ali to order al-Ashtar to halt the attacks against the Syrians, a move well planned by Mu'awiya and well delivered by al-Ash'ath.

After the decision to halt the battle, al-Ash'ath offered to be an arbiter and was granted such a position. He then read the treaty to the Iraqi camp. He could have defected to Mu'awiya, but he remained loyal to 'Ali and had no sympathy for the Syrians. Moreover, al-Ash'ath later warned 'Ali about the Khawarij and Ibn

Muljam. Taking all these facts into account, Wellhausen saw no treachery on the side of al-Ash'ath. Wellhausen, therefore, dismissed the claims that the Iraqis were misled by traitors from among them to stop the fight after the Syrians had raised the Qur'an. Wellhausen argued that the brandishing of the Qur'an was not an improvisation on the part of Amr b. al-'As; the Iraqis needed no traitors to make them understand its meaning. The Syrians "wanted to show the Iraqis that they were fighting against people whose banner was no less than theirs - the word of God. The Iraqis needed nothing more to understand this, and no wonder it made an impression on them."⁷ Therefore, the conflict at the Battle of Siffin was religious in nature and the emergence of the factions in 'Ali's army (including the Khawarij) was purely religious rather than political or military.

Brünnow argued that the Qur'an readers (*qurra'*) and the Khawarij - the former had stopped the conflict and the latter had protested against it - are two different groups; on the contrary, Wellhausen disagreed and argued that the *qurra'* and the Khawarij belonged to the same group, and that there was such a sudden change within the same circle of people. Although Wellhausen and Brünnow disagreed on whether the Khawarij and the *qurra'* were two different groups, or whether the former had sprung from the latter, they both had a similar definition of the group: the *qurra'* were inconsistent in their positions, hard to define, and had

⁷Julius Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam* (Oxford: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1975), 8.

no political program. The Qur'an, from which they took their name, was used for practice and edification, rather than a text to be studied.⁸

Wellhausen added that the *qurra'* were to be found in Mu'awiya's and 'Ali's camps and played the role of religious scholars (*fuqaha'*). They were in constant rebellion and gained popularity among the masses. During the revolt against 'Uthman, they were a violent group. They were the aristocracy of the oldest Companions of the Prophet, and they were the attackers of 'Uthman. They fought what they believed were the "enemies" of Islam as good Muslims; they were prominent in the Battles of the Camel and Siffin. The *qurra'* did not motivate or instigate the rebellions, but they rallied the masses and spoke on behalf of public opinion. Finally, and more importantly, they followed the Qur'an, the Sunna, the Shari'a, and the tradition. Thus, Wellhausen concluded that if such was the nature of the *qurra'*, then one must allow that the Khawarij could have sprung from them.⁹

Wellhausen argued that most of the Arabs in Kufa and Basra came from tribes that lived in the desert, but this does not tell us anything about the origin of the Khawarij. Wellhausen added that the Khawarij severed all their ties with their desert tribes when they migrated to the cities and joined the army. He also pointed out that when the Umayyad army attacked the Khawarij, the latter preferred to

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

retreat to non-Arab lands, rather than going back to their desert tribes. These statements by Wellhausen suggest that the Khawarij, who cut their ties with their tribes and refused to return to their nomadic environment, had no pride in their desert origin and tribes. Thus, Wellhausen refutes Brünnow's statement that the Khawarij were loyal to their bedouin tribes.¹⁰

Wellhausen asserted that the Khawarij had sprung from the *qurra'*, who appealed to the Qur'an to arbitrate among the Muslims in time of strife. The *qurra'* were the first to object to 'Ali's acceptance of the arbitration and were the loudest of all to call for God's judgment at the Battle of Siffin. Wellhausen disagreed with Brünnow who argued that the *qurra'* and the Khawarij had belonged to different circles: the *qurra'* stopped the conflict and then the Khawarij protested against stopping it. Brünnow added that "the latter are said to have been Bedouins."¹¹ For Wellhausen, the Arabs of Kufa and Basra were nearly all bedouins, but tracing the origin of the Khawarij to the bedouins does not explain the behavior of the Khawarij at Siffin.

Wellhausen added that the Khawarij expressed extreme piety and commitment to their religion after a fall from grace. They were the same people who forced 'Ali to accept the Qur'an as mediator and then rejected the arbitration. They felt that it was their obligation to repair the damage and regain what the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

community had lost from their decision. According to Wellhausen, it is in this context that the Khawarij can be understood. Wellhausen wrote:

First, after a fall from grace they regained that energy and certitude which they later held to be the essence of piety. They considered their past vacillation as a disgraceful sin, and now turned all their energy towards expiating it. It was repentance which caused them to appear, and to act. They themselves made good this repentance through action, and they asked the same of 'Ali and of others.¹²

Having refuted Brünnow's theory that the Khawarij were distinct from the *qurra'* and that their behavior was influenced by their bedouin background, Wellhausen aimed at discrediting Sayf b. 'Umar, who tried to trace the origin of the Khawarij to the Saba'iyya. Sayf theorized that, since the leaders of the first Khawarij participated in the murder of 'Uthman, they must have been Saba'iyya.¹³ Wellhausen contended that the title of Saba'iyya was applied only to the Shi'a. The Khawarij used the name to slander their opponents in Kufa. Wellhausen added that if we have to assume that the Saba'iyya were the only people responsible for the assassination of 'Uthman, and that the Saba'iyya was the common root of the Khawarij, then it remained to be established why the name previously was applied only to the extreme Shi'a.¹⁴

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Sayf B. 'Umar, *Al-Fitna wa waq'at al-Jamal*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1993), 54-58.

¹⁴ Wellhausen, *Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, 17.

According to Wellhausen, the Khawarij could not have defected from the Saba'iyya because their origin as Khawarij was at Siffin. Moreover, Wellhausen disagreed with Sayf that the movement against 'Uthman had emerged from the Saba'iyya, and that, "in that affair, they were not as significant as Sayf would have them."¹⁵ For Wellhausen, the Khawarij were not the weeds sown by the Jew Ibn Saba', but they were the sons of Islam. They did not start off as a marginal and clandestine sect, but in the full public eye and in the midst of one of the major internal confrontations among the Muslims. As defined by Wellhausen:

Their origins were essentially very different from those of the 'Abbasid and Fatimid parties. They did not have to resort to conspiracy and widespread propaganda, and were not held together by a secret complex organization. They had only principles, but these were always well-known to the people, and attracted supporters without their seeking them.¹⁶

Wellhausen justified the revolt of the Khawarij against 'Ali by arguing that the group had followed a genuine Islamic formula: for God against the corrupt Caliph, for Law and Justice against folly and misrule. This formula was applied to 'Uthman and could be applied to every other ruler who deviated from the right path, according to Wellhausen. The Khawarij used it against 'Ali to withdraw from his army, and so they became Khawarij. In this respect, Wellhausen portrayed the Khawarij as true Muslims who were expressing their religious

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18

commitment to God. The blame for their secession and their revolt is wholeheartedly put on 'Ali for his failure to conduct the Muslim affairs at the Battle of Siffin in a manner that conformed with the Law.¹⁷

According to Wellhausen, the insurgency that toppled 'Uthman and brought 'Ali to power could not be brought to a halt when he took a false step. For the Khawarij, 'Ali's pact with Mu'awiya compromised the Divine Right, the same act which caused the insurgencies against 'Uthman and Mu'awiya as well. With 'Ali surrendering the Divine Right, the Khawarij realized that 'Ali was concerned with political and military power more than he was concerned with the affairs of God, and therefore he was perceived to be as deviant as 'Uthman and Mu'awiya.

What is striking in Wellhausen's analysis of the emergence of the Khawarij is his analogy of the group with the Jewish Zealots. Wellhausen asserted that the Khawarij were a pious revolutionary faction who emerged from Islam rather than from Arabism. Their relation to the virtuosi of Islamic piety resembles that of the Jewish Zealots to the Pharisees. The difference between the Khawarij and the Zealots was that the former fought for God while the latter fought for the fatherland.¹⁸ Wellhausen also proclaimed that the Khawarij followed a different path of Islam. In the Muslim community, piety had a political slant, and this was the path which the Khawarij followed. They realized that it was their duty to help

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

God if His commandments on Earth were disobeyed. They believed that not only must they personally do good and avoid doing evil, but they must also perform public action as individuals against injustice. Although this was the duty of every Muslim, the Khawarij acted recklessly upon it at all times. This, therefore, led to their constant conflicts with the authorities.¹⁹

An authority, Wellhausen added, is only lawful if it rules in God's name and according to His will, and authority must be subordinate to the religion. In this respect, Wellhausen defined two main elements contradicting each other in theocracy: the Religion (*Din*) and the Community (*Jama'a*). The former is the duty to put God and the Law above all, and the latter is the duty to remain in the community and to obey the *imam*. According to Wellhausen, the Khawarij decided to take the side of the *din*.²⁰ In this decision, the Khawarij concerned themselves with God rather than with the community, and this act was enough to justify their disobedience to the *imams*, especially when they believed that the community had neglected God's duty and had gone astray from the path of Islam.

Wellhausen explained what constituted *din* and *jama'a* from a Khariji point of view. He said that for the Khawarij, there was no *jama'a* at the expense of religion, for the former is held together only by habit and external order. The *din* dominates every other consideration and makes no compromise. The Khawarij

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

did not acknowledge the *jama'a*; for that reason they did not hesitate to tear the community apart. Their holy war (*jihad*) was directed against every Muslim who did not share their views and beliefs. Because they considered other Muslims to be non-believers, they withdrew from the community, or from *Dar al-Harb* into *Dar al-Hijra*, according to Wellhausen.²¹

Wellhausen did not see the Khawarij as anarchists in spite of their hostile attitude toward the community and the *imam*. They saw the latter as a necessity at the head of the theocracy to lead the prayers and command the army. Therefore, according to Wellhausen, the Khawarij held to the principles of having a lawful *imam* who would put God and the *din* above the *jama'a*. They simply rejected 'Uthman, 'Ali, and Mu'awiya because they were false *imams*.²² In this respect, one may argue that the Khawarij had no political or social principles and their conflict with the community was simply to replace false *imams* with lawful ones. Wellhausen's argument, therefore, leads one to believe that the nature of the Khariji rebellions was purely religious.

Wellhausen wrote that according to Islam, "the Imam is the Imam in this world and the next, in life and in death."²³ In this view, the Khawarij believed that the *imam* must always be right; any manifest transgression committed on his part

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 22.

would make him a false *imam* or unbeliever (*kafir*). For the Khawarij, it is justified to destroy such an *imam* and the community that continued to follow his lead. Wellhausen saw the Khawarij as being extremely observant of the principles of Islam.²⁴

Although Wellhausen asserted that the religion of the Khawarij was “certainly political,”²⁵ he argued that their politics were “not based upon accessible goals. . . . [T]hey adopt what is in fact a quite unpolitical mode of political action. . . .”²⁶ Wellhausen seemed critical of the Khawarij for being politically active to achieve their religious goals. Although the Khawarij emerged as a purely religious movement, and remained as such thereafter, and were the first to raise religious questions, they were not and could not be separated from politics in an Islamic society or “theocracy” as Wellhausen described it. In a theocracy, politics and religion are inseparable, and for the Khawarij, “piety generally has a political slant.”²⁷

As to the origins of the Khawarij, Wellhausen criticized Brünnow for claiming that the Khawarij were of bedouin origin and asserted that this religio-political group emerged from very influential and noble Arab tribes. Wellhausen

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

objected to Brünnow's statement that the Khawarij were desert people and contended that although the Khawarij were not from the Ansar or Quraysh, they were from very influential and noble Arab tribes whose bedouin nature had been changed by their settlements in advanced societies.²⁸ What Brünnow meant by *Beduinenaraber* and *Vollblutaraber* is not "the desert Arabs, as Wellhausen claimed, but simply the Arabs of Kufa and Basra, who had once themselves been desert Arabs or were the descendants of desert Arabs."²⁹

Wellhausen divided the Arabs of Kufa and Basra into two groups: the Muhajira and the A'rab. The former were the privileged ones who lived in the urban centers and were considered civilized, religious people. Wellhausen wrote, the Muhajira:

had become military stipendiaries of the state, or *Muqatila*; they were raised and encouraged by the success of their Jihad, by the great deeds of God wrought through their hands. Since they lived a life of leisure in urban centers, they turned their interests towards the public affairs of the Theocracy.³⁰

The A'rab were the politically underprivileged bedouins who were branded as uncivilized, irreligious men. According to Wellhausen, the Khawarij were the true bedouins who held to their old way of life and detached themselves from

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁹ William Thomson, "Kharijitism and the Kharijites" in *The MacDonald Presentation Volume* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1933), 373.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

religio-political activity and factionalism. They were treated as camel thieves and were called A‘rabi, a pejorative term for an uncivilized, irreligious man.³¹ Wellhausen contended that the Khawarij did not come from Quraysh, but that they arose from the politically under-privileged.

Elie Adib Salem (1956)

In *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij*, Elie Adib Salem defined the Khawarij according to Ibn Hazm who says that a Khariji is any person who believes in the rejection of the Siffin arbitration, the damnation of sinners, the rebellion against wrongful and unjust *imams*, the possibility of the caliphate outside of Quraish and the Arabs, and that those who commit grave sins suffer eternal fire.³² Salem argued that the Khawarij were mostly bedouins, pious and good Muslims, “fanatic and sincere,” yet too “dogmatic” to be reconciled with the other Muslims.³³

Salem justified the revolts of the proto-Khawarij against ‘Uthman because the third caliph had removed the Ansar from their offices and replaced them with his relatives. “Nepotism and corruption grew beyond control, thus inducing feelings of dissatisfaction in the community and leading to revolt that culminated

³¹ Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions*, 3.

³² Elie Adib Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), 25.

³³ *Ibid.*, 14.

in his death in 656.”³⁴ Salem added that Khariji insurrections were due to irreligious attitudes in matters of state as well as personal discipline. Such “ungodliness” exhausted their patience.³⁵ Thus, Salem argues that revolts against ‘Uthman were generated by social and religious rather than economic factors.

Salem also argues that the *qurra*’, who first accepted the arbitration and later rejected it, sprang from the Khawarij. Salem adds that the Khawarij refused the arbitration of the Qur’an because it was exposed to diverse interpretations. In Salem’s words:

... the Khawarij consisted of Bedouin and *Qurra*’. . . . It is possible that these *Qurra*’ asked for peace when the exemplars of the Qur’an were presented, but later they changed their mind when they realized that this was the wrong thing to do. . . . They had good reasons for refusing arbitration; first, matters of such magnitude cannot be arbitrated, they can be resolved in the battlefield; second, the Qur’an cannot be made judge in this particular dispute, for it is subject to diverse interpretations.³⁶

Salem dismisses the Khawarij as a political movement. He asserts that the questions raised by the Khawarij were more religious than political and “the rise of the Khawarij should be sought in religious beliefs and loyalties rather than in political reason.”³⁷ Salem contends that the religion of the Khawarij “brought

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

them to an active, but absolutely impolitic and desperate polity.”³⁸ Salem refers to al-Jahiz who wrote:

When we see . . . the Yemeni and Maghribi . . . the Azraqi and the Najdi, the Ibadi and the Sufri, the mawla and the Arab, the Persian and the Bedouin . . . fight on one side in spite of the geographical and anthropological discrepancy, then we realize that it is religion that molds them together . . . and motivates their being.³⁹

Although the Khawarij were a religious movement, according to Salem, their goals and ends seemed to be political. In other words, they used religion as a means to achieve political ends. Salem wrote:

. . . religion is the starting point of their political theory and paradise the end of their socio-political effort. . . . They used their religious fervor and enthusiasm for the realization of a great idea, a Muslim nomocracy. In the theopolization of their existential life, lies the significance of their political contribution in general. Their political participation [and] their obedience to the law of God . . . [had] the salvation of their souls in the eyes of God.⁴⁰

At one point Salem argued that the policy of the Khawarij “was not directed towards reachable goals and was completely anti-cultural.”⁴¹ He argued that “[a]mong the later Khawarij, we find thieves, Kurds, and unbelieving Persians, whose purpose was to escape taxation and to pillage in war against the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

Government.”⁴² At a later point, Salem argued that the political theory of the Khawarij . . . the purification of Islam, the insistence on the absolute integration of the ideal with the practical, their democratic trends, and the assertion that the Qur’an is the constitution of the state . . . was appealing to non-Arabs. Salem stated that the “democratic institutions of the Khawarij and their belief in the right of revolt against corrupt rulers appealed to the Berbers.”⁴³

Salem wrote that Western scholars referred to the Khawarij as “these democrats.” In this respect, Salem defined democracy to uncover what type of democrats the Khawarij were. He wrote that democracy is of two types: procedural and substantive. Procedural democracy means the election of the caliph by the people, the right to overthrow him, and the equal opportunity of all citizens to share in the administration. Substantive democracy deals with the ends, man’s full participation in the life of the community.⁴⁴ The Khawarij were democrats of the first type. The basic question in Khariji political theory is whether the imamate is necessary. Salem argued that al-Ash‘ari, al-Ghazali, al-Mawardi, the Mu‘tazila, and the Shi‘a found it fundamental and necessary, but the Khawarij did not consider it a matter of religious obligation. All the Khawarij

⁴² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

agreed that if the Muslims were in disagreement and could not settle their differences without an imam, then they would be at liberty to appoint one.⁴⁵

Salem refuted the views that claim the Khawarij were an ideological and political movement and asserted that these claims are misleading. Salem's interpretation of the Khawarij completely contradicts the views that the group should be used as a model for, or be compared to, modern ideological movements. Salem argued that the Khawarij had no political goals, and if they ever had a political theory, it was against civilization. Ostensibly, Salem aimed in this view at discrediting the Khawarij as a political party with political goals, and asserted that they were a mere religious movement. For instance, he argued that the policy of the Khawarij "was not directed towards reachable goals and was completely anti-cultural . . . [and that] the rise of the Khawarij should be sought in religious beliefs and loyalties rather than in political reason."⁴⁶

W. M. Watt (1961, 1966)

W. Montgomery Watt has argued that economic grievances were not a factor for dissatisfaction with 'Uthman. Watt points out that:

. . . there does not seem to have been any essential economic or social difference between those who were dissatisfied with 'Uthman and those who were prepared to tolerate him. . . . The group which had fared worst

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

economically, or at least had the most genuine economic grievance, was the Ansar . . . their grievance did not make them join with the provincials in the insurrection against 'Uthman.⁴⁷

Among the accusations made against 'Uthman was the fact that he had given certain persons, especially relatives and members of his own clan, grants of land in Iraq. Watt justifies this policy, which had appeared unfair to the ordinary Muslim, by asserting that 'Uthman was within his rights since the grants had "belonged to the caliph and not to the Muslims in general."⁴⁸ In Watt's own words:

. . . To the ordinary Muslim this must have appeared a breach of the agreement not to divide up captured lands, though technically it was not so. The grants were made from certain special classes of land which from the first had belonged to the caliph and not to the Muslims in general. The appearance of unfairness, however, was certainly present, even though the grants may have been made in the hope of increasing stability and security.⁴⁹

Watt asserts that none of the grievances mentioned were sufficient to bring a rebellion against 'Uthman.⁵⁰ The fact is that the complete change in the way of life for those who had formerly been nomads played a key role in their uprisings. Watt adds that prior to the establishment of the Islamic state with its vast territory

⁴⁷ W. M. Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 94.

⁴⁸ W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1966), 10.

⁴⁹ Watt, *Islam*, 96.

⁵⁰ Watt, *Formative Period*, 11.

and bureaucracy, these nomads had roamed in the desert untamed and had enjoyed complete freedom. By 656 these nomads had become professional soldiers restricted by the state's bureaucracy. Unable to adapt to the new system and refusing to withdraw to their nomadic lives, they rose in revolt as the only way out. Watt writes: "From the freedom of the desert men had come to be under the control of a powerful bureaucracy; and many . . . felt that they were caught up in the workings of a vast administrative machine, and that there was no escape."⁵¹ Bernard Lewis agrees with Watt. Lewis says that the Khariji revolt against 'Uthman "was neither religious nor personal. It was a revolt of the nomads against any system of centralized control, a revolt not against 'Umar's state, but against any state,"⁵² which exercised constraint and even coercion and curtailed the total freedom of the tribal society. Thus, both Watt and Lewis conclude that the fundamental change in the lives of the nomads, rather than the blunders of 'Uthman, was the factor for their rebellion in Siffin.

In *Islam and the Integration of Society*, Watt explains why some movements took a trend towards disintegration and disunity. He writes:

in order to understand how Islam came to integrate heterogeneous groups it is useful also to look at its failure to integrate, and in particular to look at cases where, after a measure of integration, there appeared an opposite trend towards disintegration. . . . The problem to be considered is not

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, revised edition (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 60.

simply to show how divisions come into being but to explain why some, but only some, sectional interests harden into permanent sects and thereby impair the unity of the society.⁵³

The obvious example here are the Khawarij.

Watt adds that there were no sectional economic grievances sufficient to cause a division within the Islamic community. He argues that there had been a fundamental change in the economic basis of life for most of the Muslims who had been nomads living on pasturing animals, but now they had become the standing army of the empire.⁵⁴ The second grievance against 'Uthman, according to Watt, stemmed from the caliph's decision to make the most influential governorships available to men from his own clan and relatives. Watt asserts that 'Uthman appointed relatives because they showed efficiency and reliability. Although there is an appearance of unfairness, there is considerable justification for 'Uthman. However, Watt admits that such a policy, while understandable, was unwise.⁵⁵

The proto-Khawarij's dissatisfaction with 'Uthman was related to their dissatisfaction with the new social structure which 'Uthman represented, according to Watt.⁵⁶ In the new bureaucratic social structure, the Khawarij lost the freedom they had enjoyed in their nomadic life. Watt argues that the hostility

⁵³ Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society*, 94.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 97

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

towards 'Uthman was initiated by certain groups who found themselves insecure within the new social structure which 'Uthman represented. In their old way of life, they had enjoyed freedom and a certain say in the affairs of the tribe; but now they were restrained by a bureaucratic organization. They also felt that the "super-tribe" of Islam to which they now belonged "had abandoned its former moral standards, so that they could no longer glory in it or boast of its virtues as they had once gloried or boasted about their tribe."⁵⁷

Watt focuses on two arguments regarding the Khawarij's revolts: the first is that the Khawarij were not simply dissatisfied with a particular man or family; rather, their dissatisfaction was with the whole social structure which was represented by 'Uthman and 'Ali. The second argument is that in these revolts the Khawarij were reestablishing the tribal units in which they had belonged in their nomadic lives. Watt claims that the Khariji movement is in part a revival of Arab nomadism with a religious basis.⁵⁸ Watt also argues that the emergence of the Khariji movement was neither caused by economic grievances nor aimed at obtaining redress of economic grievances. The wealth was distributed fairly, but those "who had been accustomed to tribal society missed the security . . . provided by the old system; nothing in the new system quite replaced it."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

The Khawarij expressed their activism and aspirations in classic Khaldunian form--- the group feeling, or group solidarity, (*'asabiyya*). This theory has been used by Watt to describe the Khariji commitment and loyalty to the community rather than to leadership. Unlike the Shi'a who, when they felt insecure, turned for safety to a charismatic leader, the Khawarij in their insecurity turned for safety to the charismatic community.⁶⁰ Watt explains that the Shi'a believed in leadership because of their South Arabian belief in divine kingship. As for the Khawarij, many of their "leaders came from certain North Arabian tribes, which had had no experience of divine kingship, but in which presumably the tribe and the tribal stock had been highly regarded."⁶¹

To support his view that the Khawarij sought the protection of the charismatic community, Watt points to the way they restored the former groups in which they had lived. These groups were formed on the nomadic sub-tribe or clan style, but on an Islamic basis.⁶² The evidence that Watt provides for the influence of the idea of the charismatic community on the Khariji activity is their criticism of the following of a leader on the grounds that, if a leader erred, the whole community would go astray. They believed that the community would not err: "my community will not agree on an error." For the Khawarij, according to Watt,

⁶⁰ W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), 56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 57.

“the Islamic community was a ‘noble’ one . . . and so it is bound to act well . . . the charismatic community avoids mistakes and attains security in so far as it follows its divinely given rules.”⁶³

Watt’s notion of a “charismatic community” is quite problematic. How did the Khawarij believe in a “charismatic community” when they owe their name to their exodus from the community? Wilferd Madelung rightly observed:

[I]t was not membership in a community, but strict adherence to the *din* owed to God, religious tenets and conduct, which guaranteed salvation. If the community, or its leader, even slightly deviated in their view from the right conduct enjoined by *din*, they were ever ready to dissociate from it and to form a separate community. This primary insistence on right conduct rather than on communal solidarity led to the extreme factionalism of the Kharijite movement. The concept of a “charismatic community” is valid for the *jama‘a* of Sunnism but inappropriate for the Khawarij.⁶⁴

Bernard Lewis’ analysis of the Khariji movement is a clear indication that the group did their best to tear the community apart. Lewis wrote:

Changes in power relationships are indicated by the same metaphors. In Western language contenders for power may rise or fall. If they rise, it may be as climbers or as rebels, engaged in an uprising. In Islam, verbs meaning “to rise” are commonly used to convey religious, especially mystical, experience, but rarely political ascent. Ambitious Muslims move inward rather than upward; rebellious Muslims secede from, rather than rise against, the existing order. The earliest--indeed the pragmatic--movement of rebellion against the existing order was that of the Khawarij, “those who go out.” Significantly, their movement was expressed in the extensive social and political use of the two verbs *jama‘a*, “to gather or join,” and

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, N.Y: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 55.

faraqa, “to separate or divide.” Gathering is good--hence the *jama‘a*, “the community,” ruled by *ijma‘*, “consensus.” Separation is bad, and gives rise to *firqa*, “sect,” and other forms of disunity. The two notions are combined and contrasted in the prophetic injunction to the Muslim not to separate himself from the community, the *jama‘a*.⁶⁵

If the Khawarij truly believed that the community were a “noble” one, and that the “community avoids mistakes,” and if the Khawarij turned to the community for safety, then why “to separate or divide” rather than “to gather or join?” Such questions not only left historians in a state of perplexity about Khariji politics and background, but led others to believe that their early leaders had suffered from “schizophrenia.”⁶⁶

Fazlur Rahman (1966)

In *Islam*, Fazlur Rahman indicated that the Khawarij were “idealist fanatic rebels” or “revolutionary activists” whose idealism attracted a large number of the Persian Mawali. They were “extremely pious and puritanically religious men,” and were mostly nomads and semi-nomads from the Peninsula and the borders of Iraq. Rahman portrayed the Khawarij as egalitarians whose “absolute and uncompromising equality . . . before the Divine Command sums up their spirit”

⁶⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1988), 13.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Abdallah Mahrus, *Al-Zahira al-Adabiyya fi Shi'r al-Khawarij* (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Amana, 1988), 24. A detailed discussion of Mahrus’ interpretation of the Khawarij is provided in chapter three.

from which flows their most religious tenets. For Rahman, the Khawarij used their cardinal tenets to attack not only the Umayyad rulers but also the moderate majority of the community for being 'sedentary' conformists. For the Khawarij, according to Rahman, the community had exercised political moderation ever since the first troubles broke out during the reign of 'Uthman. Thus, for Rahman, the Khawarij's dissatisfaction with the community can be traced back to 'Uthman's time, rather than to their sudden rise in Siffin.⁶⁷

Furthermore, Rahman asserted that the Khawarij insisted on the necessity of executing the principle of 'Commanding the good and forbidding the evil.' The leaders of the Community agreed on the same principles but on the moral rather than the legal plane, through education rather than civil war. Rahman argued that the Khawarij's religious extremism drove the Sunni religious leadership to "drift more and more to Conformism, a process which was hastened by the rise of the 'Ulama' class." Thus, Rahman created a link between the rise of moderation in Islam from the ninth century onwards and the extreme religious piety of the Khawarij. This practice of moderation and catholicity of spirit, which was seen as a counterpart to the Khawarij's religious extremity, had created 'the people of the middle path and unity' (*Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'a*), i.e., the orthodox.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 168.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

As to the philosophical beliefs of the Khawarij, Rahman argued that the Khawarij were the first to believe that man is a free and responsible agent. One fundamental tenet of the Khawarij that flowed from their idealism, Rahman added, “was their rejection of justification by faith alone and their making deeds an essential part of faith.”⁶⁹ Although most scholars have argued that the belief in free will and predetermination was initiated by the Mu‘tazila, Rahman held that the Mu‘tazila inherited this philosophy from the Khawarij. On the question of the caliphate and who should rule, Rahman asserted that the Khawarij held claims that were opposed to the orthodox position (the caliph must be from Quraysh) and to Shi’ite legitimism (the imamate must be confined to the descendants of the Prophet). Being egalitarian, as Rahman called them, the Khawarij held that any Muslim was eligible for this office even though he be a black slave.⁷⁰

Although scholars refer to the Khawarij as the first sect to emerge from Islam, Rahman argued that it would be a mistake to apply the word ‘sect’ in a rigorous sense to the group. Rahman asserted that it is unarguably the Khawarij who seceded from the community and took up arms against fellow Muslims, but there is nothing in their doctrine that need necessarily lead to this self-excommunication. For Rahman, the Khawarij were not a sect in the full sense of the term, but they were individuals who separated themselves from the larger

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

body. This notion of self-excommunication has been relived in today's fundamentalists, whether amongst the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia or the Muslim Brotherhoods of the Middle East, Rahman contended. Rahman is one of the few scholars⁷¹ who has compared today's Islamic extremists to the early Khawarij. These scholars have concerned themselves with contemporary issues, and have focused on the similarities between the Khawarij and modern Islamic fundamentalism. This cluster of scholars has written mainly on political Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. Therefore, their approach to the Khawarij has been political and contemporaneous rather than historical. For instance, Rahman wrote:

Indeed, something of their [Khawarij] radical spirit (although not overt influence) has been relived not only in certain outstanding individuals in medieval Islam but in several relatively recent movements inspired by radical idealism such as the Wahhabis in the 12th/18th century, and, in a more moderate spirit and more recently, the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab Middle East.⁷²

In his discussion of the Wahhabis and the Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan, Rahman pointed out certain aspects of the similarity of the Khariji ideal with certain aspects of the doctrine of these modern radical movements. Rahman

⁷¹ See for example Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Binder uses the term "modern Kharijism" to refer to Islamic extremists (p. 185); see also Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam, Medieval Theology, and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986; Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁷² Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd ed., 170.

outlined the emergence and doctrine of the Wahhabis from a Khariji perspective. He described the emergence of the Wahhabi movement “which took the Muslim world by surprise”⁷³ as sudden. The Wahhabis sudden emergence is reminiscent of the emergence of the Khawarij at Siffin, which took ‘Ali’s camp by surprise. Another aspect that Rahman saw in the Wahhabi movement and is characteristic of the Khawarij is this violent outburst against the “corruption of religion and the moral laxity and degeneration prevalent in Muslim society.”⁷⁴ The Khawarij rose to oppose the arbitration that they saw as a replacement of God’s words with Man’s. For the Khawarij, ‘Ali had deviated from the path and had been religiously corrupt; therefore, a violent outburst was necessary against the imam who went astray.

Like the Khawarij, the Wahhabis were opposed by the masses who saw in their political activity violent militarism. In their revolt, Rahman contended, the Wahhabis sought a reform through intolerant and fanatical methods, a clear reminiscence of the Khariji revolt of the early period of Islam. “The catholic tradition of Islam opposed the Wahhabi methods as it had rejected the Kharijite methods much earlier,”⁷⁵ Rahman wrote. The Khawarij and the Wahhabis, Rahman added, wanted to unite the community while imposing “reform under the

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

compulsion of idealism,” but they instead broke the existing unity and their continued armed rebellion produced further disunity.⁷⁶

M.A. Shaban (1971)

In *Islamic History, A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132): A new Interpretation*, M.A. Shaban studied the formation of the Khawarij based on the development of the Arab tribes in the early conquest of Iraq. Shaban’s point of departure is not Siffin or the killing of ‘Uthman, but the wars of apostacy (*ridda*). Shaban traced the origins of the Khawarij to the apostates (*ahl al-ridda*) who were allowed to join the Arab conquest of the Sasanian empire in 637. The *Ahl al-Ridda*’s major role in the Battle of Qadisiyya gave them recognition and their derogatory term *ahl al-ridda* was dropped for the honorable “the people of Qadisiyya” (*ahl al-Qadisiyya*). Shaban added that the term was applied to all those who participated in this battle, *ridda* and non-*ridda* tribesmen. Although they were recognized as *ahl al-Qadisiyya*, these former *ridda* tribesmen were not treated equally with their non-*ridda* fellow tribesmen.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History, A.D. 600-750 (A.H. 132): A New Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 45-46.

Shaban provided a unique interpretation as to how the proto-Khawarij came to be known as *qurra'*.⁷⁸ He wrote that after the Arab conquest of the Sasanian lands, it was impossible to divide the lands between the Arab tribesmen, who considered themselves the legitimate owners of the lands through right of conquest. The only possible solution was to hold the lands under collective ownership; such owners were called *ahl al-fay'*.⁷⁹ Moreover, in order to administer the lands and collect their revenues, a system of trusteeship was established. The trustees (*umana'*) consisted of *ahl al-fay'* who included both *Ridda* and non-*Ridda* tribesmen.⁸⁰

Since the *Ridda* tribesmen could not be entrusted with such a responsible position, the trusteeship fell automatically on the tribesmen who were loyal to Medina during the *Ridda* Wars. The non-*Ridda* tribesmen were credited not only for their loyalty to Medina, but also for their participation in the battle of Qadisiyya and for remaining there afterwards, therefore giving them the title *ahl*

⁷⁸ Shaban departs from the traditional interpretation of the term *qurra'* which most historians translate as the Qur'an readers. Shaban understands the term "as no more than another derivation from the root *qry* and meaning the same as *ahl al-qura*, those of the villages." He argues that the early Islamic chroniclers were just confused with the earlier *qurra'* at 'Aqraba. Shaban also theorizes that the ambiguity about the Quran' readers was encouraged by the *qurra'* themselves to enhance their ever waning special status and prestige.

⁷⁹ The Arabs considered everything conquered the private property of the conquerors themselves. The difference between *ghanima* and *fay'*: *ghanima* being the booty won on the battlefield and *fay'* being all other gains.

⁸⁰ Shaban, *Islamic History*, 50.

al-ayyam or *ahl al-Qadisiyya*. According to Shaban, the non-*Ridda* tribesmen had participated in early battles that

had been overshadowed by greater battles in which they had also taken part. To call these tribesmen simply *ahl al-Qadisiyya* would in fact mean equating them with *ahl al-Ridda*. Understandably this represented a threat to their hard-gained prestige and ultimately to their newly acquired gains. Determined to keep their distinction, and because of their trusteeship responsibilities, they eventually acquired a new nomenclature, the *qurra'*.⁸¹

These *qurra'* were among the early conquerors of Iraq and had special services and good standing in the newly acquired lands that gave them special status in the government of the Sawad. According to Shaban, tax-collection and other governmental affairs were the duties of local notables and village heads (*dahaqin*). The importance of such a position was that it represented the link between the Arab government in Kufa and local governments. The task of those appointed was to collect the taxes received by the *dahaqin* and the transfer of the money to the public treasury. This vital link and important responsibility was not entrusted to the *Ridda* tribesmen; obviously, the *qurra'* were chosen to undertake such a responsibility.⁸²

As an acknowledgement of their special services in the government of the Sawad, the *qurra'* received stipends varying between 2,000 and 3,000 dirhams, while the majority received only 250 to 300 dirhams. The *Ridda* tribesmen in

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 53.

Kufa resented the special position given to the *qurra*', who were from unimportant tribes, in contrast to the ex-rebels who belonged to clans of high standing in pre-Islamic Arabia. The tension between the *Ridda* tribesmen and the *qurra*' threatened the latter's newly acquired prestige. They, therefore, felt obliged to defend their "position in the new but rapidly changing society."⁸³

The *qurra*' had never felt that their special position in the Sawad was threatened as they did under the reign of 'Uthman. The caliph's policy was to gain more control over the provincial governors. To achieve his aims, he appointed members of his clan as governors and attempted to strengthen his power and regularize the situation in Kufa and its domains. This policy brought the wrath of the *qurra*' upon his head. As mentioned above, the Sawad was administered by the *qurra*' who regarded themselves as the owners of these newly conquered lands. 'Uthman claimed that the veterans who had returned to Makka and Madina had their rights to these lands; the *qurra*' contended that they had a greater right to these lands because of their continued presence in Iraq and because they were the ones who collected the revenues.⁸⁴ "The net result of this operation was the *qurra*' belatedly discovered that their economic power base was being destroyed as their lands were distributed, regardless of their rights."⁸⁵

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

Obviously, the *qurra*’ either participated in the killing of ‘Uthman or at least were satisfied with the elimination of a caliph who greatly threatened their special position and prestige in the Sawad. Shaban wrote that the *qurra*’ were pleased with ‘Ali who eliminated favoritism and divided all the money he found in the public treasury equally among his supporters. This policy led every group that felt underprivileged under ‘Uthman’s rule to rally around ‘Ali. The factions that supported ‘Ali were the *qurra*’, the Ansar, and some *Ridda* leaders. Thus, according to Shaban, a coalition of three groups emerged in ‘Ali’s camp.⁸⁶

Shaban contended that the emergence of these three groups played a key role in dividing ‘Ali’s army during the Battle of Siffin. Shaban wrote:

None of the three main constituents of this coalition had any common interests; the ansar had nothing in common with Iraqis, and satisfying the demands of the *qurra*’ involved damaging the interests of the later immigrants and vice versa. Such a broadly based coalition, compromising so many conflicting interests, could not be expected to hold together for long.⁸⁷

Shaban claimed that the *qurra*’ were the most enthusiastic and most influential among ‘Ali’s coalition. For instance, it was the *qurra*’ who chose Abu Musa al-Ash‘ari to be the Iraqi representative despite ‘Ali’s vehement objection. Shaban wrote that the *qurra*’ insisted on Abu Musa because he had opposed ‘Uthman’s policy and had been the choice of the *qurra*’ as governor of Kufa when they

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

expelled 'Uthman's governor, Sa'id b. al-'As. Shaban added that the *qurra* ' tried to turn the negotiations between the Syrians and the Iraqis to their own advantage and that they "wished to become ... [or almost became] a third party in the dispute."⁸⁸ Thus, it is at this point that the coalition of 'Ali came to an end and that the ex-*qurra* ' emerged as the Khawarij.⁸⁹ "They must be sharply distinguished from all later Khawarij," according to Shaban, "and above all they must not be considered heretics."⁹⁰

Shaban added that the *qurra* ' were the tribesmen who had the trusteeship of the conquered lands. This means that they shared the wealth and prestige of the new system. Their special position and prestige in the Sawad, however, were threatened by 'Uthman; this explains their participation in removing him. Although the policy of 'Ali was lucrative to the *qurra* ', they realized that the new caliph's inheritance of a divided community and turmoil would make him unable to protect their newly established economic status.

Thus, at this stage and during the Battle of Siffin ('Ali's weakest moments), the *qurra* ' decided to secede from Ali's coalition and become a party of their own. Shaban's theory, therefore, argued that the Khawarij emerged as a political party to fill a political vacuum and to preserve their economic status and social prestige.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Moreover, Shaban's argument that the *qurra'* were politically united is a sheer contradiction of Brünnow's and Wellhausen's arguments, which clearly state that the *qurra'* were religiously motivated and were not reliable as a political faction.

In an article entitled "The Emergence of the Khawarij: Religion and the Social Order in Early Islam" (1989), Jeffrey T. Kenney has argued that Shaban's theory of the formation of the Khawarij is a testimonial to the author's ideal of presenting the "logical interests" that motivated the Arabs. For Shaban, according to Kenney, the Khawarij were not pious zealots against impious rulers. They were one of the many factions that emerged out of "an intricate web of changing socioeconomic policies" in the newly established provinces of the Islamic empire.

Kenney writes:

They were logical men, acting upon logical human emotions: they were angry because they had achieved a certain standard of power and prestige in the community, and this was coming to an end. The question of religion does not enter into the story of the Khawarij which Shaban relates.⁹¹

Thus, for Shaban, Kenney contends, religion as a motivation applies neither to the Khawarij nor to the whole of Islamic history. Even Muhammad was stripped of his religious significance and portrayed as a Meccan trader. Kenney adds that

⁹¹ Jeffrey T. Kenney, "The Emergence of the Khawarij: Religion and the Social Order in Early Islam." *Jusur* 5 (1989): 18.

Shaban “transforms Muhammad, the messenger of the Qur’an, into Muhammad, the social activist.”⁹²

Martin Hinds (1971)

In an article entitled “Kufan Political Alignments and Their Background in the Mid-Seventh Century A.D.,” Martin Hinds investigates the historical background of the formation of the Khawarij in the early Umayyad period. The main conclusion that his article seeks to make is that “Khariji . . . opposition of that period was not so much directed against central authority per se as against the authority of the tribal leaders through whom that central authority was exercised.”⁹³ The Khawarij were advocates of an Islamic social order that rejected tribal leadership; therefore, the formation of the Khawarij was shaped by their opposition to existing tribal order.⁹⁴

Hinds adds that the Khawarij can be defined as those who go out and acquire honor (*sharaf*). In traditional tribal terms, *sharaf* is acquired through membership in a tribe, but the Khawarij did not possess *sharaf* according to the

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Martin Hinds, “Kufan Political Alignments And Their Background In The Mid-Seventh Century A.D.” in Jere Bacharach, Lawrence I. Conrad, and Patricia Crone, eds., *Studies in Early Islamic History* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1996), 2. Hinds’ article first appeared in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, V.2, 1971, pages 346-367.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

tribal criteria; they acquired it by other means, i.e., by becoming Muslims and participating in the Muslim conquests. What the Khawarij acquired then is an “Islamic” *sharaf* and “it was in defence of this that they clashed with government-backed tribal leaders.”⁹⁵

Hinds goes on to say that *sharaf* was accorded to Iraqi early-comers who had lost their special position under ‘Uthman’s policy. It is important to look at the three divisions into which Hinds separates the early-comers:

- (i) the strongest clan leaders, who acquired increased power in the territories and were followed by both early-comers and newcomers; (ii) less influential clan leaders, with smaller followings; (iii) leaders of clan splinter groups.⁹⁶

Hinds continues to say that the *qurra*⁹⁷ were those early-comers who had the smallest followings. They held a grudge against other early-comers who posed a challenge to their influence and wealth. The *qurra*’s status was challenged by the growing influence of other early-comers who were not *qurra*’, and their wealth was threatened by the lack of fresh conquests, which meant a decrease in the resources *vis-à-vis* a growing population.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁷ Hinds does not provide an interpretation of the meaning of the *qurra*’.

⁹⁸ Hinds, “Kufan Political,” 18.

Unlike Brünnow and Wellhausen who had no mention of the *qurra*’ before Siffin, Hinds indicates that the *qurra*’ were active at the battles of the Bridge, Yarmuk, and Qadisiya. Hinds tells us that Umar had designated a *qari*’ “whose task it was to recite *surat al-anfal*, known as *surat al-jihad*, before the conflict.”⁹⁹ However, the term *qurra*’ does not occur in the sources until about 650-51. After the Battle of the Camel, ‘Ali formed a viable ‘Iraqi, but mainly Kufan, coalition to support him against Mu‘awiya. What is interesting in the present context is that after ‘Ali had formed his coalition, in which the Kufans were the main constituent, he designated individuals whose power and influence were deliberately built by ‘Ali to hold the strongest in check. These individuals, i.e., al-Ashtar, Hujr b. ‘Adi al-Kindi, and ‘Adi b. Hatim had earlier been *qurra*’, according to Hinds.¹⁰⁰

From the accounts given by Hinds, one may argue that the *qurra*’ were the backbone of Ali’s army, and that he relied heavily on them to keep other tribes under his control. This would tell us that the *qurra*’ “who afterwards became Khawarij” were not clan leaders of splinter groups as Hinds argues, and were not mere villagers as Shaban theorizes. Rather, they were important figures such as al-Ashtar, Hujr, and ‘Adi, who together with their followers, constituted the Kufan part of ‘Ali’s hard core of support (*shi‘a*) and later on became Shi‘i leaders under

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

'Ali.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Hinds' examination of the tribal names of the Khawarij shows that most of these tribes were from prominent clans such as the Bakri and Tamimi clans, most of whom came from central and north-eastern Arabia.

Michael G. Morony (1984)

In *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest*, Michael G. Morony's chapter on authority and rebellion tells us that piety had political significance, and that piety and politics were intertwined. For Morony, the "degree of one's piety or asceticism was associated with the degree of one's opposition to or support for the government."¹⁰² For some Muslims, Morony adds, personal piety was a way to withdraw from conflicts among Muslims; for others, piety was an expression of dissatisfaction and a way to indulge in violent confrontation with the government and other Muslims. Obviously, the Khawarij belonged to the second category. Morony contends that the Khawarij had a reputation for piety and virtue, and they were people of fasting and worship. To this end, Morony sees the rebellions of the Khawarij as religiously motivated to protest socioeconomic polarization in the garrison cities of Iraq.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁰² Michael G. Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 467.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 468.

Morony sees the Khawarij to have emerged from two different groups: dissident elements and Qur'an reciters. Morony does not tell us much about the origins and background of the dissident elements, but he categorizes them as soldiers since their dissatisfaction with 'Uthman was caused by the caliph's policy of reducing their military stipends. According to Morony, some of those who later became Khawarij joined and supported the revolt against 'Uthman and opposed those who sought revenge for 'Uthman's death. They abandoned 'Ali at the Battle of Siffin after forcing him to accept the appeal to the Qur'an made by the Syrians. Morony adds that the dissident elements were joined by the Qur'an reciters, which means that the Qur'an reciters and the dissident elements were two different groups, or at least did not belong to the same group.

The question that lingers: if the dissident elements were people other than the Qur'an reciters, then who were the dissident elements, and what was their sociopolitical background? As we saw earlier, Brunnnow and Wellhausen traced the origins of the religious opposition in 'Ali's camp to Arab tribes, Bedouins, and pious Muslims. In Morony's accounts, the dissident elements were joined by "local Christians and Kurds in Fars."¹⁰⁴ Unlike most scholars who attributed the term Khawarij to those who opposed 'Ali at the Battle of Siffin in July of 657, Morony tells us that the term Khawarij was not applied to the movement until after

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 470

the arbitration ended disastrously for 'Ali in the spring of 658. During that time, the dissident elements "were joined by large numbers of Qur'an reciters whose exodus from Kufa on that occasion gave the movement its designation of Khawarij (seceders)." ¹⁰⁵

As to the principles for which the Khawarij stood, Morony tells us that the Khawarij were people of equality and brotherhood who were loyal to the Sunna and the Qur'an. Because of their Qur'anic orientation, the Khawarij were the first to respect non-Muslims, and despite their Arab tribal origin, they were the first to appeal to equality between non-Arab and Arab Muslims. In Morony's own words:

In opposition to the new elite of the garrison cities, the early Khawarij stood for the original Islam of equality and brotherhood, including women, and for a community based on faith instead of kinship. They were also loyal to the sunna of God and of Muhammad, and they insisted on the application of Qur'anic principles. . . . They stood for fiscal justice for all Muslims in the division of booty and the payment of stipends and were the first to appeal to equality between mawali and Arab Muslims. . . . They were also the first to really respect the dhimmi status of non-Muslims and to apply Qur'anic requirements toward them. . . . Some Khawarij are said to have regarded as equal to Muslims those Jews and Christians who would testify to the oneness of God. . . ¹⁰⁶

Unlike Brünnow who argued that the Khawarij were loyal to their tribal origin, Morony sees the Khawarij as unconcerned with tribal affiliations. Morony adds that "Arabs who participated in the movement seem to have been otherwise

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 469.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 470-71.

obscure or younger rather than being members of the ashraf.”¹⁰⁷ With this view, Morony suggests that Arabs who joined the Khawarij were the younger generation. Being born and raised in an Islamic environment, the young Arabs’ loyalty was due to a universal Islamic identity rather than being affiliated with a particular group, i.e., being an Arab or a member of a tribe. At that time, the Khawarij represented a universal movement that attracted Arabs and non-Arabs alike.

Although some scholars have argued that the Khawarij emerged as a purely Arab movement,¹⁰⁸ Morony tells us that “many Khawarij were not Arabs at all.”¹⁰⁹ Brünnow claimed that the Khawarij were of Bedouin origin and Wellhausen argued that the Khawarij were of noble Arab tribes. Now, one would assume that Brünnow and Wellhausen had in mind the Khawarij of the early period, that is the years of Siffin and until ‘Ali’s death. It has also been argued that the first wave of non-Arabs joined the Khawarij only during the Umayyad period as a response to the Umayyad policy of Arab favoritism. Contrary to the claims above, Morony tells us that most of the two hundred followers of Abu Maryam as-Sa’di of Tamim, who rebelled in January 659, were *mawali*. Therefore, having non-Arabs

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 474.

¹⁰⁸ See for example Cesar E. Farah, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances*, 5th ed. (Hauppauge, New York, 1994). Farah argues that the Khawarij “were elitists, arguing that Islam was targeted specifically for Arabs. They were unkind to non-Arabs joining Islam” (p. 172).

¹⁰⁹ Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 474.

among the early Khawarij in 659 would refute the theories that the movement had originated with Arabs only, and that non-Arabs joined later to counter the Umayyad policy.

Unlike Wellhausen who asserted that the Khawarij had followed a genuine Islamic formula, Morony argues that the movement had also followed ideas expressed by Christians, monks, and Jews. In Morony's words:

The Christian background or connections of some of the Khawarij may have contributed to the way their ideas developed and were expressed. There were Christians among the 'Abd al-Qays before they became Muslims and local Christians sometimes joined Khariji uprisings or collaborated with them. . . . The issues raised by the Khawarij seem rather close to those concerning the position of a monk in a monastic community. . . . The Khariji definition of sin in terms of polytheism has close parallels among Jews and Christians. . . ¹¹⁰

The Khawarij were known for their ascetic pietism, but to what extent was their pietism religious or Islamic in nature? Wellhausen contended that in the Muslim community, piety has a political slant, and this was the path that the Khawarij followed. This means that their pietism was political rather than religious. Now, was the Khariji pietism purely Islamic? According to Morony, the Khariji piety conforms with Christian and Jewish piety. Morony talks about Christian influence on the Khariji Salih ibn Musarrih of the tribe of Tamim. Morony writes:

In 695 he [Salih ibn Musarrih] and his followers were at Dara, and in Ard Mawsil, and in the Jazira in the midst of Christian monasteries, and in the

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 475.

part of Mesopotamia where the Arabs who had been converted to Monophysite Christianity in the sixth century had been so attracted to asceticism.¹¹¹

In addition to the relationship between monastic piety and early Islamic piety, Morony notes two additional aspects. First is the Khariji idea of selling their souls and property to God in return for a place in paradise, hence, they called themselves “vendors” (*shurat*). This idea “of spending one’s worldly goods in return for salvation was also current in Christian piety and was part of the rejection of material values.”¹¹² Second, the Khariji “connection between asceticism and death had already been made in Jewish piety and in Christian monasticism.”¹¹³

Jeffrey T. Kenney (1991)

In his unpublished dissertation, Jeffrey T. Kenney provides one of the most recent works on the Khawarij.¹¹⁴ Kenney, whose thesis is a study of the Khawarij in the Islamic tradition, focuses on the historical process that transformed the Khawarij from a “protest movement to a symbol of religious extremism.”¹¹⁵ Kenney’s thesis is quite interesting and provides a new interpretation of the

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 475-76.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 476.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Jeffrey T. Kenney, “Heterodoxy and Culture: The Legacy of the Khawarij in Islamic History.” PhD dissertation, 1991.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vi.

Khariji place in Islamic tradition. Kenney argues that Sunni historians and theologians invested the Khawarij with a prohibiting power and used the group to define and defend the borders of Islam. In Kenney's own words: "they [the Khawarij] were made a negative symbol within the mental space of the Islamic tradition to prevent similar types of rebels from infringing on the community's social and political space."¹¹⁶ Thus, the Khawarij represented Muslim extremism not only in the early Islamic tradition, but also in today's Arab media and contemporary scholarship.

In a chapter entitled "The Khawarij as Paradigm of Muslim Extremism in al-Shahrastani's *Kitab al-milal wa'l-nihal*," Kenney analyzes al-Shahrastani's *Milal* and traces how the author brings together the Sunni theology and his philosophical proclamation (*Ash'arism*) to order and make sense of sectarian divisions. Kenney writes that al-Shahrastani attempts to show that the category "Khawarij" can be arrived at both through theological tradition and through logical (philosophic) deduction.¹¹⁷ Al-Shahrastani defines the Khawarij as follows: "Whoever rebelled against the legitimate imam accepted by the people is called a Khariji, whether this rebellion took place at the time of the Companions against the rightfully guided imams, or against their worthy successors, or against

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

the imams of any time.”¹¹⁸ In this opinion, al-Shahrastani makes the Khawarij a paradigm of Muslim extremism, and “ordains such rebellious behavior as, for all time, Khariji inspired.”¹¹⁹

To what extent did al-Shahrastani’s definition of the Khawarij succeed in portraying the group as a symbol of insurgency for all time? Kenney writes that it is difficult to measure the success of al-Shahrastani’s endeavor, but the rebellious image of the Khawarij can be seen in a number of contemporary movements across the Middle East.¹²⁰ Religious scholars (*‘ulama’*) at al-Azhar have frequently invoked the terms “Khawarij” for violent Islamic groups, and the Egyptian media have never hesitated to refer to Islamic extremists as the neo-Khawarij. For some extremists, however, the Khawarij represent pietism and their name evokes a positive response for its revolutionary connotations.

Kenney contends that the Khawarij are very much alive in the thought of contemporary extremist movements; however, he adds, “Kharijism” of the twentieth century is neither a historical remnant, nor a rebirth of the seventh century movement. Rather, “Kharijism” has been transformed into a symbol that

¹¹⁸ Al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-milal wa l-nihal*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifa, 1996), 132.

¹¹⁹ Kenney, “Heterodoxy and Culture” 78.

¹²⁰ The Egyptian group Takfir wa’l Hijra (excommunication and emigration) leads a Khariji-style way of life. Please see chapter 4 for more discussion about this group.

signifies rebellion or innovation (*bid'a*).¹²¹ Kenney echoes al-Shahrastani's plan to dehistoricize the Khawarij and to transform them into a symbol of religious extremism. To this end, Kenney views al-Shahrastani's treatment of the Khawarij as an example of how symbolism and trans-historicity are constructed and how they become a part of the Muslim experience.

The symbolic image of the Khawarij was constructed in the mind of the Muslim community by al-Shahrastani's definition of the group. According to Al-Shahrastani's definition of a Khariji, the term "Khariji" has become a label to whoever rebelled and will rebel against the ruler. Was this symbolic image of the Khawarij created by al-Shahrastani? Not really. Kenney argues that al-Shahrastani may have fostered this image, but he did not create it. He embellished this image because "it was a product of the cultural environment into which he was born, a part of his intellectual inheritance,"¹²² Kenney asserts.

The "story" of the Khawarij was told by *sunni* historians and writers on sectarian groups who were communicating a pattern of meaning. Their story reflects the anti-Khariji communal sentiment, or the shared pattern of meaning. But, according to Kenney, the initial actions of the Khawarij cannot be equated with the pattern of meanings later associated with them. The early sources discuss the origins of the Khariji symbolic transformation, while later sources provide us

¹²¹ Kenney, "Heterodoxy and Culture," 81.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 124.

with evidence of how the symbol developed. Kenney sees two polemical counterpoints to the symbolic image of the Khawarij: one is associated with the Sunni authors who aimed at dehistoricizing the Khariji rebels in order to create a negative symbol of religio-political action; the second is related to Ibadi authors who reacted to that symbolic creation.¹²³

Kenney interprets the effects of the symbolic transformation of the Khawarij by discussing an Ibadi counterpoint to the Sunni polemic. Kenney contends that the Khawarij added their own heresiography to the ongoing polemic, and that the Ibadis formulated a systematic Khariji theology. The Ibadis, Kenney adds, present a revisionist, intra-sectarian view of the Khawarij. The Ibadis have maintained the legacy of the Khawarij, a legacy that was shattered by the Sunni orthodox on the very name “Khawarij.” Kenney’s main source on the Ibadi polemics is *al-Kashf wa’l-Bayan*¹²⁴ by Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. Sa‘id al-Azdi al-Qalhati, an Ibadi author from Qalhat in Uman.

While it has been suggested that al-Shahrastani may have depended on al-Qalhati, Kenney contends that his findings indicate that al-Shahrastani was in fact the source for al-Qalhati. In *al-Kashf*, the Ibadi accounts of the Khawarij unfold, and the point of departure is the reign of ‘Uthman. Al-Qalhati, writing from an

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹²⁴ *Al-Kashf*, an 11th or 13th century work, is one of the few surviving early Ibadi sources

Ibadi point of view, tries to disassociate the Ibadis from Khariji extremism by ignoring the Khawarij in his discussion of the period from ‘Uthman’s rule to the death of ‘Ali. The Khawarij are only discussed in the latter section on the Islamic *firaq*. Kenney argues that this omission of the Khawarij is not an oversight of al-Qalhati’s part; rather, it is an attempt to “(re)focus the historical record on why the Khawarij revolted instead of how.”¹²⁵ Nevertheless, al-Qalhati makes it clear that the roots of the Ibadis and the early Khawarij are traced to the same source: the discontent with ‘Uthman’s policies.

In his discussion of al-Qalhati’s accusations against ‘Uthman, Kenney tries to show that the Ibadis did not follow the Sunni traditional accounts of praising ‘Uthman and equating him with Abu Bakr and ‘Umar b. al-Khattab. For the Ibadis, ‘Uthman erred, and he was condemned in the Ibadi tradition. Although the charges levelled by al-Qalhati, or the Ibadis for that matter, can also be found in early Sunni sources, i.e., al-Tabari and al-Baladhuri, the Sunni accounts, however, do not mention the “critical commentary,” the strategically placed Qur’anic quotes intended to condemn ‘Uthman. Thus, Kenney’s analysis of al-Qalhati’s accounts of ‘Uthman’s policies aims to show the reader that the Ibadis lean more towards their ancestors the Khawarij, or more accurately the proto-Khawarij, and do not reserve for ‘Uthman a place of respect. In other words, “the Ibadi tradition,”

¹²⁵ Kenney, “Heterodoxy and Culture,” 146.

Kenney argues, “strips ‘Uthman of the place historically accorded him in the Sunni tradition. . . . Sunni and Ibadi historical accounts of ‘Uthman differ not so much over facts but rather over how the facts should be interpreted.”¹²⁶

Kenney asserts that ‘Uthman’s unjust rule and innovations gave rise to the proto-Khawarij, and were the primary cause for Ibadi-Khariji history to diverge from Sunni history. ‘Uthman’s blunders and how people reacted to them became the yardstick by which the Khawarij and their descendents later judged historical figures and events. Kenney argues that the proto-Khawarij formed in reaction to ‘Uthman’s economic policies:

It was the proto-Khawarij who had been disenfranchised by the economic measures implemented by ‘Uthman in the provinces, particularly the Sawad. ‘Uthman had abrogated policies established and sanctioned by Muhammad and the first two caliphs, policies that had been part of a system of Islamic priority which was the basis for social and economic interaction. With his innovations, ‘Uthman had upset this system of Islamic priority and, in turn, weakened the social and economic position of those, like the proto-Khawarij, whose only claim to power rested on their commitment to the Islamic system, i.e., on their “early-comer” status.¹²⁷

But for al-Qalhati, it was not the disruption in the system of Islamic priority that gave rise to the proto-Khawarij, as Kenney contends. Al-Qalhati avoids attributing the rise of the proto-Khawarij to economic dissatisfaction; rather, he focuses more on religious and theological differences. Kenney argues that al-

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

Qalhati wished to give the rise of the proto-Khawarij a religious expression, although their protest was to challenge the social, economic, and political order. Second, al-Qalhati did not wish to single out the proto-Khawarij, for it was the duty of all Muslims to share in the revolt against ‘Uthman. Thus, the reason for al-Qalhati to include the entire community in the outrage against ‘Uthman and to focus on religious differences rather than economic, according to Kenney, was to insure that the “spectre of the Khawarij did not interfere with the version of orthodoxy he was advocating.”¹²⁸ Kenney adds that al-Qalhati had to suppress any connection between the Khawarij and the Ibadis, so the Ibadi “orthodoxy” would be accepted in the Muslim community.¹²⁹

Kenney continues by stating that al-Qalhati tried to maintain a distance not only between ‘Uthman and the Khawarij, but also between the Khawarij and ‘Ali, the man from whom the Khawarij separated. Kenney stipulates that al-Qalhati wanted to project that the proto-Khawarij rebellion against ‘Uthman and their secession from ‘Ali’s camp were the rebellion and the secession of the entire Muslim community. Kenney argues that in terms of Ibadi rhetoric, ‘Ali’s focus on ‘Uthman’s economic policies made the proto-Khariji cause central to the Muslim community. Kenney adds that al-Qalhati’s version of the battle of Siffin differs considerably from that of Sunni historians. The Sunni tradition states that the

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

dissenters at Siffin were the Khawarij, and that Siffin produced the first sectarian movement in Islam. Kenney, however, tells us that al-Qalhati had a different view of the event at Siffin. According to Kenney, al-Qalhati, who provided a proto-Khariji interpretation of the events at Siffin, argued that the dissenters were none other than “the Muslims,” who represented the entire Muslim community. Now, after these “Muslims” left ‘Ali and assembled at Nahrawan, al-Qalhati referred to them as the “people of Nahrawan” (*ahl al-Nahrawan*). Again, al-Qalhati’s agenda is obvious: he wished to project Ibadi interests onto the greater Muslim community, as Kenney claims.¹³⁰

Kenney sees al-Qalhati’s account of the Khawarij as apologetic and a tactic that involves more than a simple denial of the group’s historical existence. Kenney argues that al-Qalhati’s agenda of referring to the Khawarij as “Muslims” and “people of Nahrawan” is to legitimize their insurgency and their ideology as well, but without the associated burden of the name “Khawarij.”¹³¹ It is important to mention that this method of establishing firm boundaries between two related movements is also seen in the writings of modern and contemporary scholars who replaced the term Islamic fundamentalism (*al-usuliyya*) with names like

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 160

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

“Islamicists” (*al-Islamawiyyun*) or “Islamic modernism” (*Al-tajdid al-Islami*).¹³²

The only difference between the “Islamicists” or “Islamic modernists” and the Islamic fundamentalists appears to be the name. Like al-Qalhati (the Ibadis), the modernists perhaps aim to legitimize radical Islam, but without the burden of associating with Islamic fundamentalism.

Returning to al-Qalhati’s treatment of the Khawarij, Kenney discusses the author’s shift in the historical narrative of the group. In the section on early Islamic history, al-Qalhati omitted the Khawarij and portrays a community of Muslims. But, in the section on *firq*, al-Qalhati wrote about a disintegrated community, and the Khawarij are suddenly in the picture. It is understandable that to write about *firq* is to write about division and difference, but why would a discussion of early Islamic history, a period that witnessed the emergence of the Khawarij, pass over those divisions and differences? Kenney explains al-Qalhati’s confusing and equivocal stance toward the Khawarij: the section on early Islamic history was a narrative account of the “Muslims” and “the people of Nahrawan,” or the “orthodox faction,” as Kenney puts it. In the *firq* section, this orthodox faction was referred to as the “saved sect” (*firq* *najiya*), viz. the Ibadis.¹³³ Kenney provides more explanations for al-Qalhati’s (Ibadis’) deliberate avoidance

¹³² See, for example, Dekmejian’s *Islam in Revolution* and Hassan al-Turabi’s *Tajdid al-Fikr al-Islami*.

¹³³ Kenney, “Heterodoxy and Culture,” 166.

of division and difference among the Muslims in the historical narrative of early Islam. Kenney writes:

All references to the Khawarij, along with the Shi'a and other factions, were avoided to provide the Ibadis with an unrestricted field of play. Only a history shorn of the Khawarij allowed the Ibadis to create the illusion of an early Islamic community unified behind their agenda.¹³⁴

There is no doubt that there is a correlation between the Khawarij and the Ibadis and that the Khawarij played a role in Ibadi history, but at what point in history and for what reasons did the shift between them, between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, occur? Kenney does not provide answers to these questions, but he tells us that the Khawarij lost their orthodox affiliation when the Ibadis shifted their historic allegiance away from them.¹³⁵

In his analysis of the *Kashf*, Kenney traces out the process of sectarian division and focuses on who retains the label "the people of rectitude" (*ahl al-istiqama*). Kenney concludes that the people of rectitude, the Muslims, and the people of Nahrawan are interchangeable names representing Muslim orthodoxy. Kenney argues that the people of rectitude were the inheritors of Muhammad and the two caliphs and were none other than the people of Nahrawan, who were later called Khawarij. Now, how and why the Khawarij lost their status as Muslim orthodox and people of rectitude is discussed by Kenney from an Ibadi point of

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

view: the blame was put on other Khariji splinters, mainly the Azariqa, who separated themselves from the Khawarij, divided their community, and differentiated between the people of rectitude and the Muslims.

Kenney argues that the Azariqa's actions were not to blame for the Khawarij's fall from grace; rather, it was the Khawarij who joined the Azariqa and, therefore, separated themselves from the people of rectitude. Yet, technically, the Khawarij remained orthodox. And why is that so? Because there were "all the kinds of Khawarij who are not the people of rectitude," according to al-Qalhati. Kenney tells us that al-Qalhati's statement suggests that there were two types of Khawarij: the heterodox who were easily identifiable and categorized, and the orthodox or the people of rectitude. For if "there were kinds of Khawarij not of people of rectitude, then obviously there were kinds who were,"¹³⁶ Kenney concludes.

Kenney elaborates further on the Khariji heterodox-orthodox divide to show how the Khariji authority and status is drained and then reinstalled into the Ibadis. Kenney writes that Nafi' b. al-Azraq, the leader of the Azariqa, and his supporters introduced the seeds of division (*iftirāq*) into the Khawarij. The action of the Khawarij to follow Nafi' created the division within the previously all orthodox group. Thus, al-Qalhati's task then was to separate the Ibadis from the

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 173

Khawarij, and this meant writing an Ibadi history that is separate from that of the Khawarij. But, “attempting to write the Khawarij entirely out of Ibadi history,” Kenney writes, “amounted to an impossible task.”¹³⁷

Kenney criticizes al-Qalhati for listing the Wahbiyya¹³⁸ as the first sect of the Khawarij. Listing the Wahbiyya as the first Khariji sect would contradict al-Qalhati’s earlier claim that Nafi’ was to blame for instigating the first division within the Khawarij. Kenney asks: “if the Wahbiyya existed from the beginning of the Khariji movement, then how could Nafi’s group, the Azariqa, who presumably appeared later, be the first sectarian division?”¹³⁹ Kenney proclaims that in order for al-Qalhati to put the Ibadis in the same line with the people of rectitude, he had to link the past of the Ibadis with the Wahbiyya and then claim that the Wahbiyya and the Ibadis are “one sect” (*firqa wahida*) and “the true sect” (*al-firqa al-muhiqqa*).¹⁴⁰ Kenney challenges al-Qalhati’s claim by saying that, historically, the Ibadis and the Wahbiyya could not be connected since the former

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹³⁸ The Wahbiyya were the followers of ‘Abdullah b. Wahb al-Rasibi, the first Khariji *imam* elected by the Khawarij at Harura’. The Wahbiyya were also referred to as the Muhakkima, a name given to those who objected to the arbitration between ‘Ali and Mu‘awiya.

¹³⁹ Kenney, “Heterodoxy and Culture,” 175.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

did not emerge until “the end of the historical spectrum in the development of sectarian sub-divisions among the Khawarij.”¹⁴¹

Al-Qalhati’s agenda to conjoin the Ibadis with the Wahbiyya, “the purist element of the Khawarij,” according to Kenney, is to distance the Ibadis from the later deviance of the Khawarij. Moreover, al-Qalhati’s plan was to establish boundaries between the pure and the impure. Of course, for al-Qalhati, the Ibadis and the Wahbiyya were the pure elements; all those who came after, starting with the Azariqa, were “the kinds of Khawarij who are not the people of rectitude.”¹⁴² Kenney adds that the Wahbiyya are not given a great deal of attention in al-Qalhati’s *Kashf*; their mention was only to establish a historical link for the Ibadis. Conjoining the Wahbiyya with the Ibadis would “legitimate their own birthright as the people of rectitude.” Once the Wahbiyya died out in al-Qalhati’s literature, the Ibadis emerge as the sole representative of the orthodox line.¹⁴³

Kenney downplayed the role of the Khawarij as a threatening force to Sunni dominance. Unlike the Shi’a, Kenney contends, the Khawarij were a “temporary phenomenon, a volatile movement that quickly burned itself out in futile, violent confrontations with the ruling powers.”¹⁴⁴ Although the Khawarij

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

died out as a movement, their image has lived in modern day religious extremism. Kenney is one of the several historians who see similarities in Khariji and modern Islamic extremists' ideologies and practices. Kenney's final chapter compares Egypt's modern Islamic fundamentalists, namely the Muslim Brotherhood, to the Khawarij.

In his concluding remarks, Kenney writes that the Khawarij were transformed from movement to symbol, and then to a category of Islamic thought. The historical accounts of the Khawarij served the political and theological interests of both the orthodox and the heterodox. The "Khawarij" became a category of Muslim thought and an official sectarian division, which has its roots in the "evolutionary development of the Islamic tradition." Kenney contends that studying the Khawarij as a category of Islamic thought will shed light on the formation and development of Islamic intellectual history and will enable historians to reevaluate who the Khawarij actually were.¹⁴⁵

Chase F. Robinson (2000)

In *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest*, Chase F. Robinson's chapter on Muslims in the northern Jazira (Mesopotamia) sheds the light on how tribesmen in the north came to believe in the Khariji form of belief. These tribesmen, according to Robinson, rebelled under the banner of Kharijism,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 242.

prompting the state to consider them revolutionary tribesmen. Robinson refers to these tribesmen as “Kharijites” who “saw themselves as reformers, rather than revolutionaries. . . .”¹⁴⁶ Robinson adds that the Khawarij of the north developed a political program; however, he does not tell us what their political goals were and how they were different from those adopted by the early Khawarij except that they had “a [program] of pious activism.”¹⁴⁷

What is important in Robinson’s study of the tribesmen of the north is that he establishes a link between the Marwanid rule and the rise of Jaziran Kharijism. And, it “seems the longer the Marwanids ruled the Jazira,” Robinson argues, “the more attractive Kharijism became to its tribesmen.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, the author tries to understand why the tribesmen of the north had the tendency to acquire Khariji beliefs within the “politicised Jazira of the Marwanid period. . . .”¹⁴⁹ Robinson, therefore, focuses on Khariji leaders of the north and argues that these tribesmen abandoned their elite status as members in the army to reclaim it through piety. Thus, the question Robinson has posed is why and in what circumstances did the Khawarij of the north rebel?¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Chase F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

As previously mentioned, Robinson has focused on the study of Khariji individuals/leaders to show how these leaders affected and shaped the behavior of northern tribesmen. Unlike many contemporary western scholars who have classified the Khawarij as bandits with no political program, Robinson argues that Khariji figures such as Salih b. Musarrih and Shabib b. Yazid “were not parochial bandits. . . . These were warrior saints who did have a [program].”¹⁵¹ Moreover, these rebels of the north adopted Salih b. Musarrih’s rebellion, which became a local tradition of Kharijism and a program of pious activism. Thus, the Khariji Salih had a great influence on the tribesmen of the north in that no follower would rebel without first visiting his tomb, which is said to be in Mosul.¹⁵²

For Robinson, the local tradition of Kharijism seems to have emerged with Salih b. Musarrih, whose rebellion inspired the tribesmen of the north. Piety was a common feature among the Khawarij, and Salih’s preachings and sermons, such as teaching his students to recite the Qur’an and condemning ‘Uthman and ‘Ali, were standard Khariji concerns. Moreover, for Robinson, Salih represented a “Prophetic paradigm into the late first-century Jazira. . . .”¹⁵³ Tribesmen of the north, inspired by the early tribesmen who fought alongside Muhammad, were attracted to Salih’s preaching of Qur’anic piety and activism against the Umayyad

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 116.

elite, who in turn turned away from *jihad* and *hijra*. Robinson, thus, concludes that Salih's call for *jihad* and *hijra* on Muhammad's model of first *jihad* and *hijra* explains the growing popularity of Khariji thought (especially the Azraqi doctrine) among the tribes of the Jazira.¹⁵⁴

In contrast to Robinson's argument, Morony tells us that the Arabs of the Jazira had been attracted to Salih's ascetism,¹⁵⁵ rather than to his preaching and sermons against the Umayyad elite. In Morony's account, Salih was "ascetic . . . humble . . . pale-faced . . . and devout. . . ,"¹⁵⁶ rather than a charismatic leader who could offer a program, who could inspire, and who could recommend death to those Khawarij who did not accept his call for *hijra* and *jihad*. Morony, however, states that Salih "led an armed revolt against Marwani rule. . . ."¹⁵⁷ Thus, it seems that for Morony, Salih was not an important factor in the growing popularity of Jaziran Kharijism.

Another Khariji figure whom Robinson has discussed in his chapter on Jaziran Kharijism is Shabib b. Yazid al-Shaybani, who purportedly assumed the role of reconstituting Salih's rebellion. It is primarily in al-Tabari that Shabib continued Salih's rebellion, whereas in al-Baladhuri and Ibn al-'A'tham, "Shabib

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 476.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 477.

rebels on his own, for his own reasons.”¹⁵⁸ Robinson’s focus is on the successes of Shabib’s rebellion against the Umayyads, rather than being on the precise relationship between Salih and Shabib. The latter was “an extremely able guerilla . . . [who] fought and moved, leading his men to a series of spectacular victories”¹⁵⁹ Moreover, Robinson speaks of Shabib’s reputation among local Christians, who praised him and held him in high regard.¹⁶⁰

Robinson discusses three accounts pertaining to Shabib’s rebellion. The first account talks about Shabib’s loss of his stipend in the army and his rebellion to regain it. The second report speaks of the Marwanids’ policy of not granting the Bakr and Tamim of Syria a stipend. Shabib turned to rebellion in order to get it. The third report narrates that ‘Abd al-Malik cut off stipends to anyone in Syria who followed the Khariji view.¹⁶¹ Thus, it is not clear if Shabib embraced Kharijism in order to regain his elite status, or if he lost his status because he adopted Khariji thought. But, Robinson is certain that Shabib rebelled on his own and his rebellion was successful against the Umayyads. Thus, for Robinson, Salih

¹⁵⁸ Robinson, *Empire and Elites*, 117.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

and Shabib “bequeathed to the Jazira a potent model . . . and theatrical asceticism that attracted opportunistic tribesmen throughout the eighth century. . . .”¹⁶²

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the western historiography of the Khawarij and showed how historians differed in their interpretation of the movement. It seems that earlier scholars like Brünnow and Wellhausen, who wrote their histories of the group at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively, were more concerned about who the Khawarij were rather than why they rebelled. In contrast, later writers such as Watt, Salem, and Rahman, who wrote their works in the 1950s and 1960s, touched on the causes that led the Khawarij to deviate from orthodox Islam. What prompts a group of historians to focus on a specific issue at a certain period of time could be attributed to the prevailing ideological trends in the society that is being discussed. For instance, the rise of modern Islamic fundamentalism in the middle of the twentieth century prompted scholars who wrote in that period to focus on the ideologies of the Khawarij and the causes that led to their emergence. A number of historians saw similarities between the Khawarij and modern fundamentalists, but in the comparison they focused more on the Khariji rebellion rather than on the Khawarij as a movement.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 125.

Other historians, however, wrote their histories of the Khawarij based on historical perspectives and only for the purpose of incorporating the group into the larger picture. For instance, Philip K. Hitti's *History of the Arabs* (1951), Ira Lapidus' *A History of Islamic Societies* (1988), Marshal G. S. Hodgson's *The Venture of Islam* (1974), and Sir William Muir's *The Caliphate* (1924) were not discussed in this chapter because their mention of the Khawarij is brief and lacks the in-depth analysis of Khariji issues. Some historians have discussed Khariji figures instead of focusing on the group as a whole. For instance, on the history of Iraq after the Muslim conquest, Chase Robinson gives a great deal of attention to Khariji individuals, whereas Michael Morony is more concerned with the Khawarij as a group and a community.

Chapter Three

The Khawarij in Modern Arab/Muslim Historiography

In this chapter, the Khawarij in Arab-Muslim historiography are discussed. Part one deals with historians who told the story of the Khawarij as it was transmitted to them from early sources. Some were critical of the Khawarij while others showed some favoritism. In part two, the poetry of the Khawarij is discussed. Although only a few scholars (Ihsan Abbas, Suhayr al-Qalamawi, Nayef Ma'ruf, Abd al-Razzaq Hussein, and Abd al-Baqi Muhammad) wrote about and analyzed the poetry of the Khawarij, these scholars have produced an essential and needed genre of literature about the history and beliefs of the Khawarij. The works on poetry can be considered the most positive literature written about the Khawarij. Part three shows how the Khariji image has been used by Arab historians to promote certain beliefs and ideologies in the Arab world.

A NEW READING OF KHARIJI HISTORY

Hasan Ibrahim Hasan (1953)

In *Tarikh al-Islam*, Hasan Ibrahim Hasan writes that the early Khawarij were no more than a political party that was satisfied with the reigns of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman's early years, and 'Ali prior to the arbitration at Siffin. Hasan adds that the Khawarij represented extreme democratic principles and made the

caliphate a right to every free Arab and later to every Muslim. They were supported by Bedouins from prominent and “dangerous” Arab tribes who felt that their interests had been subordinated to the interests of other parties. Hasan also argues that when the Khawarij emerged they were immediately labeled as a political movement. Although many scholars argue that the Khariji revolts against ‘Ali were aroused by religious sentiments, it seems more plausible that the Khawarij mixed their political opinions with religious matters. As a result, their religious thoughts became no less extreme than their political ones.¹

Muhammad ‘Ali Mukhtar (1976)

In *Dirasat fi Tarikh al-‘Arab*, Muhammad ‘Ali Mukhtar dedicates a chapter to the emergence of the Khawarij. According to Mukhtar, most of those who came to be known as the Khawarij after Siffin had participated in the murder of ‘Uthman and had taken control of Medina. They rose in revolt because they opposed the Quraysh and feared its authority. Therefore, Mukhtar concludes, the Khawarij attacked ‘Uthman to undermine the Quraysh’s influence.² Undermining the Quraysh’s influence was not the only reason to attack ‘Uthman. According to Mukhtar, ‘Uthman’s blunders, such as distributing Muslim lands and money to

¹ Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, *Tarikh al-Islam* (Cairo: matba‘at Misr, 1953), 420.

² Muhammad ‘Ali Mukhtar, *Dirasat fi T’arikh al-‘Arab* (Cairo: Dar al-Nahda, 1976), 117.

relatives and members clan of his, provoked the Khawarij to rise in revolt against the caliph. Mukhtar asserts that this unjust policy by the caliph was the main cause for the rebellion of the Khawarij.³

He argues that the roots of the movement go back to the insurgency against ‘Uthman, meaning that many of those who became Khawarij after the arbitration were Iraqi soldiers who participated in the uprising against and the killing of ‘Uthman. Mukhtar states that these people, however, had different beliefs than the rest of the Muslims and represented a radical trend that had no rational or theoretical views.⁴

Mukhtar states that some of the Khawarij could have emerged from a group of people who had become disenchanted with the Quraysh’s monopolization and capitalization of the Muslims’ gains and achievements during Muhammad’s time and afterwards. These people who were opposed to the Quraysh and dissatisfied with its authority monitored ‘Uthman’s behavior closely and at times attacked his policies, either because they were skeptical of his policies or for the sake of attacking the caliph, Mukhtar proclaims. The author adds that these people consisted of soldiers whose agenda was to oppose the Quraysh. They opposed the Quraysh influence because they felt and feared its hegemony over the newly acquired lands, which were won by the Muslims. Mukhtar contends that these

³ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

people's opposition to the Quraysh was not genuine and could not be based on their fear of hegemony because the new territories were the property of all Muslims, and the Quraysh could not extend its hands over them even if it wanted to. Mukhtar adds that the Quraysh and the new class that emerged in Islam were not after wealth, but they were occupied with other matters.⁵

These soldiers who opposed the Quraysh had different beliefs than the pious Muslims who participated in the insurgency against 'Uthman. These pious people were the Khawarij. Thus, Mukhtar contends that the Khawarij who emerged after the arbitration at Siffin were not from the circle of those soldiers who opposed the Quraysh. These pious men rose against 'Uthman for different reasons, such as his unjust rule. Mukhtar states that this group, which later was known as the Khawarij, had its roots in the insurgency against 'Uthman. The leaders of the proto-Khawarij started to form during 'Uthman's rule. Their personalities gradually started to develop during the insurgency and continued to take shape afterwards.⁶

The difference between the soldiers who opposed the Quraysh and the proto-Khawarij was that the latter did not concern themselves with 'Uthman's blunders of distributing the booty among his clan and relatives. The proto-Khawarij were dissatisfied mainly with religious matters, i.e. 'Uthman's deviation

⁵ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

from the Qur'an. But, Mukhtar concedes that it is hard to confirm what caused rebellions that were motivated by individuals who did not have a common goal.⁷

Mukhtar tries to sort out the identity of the founders of the Khariji movement. For him it is not clear who was behind the rise of this movement, but he nonetheless named three groups: the tribe of Tamim, the soldiers from Iraq, or the pious Qur'an readers. When 'Ali was asked to choose an arbitrator from his side, his eyes were on his cousin 'Abdallah b. 'Abbas. But a group of men in his army objected to this choice arguing that 'Abdallah b. 'Abbas and 'Ali were both from the Hashim family. Thus, these men regarded 'Ali's appointment of his cousin as an arbitrator as serving Hashim's interests rather than the interests of all Muslims.⁸

Mukhtar argues that this objection to 'Ali's appointment of his cousin was an indirect attack against the Quraysh. It is reminiscent of the attack against the Quraysh during 'Uthman's reign. For Mukhtar, it seems that the same pious men who attacked 'Uthman intimidated 'Ali to stop his campaign after the Syrians raised the Qur'an on their lances. Mukhtar writes that 'Ali was confident they would accept his cousin as an arbiter since he accepted their calls to stop the battle. These pious men insisted on appointing Abu Musa al-Ash'ari to represent 'Ali's camp at the arbitration. Mukhtar states that they insisted on al-Ash'ari

⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

because he was from the Qurra'. Thus, Mukhtar concludes that if the Qurra' accepted the arbitration, then who were those men who refused it and declared "No judgment but God's"?⁹

It seems to Mukhtar that there was a division in 'Ali's opposition camp. The opposition consisted of those who called for the arbitration, i.e. the Qurra', and those who rejected it. However, Mukhtar asserts that the group that rejected the arbitration shared the views of the Qurra on choosing al-Ash'ari to represent 'Ali at the arbitration instead of Ibn Abbas.¹⁰

Sulayman ibn Dawud ibn Yusuf (1983)

In *Al-Khawarij hum Ansar al-Imam 'Ali*, Sulayman ibn Dawud ibn Yusuf tells us his version of the relationship between 'Ali and the Khawarij. The author, who himself is an Ibadi from North Africa, refutes all of the theories that suggest that the Khawarij seceded from 'Ali's army at Siffin. Ibn Yusuf writes that the Khawarij were the most loyal supporters of 'Ali until they quarreled with the *imam* on theoretical issues, such as the issue of arbitration (*tahkim*). He adds that they retreated to Nahrawan not to start an insurgency, but to wait for the truth to come out. 'Ali did not fight the Khawarij at Nahrawan. The man who attacked

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

the Khawarij at Nahrawan was al-Ash'ath b. Qays and his followers.¹¹ Thus, al-Ash'ath's involvement in 'Ali's army at Siffin based on the primary sources needs to be considered before discussing Ibn Yusuf's version of this person.

Al-Ash'ath is mentioned only four times in al-Tabari's account of Siffin. The first reference occurs in a section entitled "the fight over the water." On the authority of Abu Mikhnaf, al-Tabari writes that when the Syrians denied 'Ali's army access to water at the Euphrates, al-Ash'ath volunteered to lead the Iraqis in the "battle over the water."¹² It is worth mentioning that the "battle over the water" was the first encounter between the Iraqis and the Syrians. Now, for 'Ali to designate al-Ash'ath to lead the initial fight against the Syrians indicates that al-Ash'ath had won 'Ali's trust and confidence.

Al-Tabari's second reference to al-Ash'ath occurs in the account of the arbitration and the appointment of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari as the Iraqi representative and one of the arbitrators at Dumat al-Jundal. It is reported that 'Ali had objected to the nomination of Abu Musa, but Al-Ash'ath and others insisted on giving the task to Abu Musa. 'Ali later agreed on Abu Musa, obviously on the advice of al-Ash'ath. At Dumat al-Jundal, near Siffin, al-Ash'ath and a few other men witnessed the arbitration agreement. Once the agreement was written, al-Ash'ath

¹¹ Sulayman ibn Dawud ibn Yusuf, *Al-Khawarij hum Ansar al-Imam 'Ali* (Qissnatina, Algeria: Dar al-Ba'th, 1983), 16.

¹² Al-Tabari, *T'arikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, Vol. 3, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997), 74.

held a copy of it and read it to the people. According to al-Tabari, on the authority of Abu Mikhnaf, the Banu Tamim were discontented with the agreement. A man of the Banu Tamim by the name of 'Urwa ibn Udayya objected to the agreement and said: "You make men arbitrate on behalf of God, know that there is no judgement but God's."¹³

The third reference to al-Ash'ath in al-Tabari occurs in the historian's account of the incident in which the Khawarij murdered Abdullah ibn Khabbab, his wife, and four other people who were with them. After that incident, al-Ash'ath demanded that 'Ali should first take care of the murderers and then proceed to Syria. 'Ali and his followers agreed to al-Ash'ath's suggestion.¹⁴ The fourth reference to al-Ash'ath is encountered in al-Tabari's account of the battle of Nahrawan. After winning the fight against the Khawarij, 'Ali's followers showed dissatisfaction in returning to Syria to fight Mu'awiya. They begged 'Ali to let them rest and regroup before engaging in another battle. Al-Tabari reports on the authority of Abu Mikhnaf that al-Ash'ath urged 'Ali's army to continue their march to Syria, but his calls were unheeded.¹⁵

Al-Tabari's accounts of al-Ash'ath do not reflect the behavior of someone who had conspired against his leader, i.e. 'Ali. But to Ibn Dawud, al-Ash'ath was

¹³ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

a conspirator who betrayed 'Ali. Ibn Yusuf writes that the Khawarij, dissatisfied with the arbitration agreement, isolated themselves at Nahrawan after they chose not to engage in the quarrel between 'Ali and Mu'awiya. "It was al-Ash'ath and his followers," Ibn Yusuf continues, "who fought the Khawarij at Nahrawan."¹⁶ Moreover, it was al-Ash'ath who insisted on the appointment of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari as the arbitrator from 'Ali's side. Ibn Yusuf adds that the murder of 'Ali was not a Khariji conspiracy as it had been alleged. It was al-Ash'ath who hired Ibn Muljam to murder 'Ali. "If it were truly a Khariji conspiracy to kill 'Ali, Mu'awiya, and Amr ibn al-'As, then why were Mu'awiya and Amr spared,"¹⁷ Ibn Yusuf writes.

The author provides a different interpretation of the relations between 'Ali and the Khawarij. He argues that the Khawarij were 'Ali's followers and that they stayed as such even after his death. They never expressed any opposition to his rule. 'Ali agreed with their famous principle: "No judgement but God's," and he never attacked them at Nahrawan. Ibn Yusuf adds that 'Ali was discontented with those who led the assault against the Khawarij at Nahrawan. The author reiterates his theory that it was al-Ash'ath who attacked the Khawarij in Nahrawan.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibn Yusuf, *Al-Khawarij*, 16.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

The author accuses al-Shahrastani of distorting the Khawarij's history by showing al-Shahrastani's partiality against this group. Ibn Yusuf alleges that al-Shahrastani cannot be considered a reliable source because he intentionally affiliated himself with the Shafi'i school, although he was an "Isma'ili esoteric."¹⁹ The author cites al-Hafez al-Dhahabi in *T'arikh al-Islam* who transmits on the authority of Ibn al-Sam'ani, al-Shahrastani's student, that "al-Shahrastani was accused of leaning toward 'the people of heterodoxy' (*ahl al-qila'*), meaning the Isma'ilis."²⁰ The author also cites Ibn Taymiyya's attack against al-Shahrastani in *Minhaj al-Sunna*. He writes: "Ibn Taymiyya said in *Minhaj al-Sunna* that the accounts transmitted by al-Shahrastani and other heresiographers had no *isnad*. [Ibn Taymiyya] also stated that Al-Shahrastani leaned toward the Isma'ilis."²¹

Ibn Yusuf asserts that the Khawarij were treated unfairly by most heresiographers who had no *isnad* for their accounts. He contends that the accounts of Dhi al-Khuwaysara are invented and do not apply to the Khawarij. "How can we label the Khawarij as heretics when some prominent companions of the Prophet such as 'Ammar bin Yaser and those who followed, such as al-Hasan al-Basri, joined their ranks?"²² the author asks. Ibn Yusuf rejects the accounts that

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

²² *Ibid.*, 56.

tell how the Khawarij forced ‘Ali to accept the arbitration; that ‘Ali replied to their motto “No judgement but God’s” with his famous statement “A rightful word used for wrongful reasons”; that they killed ‘Abdullah b. Khabbab and his wife; that ‘Ali fought the Khawarij; and finally that the Khawarij conspired to kill ‘Ali. Ibn Yusuf argues that all these accounts mentioned above are unfounded.²³

Ibn Yusuf refutes the theories that suggest that Mu‘awiya’s call to raise the Qur’an was not a “conspiracy” planned by ‘Amr b. al-‘As alone, and believes it was also planned by one of ‘Ali’s aides with the coordination of Mu‘awiya’s aides. Ibn Yusuf tells us that “Taha Hussein wrote that al-Ash‘ath was behind the call to raise the Qur’an.”²⁴ However, Ibn Yusuf does not tell us where Hussein wrote this statement. He adds that al-Ash‘ath threatened to kill ‘Ali following a verbal confrontation between the two. Ibn Yusuf reports that after Siffin, some witnesses saw al-Ash‘ath in a private meeting with Ibn Muljam, ‘Ali’s assassin, in Kufa.²⁵ Ibn Yusuf argues that “all historians agree that the conspiracy to murder ‘Ali was planned by al-Ash‘ath, the enemy of the Khawarij.”²⁶ The historians to whom the author refers are Ibn Sa‘d, al-Mubarrad, Ibn al-Athir, Ibn Abi al-Hadid, and al-Mas‘udi.

²³ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

Ibn Yusuf refutes the reports that the Khawarij met in Mecca and conspired to murder ‘Ali, Mu‘awiya, and ‘Amr ibn al-‘As. Ibn Yusuf argues that this meeting could not be true because we do not have the names of the Khawarij who met in Mecca. Usually, the names of all the Khawarij who participated in the war against Mu‘awiya, including their children, were mentioned in the accounts. Why was there no mention of their names in Mecca, the author asks. Second, the names and affiliations of the three men²⁷ who were assigned to assassinate ‘Ali, Mu‘awiya, and ‘Amr had not been affiliated with the Khawarij until after the conspiracy was revealed.²⁸ It is worth mentioning that Wellhausen states in *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall* that “this clandestine conspiracy is incompatible with the Khawarij’s tradition.”²⁹

Ibn Yusuf writes that al-Ash‘ath, who was the governor of Azerbaijan during ‘Uthman’s reign, was reluctant to pay allegiance to ‘Ali. He did so only after he faced pressure from the people of Azerbaijan. Although al-Ash‘ath marched with ‘Ali to Siffin, he remained a fifth column, a man loyal to Mu‘awiya in Ali’s army. Some reports indicate that after ‘Ali had accepted the Khariji demand to reject the arbitration, al-Ash‘ath showed discontentment with ‘Ali’s decision. Obviously,

²⁷ Abdul Rahman b. Muljam, al-Hajjaj b. Abdullah al-Sarimi, and Zadawiyya the client (*mawla*) of ‘Anbar b. ‘Umar b. Tamim.

²⁸ Ibn Yusuf, *Al-Khawarij*, 196.

²⁹ Julius Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall* (London: Curzon Press, 1973), 98.

‘Ali succumbed to al-Ash‘ath’s demand to silence the Khawarij and to renew the campaign against the Syrians. Such a move weakened ‘Ali’s front and divided his army. Al-Ash‘ath succeeded in his plan. ‘Ali very likely had not realized al-Ash‘ath’s conspiracy, but at least he was unhappy for having fought the Khawarij at Nahrawan. Ibn Yusuf reports that ‘Ali praised the Khawarij and defended them after Nahrawan. He declared that it was unjustifiable for him to fight them and spill their blood.³⁰ These declarations, if they were true, would indicate that ‘Ali did not plan his attacks against the Khawarij. Ibn Yusuf indicates that ‘Ali praised the Khawarij because he discovered al-Ash‘ath’s conspiracy against them.³¹

Not only was ‘Ali forced to fight the Khawarij at Nahrawan, but he was also pressured to accept the arbitration. Again, the pressure came from al-Ash‘ath and the people of the Yemen. The author writes that al-Ash‘ath carried the arbitration agreement to the tribes in ‘Ali’s army. They all refused to allow arbitration by men and declared “No judgment but God’s.” Some tribal members attacked al-Ash‘ath and accused him of collaborating with Mu‘awiya. The author concludes that the allegations that the Khawarij had first pressed for the arbitration and then rejected it are unfounded. It was the Khariji leader ‘Urwa ibn Udayya

³⁰ Ibn Yusuf, *Al-Khawarij*, 91.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

who first declared the motto “No judgement but God’s” and fought al-Ash‘ath for accepting the arbitration.³²

Ibn Yusuf adds that like Abdullah ibn Saba’, al-Ash‘ath conspired against the Muslims. Not only did he succeed in manipulating ‘Ali to accept the arbitration, but he also convinced the *imam* to appoint Abu Musa al-Ash‘ari as his representative. The author argues that choosing Abu Musa, ‘Ali’s former enemy, was al-Ash‘ath’s greatest betrayal of ‘Ali. The Muslims were stunned to see Mu‘awiya choose his own representative, while ‘Ali was not at liberty to choose his. This was a clear indication of al-Ash‘ath’s conspiracy with Mu‘awiya,³³ according to Ibn Yusuf. The appointment of Abu Musa prompted ‘Ali to tell his followers “They [the Syrians] chose the most admired men among themselves; you chose the most hated among yourselves. . . .”³⁴

Ibn Yusuf refutes the accounts that suggest that the Khawarij and the Shi‘a were at odds with each other, and blames the Umayyads for this propaganda. Ibn Yusuf also refutes the reports that the Khawarij condemned ‘Ali and ‘Uthman and contends that there were personal motives behind these reports. The author supports his claims by citing an Ibadi scholar who wrote “We follow the steps of

³² *Ibid.*, 106.

³³ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali . . . and we hold to their sunna.”³⁵ Ibn Yusuf's attempt to show the relationship between the Ibadis and the early Khawarij is unrealistic. As history tells us, the Ibadiyya survived because they abandoned the Khawarij's beliefs and then pursued a policy of assimilation (not dissimulation) with the Sunna. Therefore, the early Khawarij and the Ibadiyya are considered two different sects with different ideologies, although one sprang from the other.

Ibn Yusuf has written an unconventional history of the Khawarij from an Ibadi point of view. Obviously, the author's agenda is to rehabilitate the image of the Khawarij in the traditional Islamic history by blaming one single villain, that is al-Ash'ath, for all the bloodshed between 'Ali and the Khawarij. More importantly, Ibn Yusuf's argument represents a modern approach with the Shi'a. Ibn Yusuf, who seems apologetic, revised the Khariji history in a way to make the reader assume that the Khawarij and the Shi'a were different only in name. Not only did Ibn Yusuf try to narrow the gap between the Shi'a and the Khawarij, but he also aims (1) to legitimize 'Ali's decision at Siffin, (2) to deny that the Khawarij disapproved of 'Ali's conduct at the battle of Siffin, and (3) to show that the Khawarij were legitimate Muslims, and that the same can be said about all the sects that sprang from them, including the Ibadiyya.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

Ridwan al-Sayyid (1984)

In *Mafahim al-Jama'at fi al-Islam*, Ridwan al-Sayyid studies the concept of group formation in early Islam and then focuses on the emergence of the Khawarij and the Shi'a. Al-Sayyid tells us that there is a connection between the group formation and the Qur'anic text that refers to the group. The author begins his study by discussing how the Quraysh family assembled one day in Mecca to worship one of its idols. From that assembly, four people emerged and questioned the Quraysh's social roots. These four, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, 'Ubaydallah ibn Jahsh, 'Uthman ibn al-Huwayrith, and Zayd ibn 'Amr realized that their gatherings had no ideological background and their beliefs had no text to rely on. Thus, these four formed their own groups after they left Mecca in search for other religious beliefs.³⁶ This was the group formation in pre-Islam.

After the birth of Islam, groups were formed as a result of the Qur'anic text that encouraged their formation either directly or indirectly. For instance, according to al-Sayyid, the Qur'an inspired Muslims to form groups that eventually would command the good and prohibit evil. "So let there be a body among you who may call to the good, enjoin what is esteemed and forbid what is odious. They are those who will be successful."³⁷ Thus, young Muslims were

³⁶ Ridwan al-Sayyid, *Mafahim al-Jama'at fi al-Islam* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Tanwir, 1984), 10.

³⁷ The Family of Imran, 104.

inspired and encouraged by the Qur'anic text (some believed it was a duty) to form groups. Among the earliest groups to be formed were the Muhajirun and the Ansar, followed by the Qur'an reciters (*qurra'*) and others. These groups were not only formed as a result of the Qur'anic text, but they also based their beliefs according to their interpretations of the text.³⁸ For instance, the Khawarij based their belief on the verse "Those who do not judge by God's revelations are infidels indeed."³⁹ Hence, their motto "No judgement but God's" (*la hukma illa lillah*). Al-Sayyid tells us that the concept of the group is mentioned in several verses and chapters in the Qur'an, although vaguely.

The first group to be mentioned in the Qur'an is the family of Quraysh: "Since the Quraysh have been united, United to fit out caravans winter and summer, Let them worship the Lord of this House, Who provided them against destitution and gave them security against fear."⁴⁰ Al-Sayyid adds that in Medinan verses, the Qur'anic concept of the group was developed to include new groups within the Quraysh such as the "hypocrites" (*al-munafiqun*), the Muslims, the believers, the Muhajirun, the Ansar, the Jews, the apostates, and the infidels.⁴¹

³⁸ al-Sayyid, *Mafahim*, 17.

³⁹ Al-Ma'idah, 44.

⁴⁰ The Quraish, 106.

⁴¹ Al-Sayyid, *Mafahim*, 32.

Al-Sayyid then turns to discuss the Khawarij, who at times were called *qurra*' and at others were referred to as the people of Harura'. The Khawarij did not aim to annihilate the authority, but they wanted the Islamic law (*shari'a*) as the sole authority. They wanted to limit the role of the imam to be only a leader in military conflicts. At Nahrawan, the Khawarij appointed Abdullah b. Wahb al-Rasibi as their leader. The Khawarij were mostly of bedouin origin, but not of prominent tribes. Their *qurra*' were in charge of appointing their leaders. In times of peace, they did not have leaders.⁴²

Al-Sayyid contends that there was a debate over the origin of their name "Khawarij." He believes their name had an ancient tribal origin that meant "the exiled." Their men used to assemble in remote mosques, so they remained away from the reach of the authority. When they were exposed to authority and could not bear its laws, they either moved away to relieve themselves from the authority or to form a counter-group. In their conflict with the authority, the Khawarij looked for help from fellow Muslims. But, if other Muslims were reluctant to help, the Khawarij branded them as infidels and ignorant, and as those believers who sit at home (*al-qa'ada*). All these are Qur'anic terms.⁴³

The concept of migration and group (*al-hijra wa al-jama'a*) started to play a key role in the Khariji ideology towards the end of the seventh century.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴³ Al-Nisa', 95.

Although the concept of the group had tribal connotations, the Khawarij did not emerge as a group with tribal affiliations. The Khawarij emerged in response to ‘Uthman’s and ‘Ali’s policies and as a counter-force to the ills of society. This rebellion was based on the concepts of declaring loyalty (*tawalli*) to Abu Bakr and ‘Umar b. al-Khattab, and shunning guilt (*bara’a*) from committing evil. These are also Qur’anic terms. The author adds that the Khawarij felt isolated in a society controlled by tribal groups and central authority. The Khawarij rose from isolation and rebelled against the ills of society armed with the text that encouraged the Muslim to do so. In their endeavor, the Khawarij looked for outsiders who would invade their province and turn it from the Abode of Ignorance (*dar dalal*) into the Abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*). Their model was the Prophet when he launched his attack from the Abode of Migration (*dar al-hijra*) in Madina against Mecca, the Abode of Polytheism (*dar al-shirk*). As a result, society was transformed from the Abode of Islam to the Abode of the Whole Group.⁴⁴

Al-Sayyid states that the Khawarij tried unsuccessfully to transform themselves from a tribal movement into a “group.” Their leaders argued that “belief” brought them together and that the “ills of society” caused their insurgencies. But, the Khawarij did not hold to these principles, according to al-

⁴⁴ Al-Sayyid, *Mafahim*, 58.

Sayyid. For instance, Khariji leaders accused each other of being influenced by tribal feeling. The Khawarij of Tamim once supported their tribe in its conflict with the Azd tribe in Basra. Moreover, the Ibadi literature attacks the Berbers and the Persians in favor of the Arabs. Al-Sayyid adds that the Khariji movement was expected to attract all the new Muslim clients (*al-mawali al-judud*) who suffered from the pressure of the authority and the Arab tribes, but the Khariji principles of equality among all Muslims regardless of race or ethnic background contradicted Khariji behavior. For instance, the Khawarij ridiculed an Arab woman who married a *mawla*. The movement of Nafi' ibn al-Azraq split into two groups: Arabs and *mawali*.⁴⁵

'Amir al-Najjar (1986)

In *al-Khawarij: Aqidatan wa Fikran wa Falsafatan*, 'Amir al-Najjar debates the Khariji thought vis-à-vis mainstream Islamic thought. He argues that the Khawarij's principles and thought were short lived in the Islamic world because their principles were founded on violence and the declaration of other Muslims as unbelievers (*takfir al-Muslimin*). Al-Najjar tells us how the Khawarij were different from Sunni Muslims and on what issues the Khawarij and orthodox Islam had differed. According to the author, the Khawarij justified the killing of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

their Muslim rivals. Islam forbids the killing of a believer unless he or she commits adultery, homicide, or apostasy. Their motto “No judgement but God’s” has no ground in orthodox Islam because “God invested his people with power to make their own decisions in social and political matters.”⁴⁶

Their declaration of ‘Uthman and ‘Ali as unbelievers is invalid, al-Najjar adds, because these two leaders were appointed after the consensus of the whole community. Islam teaches that “when Muslims consent to a leader, the latter should not be removed unless there is a consensus to remove him.”⁴⁷ Not only were ‘Ali and ‘Uthman deemed unbelievers by the Khawarij, but so were all the Muslims who participated in the battle of the Camel. Al-Najjar contends that the people of the Camel, such as the Ansar and the Muhajirun, were the first to embrace Islam. God revealed:

And the foremost to embrace Islam of the Muhajirun (those who migrated from Makkah to Al-Madinah) and the Ansar (the citizens of Al-Madinah who helped and gave aid to the Muhajirun) and also those who followed them exactly (in Faith). Allah is well-pleased with them as they are well-pleased with Him. He has prepared for them Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise), to dwell therein forever. That is the supreme success.⁴⁸

Al-Najjar goes on to show that the theology of the Khawarij did not conform to Islamic teachings. He cites Qur’anic verses that negate their ideas. He

⁴⁶ ‘Amir al-Najjar, *Al-Khawarij: Aqidatan wa Fikran wa Falsafatan* (Beirut: Alam al-Kutub, 1986), 103.

⁴⁷ Al-Malti, *Al-Tanbih wa al-Rad* (Baghdad: al-Muthanna, n.d.), 50.

⁴⁸ Al-Tawba, 100.

also challenges their theology by citing other theologians, such as the Mu'tazila, who argued that "even those who commit a grave sin do not deserve to be declared unbelievers."⁴⁹ Al-Najjar writes that the Khawarij considered anyone who challenged their beliefs and principles or who committed a grave sin to be unbelievers. Al-Najjar contends that the Khawarij misunderstood the teaching of Islam and the Qur'an. He cites the Mu'tazila who said to the Khawarij: "You misconstrued Islamic analogy and abandoned the path of learning. God revealed in His book that the *fasiq* (disobedient to Allah) is in a place between belief and unbelief."⁵⁰

Moreover, the Khawarij did not differentiate between small sins and great sins. God revealed in the Qur'an: "If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden to do, We shall expiate from you your (small) sins, and admit you to a Noble Entrance (i.e. Paradise)."⁵¹ This means that Islam does not declare those who commit small sins to be unbelievers. But for the Khawarij, any sin was a great sin. Al-Najjar states that this is a clear indication to what extent the Khawarij misinterpreted and altered the Islamic teaching to their advantage, and

⁴⁹ Qadi Abd al-Jabbar, *Sharh al-Usul al-Khamsa* (n.c.: Wahbe, 1965), 712.

⁵⁰ Al-Najjar, *Al-Khawarij*, 107.

⁵¹ Al-Nisa', 31.

their gravest mistake was to declare ‘Ali, ‘Uthman, and the people of the Camel unbelievers.⁵²

Also, al-Najjar shows that the Khawarij misconstrued the words of God when they declared that those who believe in the unity of God and Muhammad as his Prophet and still commit a sin are unbelievers. The verse that they misinterpreted states: “. . . And whosoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, such are the Kafirun (i.e. disbelievers --- of a lesser degree as they do not act on Allah’s laws.”⁵³ Here, al-Najjar refers to al-Razi who interpreted the verse to be directed against “the Jews who distorted God’s judgment on matters of adultery.”⁵⁴ Al-Najjar adds that the Khawarij proclaimed that whoever disobeys God commits an act of disbelief, and whoever rules against what God revealed is a disbeliever. Muslim theologians, according to al-Najjar, contend that the verse mentioned above was directed against the Jews only. This is a weak argument because the language in the verse does not mean to specify a group of people; its meaning is general.⁵⁵

Ahmad Sulayman Ma’ruf (1988)

⁵² Al-Najjar, *Al-Khawarij*, 107.

⁵³ Al-Ma’idah, 44.

⁵⁴ Al-Najjar, *Al-Khawarij*, 108.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

Contrary to Hasan Ibrahim Hasan's views, Ahmad Sulayman Ma'ruf⁵⁶ argues that the Khawarij made their first appearance in the pre-Islamic *jahiliyya*. Ma'ruf adds that the proto-Khawarij rose in revolt against the nomadic values of the tribal system, which was the legitimate system. He also argues that they attacked and robbed the well-to-do, and shared most of their gains with the poor and the needy. Ma'ruf justifies their rebellion as a type of revolution against the corrupt social system that prevailed in the *jahiliyya*. He also attributes their rebellion in that period to the unfair distribution of wealth.⁵⁷

Ma'ruf's argument, thus, is that the Khawarij who rebelled against 'Ali after Siffin were the descendants of those who had revolted during the *jahiliyya* against the tribal system. Although he justifies their rebellion during the *jahiliyya*, Ma'ruf finds no justification for their rebellion against the Islamic government, which he thinks was balanced and fair. Ma'ruf says that the Khawarij were in constant rebellion because they were always ready to rise in revolt against the system and its leaders on the one hand, and because they could never tolerate what appeared to be unjust and unfair on the other hand.⁵⁸

Ma'ruf's assertion that the Khawarij emerged long before Islam is neither based on an early report nor mentioned by any modern scholar. It seems that

⁵⁶ Ahmad Suleiman Ma'ruf, *Qira'a Jadidah fi Mawaqif al-Khawarij* (Damascus: Tlas, 1988).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

Ma'ruf arrived at this conclusion after establishing similarities between the behavior of *jahili* groups and the Khawarij, such as inclinations to rebellion. However, one may ask why Ma'ruf did not categorize the people of the *ridda* as Khawarij since he used similarities in behavior to correlate earlier groups with later ones. According to Ma'ruf, the *ridda* people were not Khawarij because they withdrew from Islam and became apostates; whereas, the Khawarij were true and pious Muslims, and their rebellions were aimed at serving and defending Islam.⁵⁹

The rise of the Khawarij, as Ma'ruf points out, occurred in four stages. The first stage was during the *jahiliyya*, as mentioned above. The second was during Muhammad's lifetime when a man by the name of Dhu al-Khuwaysarah accused the Prophet of unfairly distributing the booty (*fay'*) after the conquest of Khaybar. Ma'ruf considered this incident to be the first Khariji uprising in Islam. The third stage occurred during 'Uthman's reign, resulting in the murder of the Caliph.⁶⁰ The last stage took place at the battle of Siffin when the Khawarij split from 'Ali's army. Ma'ruf calls the first three stages of the Khawarij's emergence the "lesser *khuru'*"; while the fourth is the "greater *khuru'*."

Abdullah Mahrus (1988)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁰ Ma'ruf asserts that the Khawarij confessed to the murder of 'Uthman when they told 'Ali that he would face the same fate if he did not listen to their demands in restarting the war against Mu'awiya.

Ma'ruf's theory of the rise of the Khawarij is quite problematic. For example, according to Abdullah Mahrus,⁶¹ the rise of the Khawarij movement in Ma'ruf's second stage cannot be attributed to Dhu al-Khuwaysarah's objection to Muhammad's distribution of the booty (*fay'*). Mahrus argues that this incident by itself was insufficient to produce a political movement. Mahrus also argues against scholars who have theorized about the rise of the Khawarij and who claimed that the founder of the Khawarij movement was Abdullah ibn Saba'. He says that such a claim is far from authentic since there are not enough facts to support it. Mahrus tells us that we are more prone to believe that the sudden changes in Islamic society and the resurfacing of the *jahili* tribal solidarity, which had vanished during the time of Muhammad, Abu Bakr, and 'Umar, caused the Khawarij to revolt.⁶²

Mahrus adds that the Khariji revolts were influenced by savvy leaders who, through their experience in politics and war, approached, communicated, and mobilized the Khawarij in a very efficient way. These leaders told the Khawarij that Islam was in danger, and then spread propaganda against 'Uthman and 'Ali. Mahrus also talks about the schizophrenia of the Khariji leaders that made them commit good and evil acts, i.e., kill other Muslims and at the same time sacrifice

⁶¹ Abdullah Mahrus, *Al-Zahira al-Adabiyyah fi Shi'r al-Khawarij* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Amana, 1988).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 21-23.

their lives for Islam. Mahrus discusses the concept of schizophrenia in detail to prove his argument and concludes that the psychological and mental dimensions of the Khawarij contributed to their rise.⁶³

Abd al-Rahman Shalqam (1991)

In al-Din wa al-Siyasa fi al-T'arikh al-Islami, Abd al-Rahman Shalqam disagrees that the Khawarij forced 'Ali to stop the war and to accept Abu Musa al-Ash'ari as his representative at the arbitration. The Khawarij, Shalqam asserts, could not impose their decisions on 'Ali because their leaders did not occupy a leading role in 'Ali's army, nor were they in a position to influence his decisions. Their leaders were not even close to 'Ali nor had they any high military status like Malik al-Ashtar and al-Ash'ath ibn Qays. Shalqam adds: "How could it be possible that suddenly 'Ali bowed to the pressure of individuals who had no political or military influence on him and who had no strong tribal affiliation that gave them political and military weight?"⁶⁴ For example, 'Ali opposed his cousin Abdallah b. 'Abbas and challenged al-Mughira b. Shu'ba when they expressed their opinions. So, to say that a few individuals in his army had influenced 'Ali's

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁴ Abd Al-Rahman Shalqam, *Al-din wa al-Siyasa fi al-Tarikh al-Islami* (Rome: Intergraph, 1991), 164.

decisions at Siffin would not suit 'Ali's character of determination, and contradicts the political philosophy of the Khawarij.⁶⁵

Shalqam adds that the Khawarij could not have reached a hasty decision at Siffin to stop the war because the majority of them were Qur'an readers. Being Qur'an reciters and theologians, they were apt to debating matters rather than making fast decisions. A good example of their tactics to look into matters and debate them first before making hasty decisions was their discourse with Abdallah b. 'Abbas, the man 'Ali had sent to convince the Khawarij to return to his camp. Shalqam concludes that this discussion is clear evidence that the Khawarij did not act hastily, for they discoursed with their enemies using logic and the Qur'an in religious issues.⁶⁶ Hence, they were the first theologians (*mutakallimun*) in Islam.

The Khawarij were not an insignificant group that made a sudden emergence. If their number was set at more than 10,000, according to the historical accounts, then how could it be possible for such a large number of individuals to contact each other and come together in a very short period? Contacting that number of people would require a lengthy period of time. Therefore, Shalqam suggests that the Khawarij were formed as a movement during the period between the battle of the Camel and Siffin. There are several factors that led Shalqam to believe that the Khawarij emerged at the battle of the Camel.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

First, 'Ali sensed dissatisfaction among his army at the battle of the Camel. Second, the fundamentals of Khariji thought were the rejection of the caliphate of the Quraysh. This theory emerged as a result of the battle of the Camel, according to Shalqam. Third, the Khawarij witnessed a conflict between two Qurayshi poles, 'Ali and Mu'awiya, the last remaining prominent leaders in the Quraysh. Being a third party between two leaders, the Khawarij rose to confront 'Ali on issues they had never dared to address before. Thus, the Khawarij became aware of the nature of the conflict around them and chose to be key players in it.⁶⁷

On the other side of the conflict, Shalqam adds, Mu'awiya represented the political front that stood against the religious front under the leadership of 'Ali. Mu'awiya and his men fought 'Ali armed with political rules. 'Ali was a man of religion, not politics. When he tried to pursue the conflict through political means, he failed. The Khawarij, thus, were quick to fill the vacuum left by 'Ali and never hesitated to use it against him.⁶⁸

Shalqam adds that the Khariji movement in Islamic history deserves further study and analysis because it reflects the wind of anxiety that swept across Islamic society after the Muslims had been awakened from the ecstasy of their new religion, which gave them a new character. Their new character was more committed to the spiritual world than to this world. The Khawarij represented this

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

trend. Moreover, Shalqam proclaims that there was no movement in early Islam that had expressed completely and comprehensively the feeling of the individual and the society like the Khawarij. They represented the religio-political trend in Arab society. Al-Shahrastani defined the Khawarij as “whoever rebelled against the imam” This statement had its religious and political influence in Arab society. It had its impact on the people’s “decision” towards the *imam* or the caliph.⁶⁹ One may argue that Shalqam’s arguments are based more on logic than on evidence.

Muhammad ‘Ali al-Shahari (1992)

In *Kayfa Nafham Tarikh al-Yaman al-Arabi al-Islami*, Muhammad Ali al-Shahari argues that the rise of early Islamic sects may be attributed to the socio-economic structure of the caliphate, which was based on Arab aristocracy. The emergence of land-ownership during the Umayyad caliphate, and during ‘Uthman’s rule in particular, prompted some Arabs and non-Arabs (i.e., *shu‘ubiyya*) to challenge the Umayyads who represented the new social class, or Arab “aristocracy,” as the author calls it. Among the Arabs who rose against the Umayyads was the Abbasid house (also an Arab aristocracy).⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁷⁰ Muhammad Ali al-Shahari, *Kayfa Nafham Tarikh al-Yaman al-‘Arabi al-Islami* (n.c.:Al-Amal, 1992), 26.

The Abbasids' success in overthrowing the Umayyad dynasty during their ascent to power was due largely to their status as the most influential Arab "aristocracy" in the opposition camp. Thus, the structure of the caliphate based on Arab "aristocracies" beginning with Quraysh and the Umayyads to the Abbasids and the Fatimids played a key role in the rise of the various social movements. However, al-Shahari argues that the Khawarij emerged for completely different reasons. The Khawarij were not a social movement like other Islamic groups, such as the Shi'a and the Alawis.⁷¹

According to al-Shahari, the Khawarij were basically a movement of tribal democratic ideals who advocated a militant democracy. This form of democracy was experienced by all the tribes that preceded the formation of the central state. The Khawarij's militant democratic practices can be seen in their rejection of a caliphate based on one family rule, in their objection to 'Ali's arbitration, and in their endless military confrontations with those who opposed them, in addition to their establishment of small political entities at the periphery of the Islamic empire.⁷²

Al-Shahari asserts that the Khawarij's militant tribal democracy rose against an Umayyad "aristocratic democracy"⁷³ and leaned more toward a tribal

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

aristocracy that rejects being ruled from the outside. Al-Shahari argues that the *mawali*'s presence in the Khariji movement was marginal, rare, and insignificant due to the Khawarij's Arab orientation and Arab identity. Al-Shahari indicates that historical preferences tell us that most of the Khawarij came from the tribe of Tamim. More Arabs from the north, especially from Tamim, joined the movement after the Khawarij revolted against 'Ali. Even those who planned the assassination of 'Ali, Mu'awiya, and 'Amr ibn al-'As were from Tamim.⁷⁴

Al-Shahari adds that the Khawarij had no political goals or effective plans to take over the caliphate had their assassination of the trio been successful. Their ideas and beliefs failed to gain ground in the Arab east but were warmly received in the Arab west, especially among the Berbers of North Africa who had campaigned to free themselves from the caliphate. Al-Shahari attributes the Khawarij's success in North Africa to the Berbers' social development, which was closer in nature to the tribal social organization of the Khawarij. Al-Shahari quotes Ibn Khaldun who said that the "beliefs of the Khawarij were compatible to the nature of the Berbers."⁷⁵ Al-Shahari adds that "Ibn Khaldun did not see in the Khawarij's beliefs a political goal that promoted the establishment of a defined state, principles, or methods."⁷⁶ "For Ibn Khaldun," according to the author, "the

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Khawarij were an opposing and rebellious movement that had no interest in building a state or a civility.”⁷⁷

Al-Shahari claims that the Khawarij were defending the tribal system against the rising Arab-Islamic society, which was founded and supported by prominent Arab families and notables. The Khawarij challenged the new system and tried to abort the transition to a new historical phase by forming a far more conservative and reactionary opposition movement that would stand against the new social clusters. This was the social and political nature of the Arab-Islamic society during the Umayyad and Abbasid reigns when the Khawarij’s movement rose in opposition. Al-Shahari compares the Khawarij to some European groups and movements that opposed the spread of land-ownership and attempted to preserve the old feudal system.⁷⁸

The Tamim tribe of North Arabia was the backbone of the Khariji movement, al-Shahari contends. Representatives of the Khariji doctrine and beliefs traveled all over the Islamic empire (including Yemen and Oman) to spread their faith. Inhabitants at the periphery of the Islamic empire, i.e. Oman, Yemen, and North Africa, were more receptive to the Khawarij’s beliefs due to these

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

peoples' profound attachment to the tribal system. Muslims in urban and more advanced areas were not as strongly attached to the tribal system.⁷⁹

‘Ali Abd al-Raziq (1996)

In *Al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm*, Ali Abd al-Raziq argues that the Arabs declared the *jihad* against the Khawarij not because they deviated from mainstream Islam, but because they posed a great danger to the unified community and its political structure. The belief that prevailed among the Arabs and Muslims was that whoever disobeyed the *imam* was an apostate and must be fought. Abd al-Raziq argues that it is true that the Khawarij disobeyed the *imam*, but they did not deviate from the path of Islam, and many of them remained true believers.⁸⁰ Bernard Lewis shares the same views as Abdel Raziq. Lewis writes: “Even the Kharijites . . . though held to be in manifest error on important points of doctrine and Holy law, were still Muslims and enjoyed the privileges of such in this world and the next.”⁸¹ Abd al-Raziq points out that if disobeying the *imam* is an act of apostasy, then ‘Ali and Sa‘ad ibn Abi Waqqas should have been portrayed as apostates since they opposed paying the legitimate homage to Abu Bakr. Abd al-

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Ali Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, 1996), 193.

⁸¹ Bernard Lewis, *Islam in History* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1993), 285.

Raziq contends that the wars against the Khawarij were mainly aimed at oppressing the group politically rather than defending Islam against “unbelievers.”⁸²

Nizar Albus‘id (1996)

In *Judhur al-Shubhat: Qira’a fī Harakat al-Khawarij*, Nizar al-Busa‘id tackles the development of the Khawarij’s thought and philosophy. He says that the Khawarij did not lay out a complete and clear theory for their methodological beliefs. The Khawarij had a distinguished belief that differentiated them from the Shi’a and the Mu‘tazila. Their political aims did not materialize because they occupied themselves with the armed struggle and because their beliefs were born in Iraq where the majority of the inhabitants were Shi‘i. Thus, because their beliefs could not mature in a hostile environment, the Khawarij favored rebellion. Al-Busa‘id adds that the succeeding governments imposed a ban on the spread of Khariji thought because the Khawarij were considered a threat to these governments. Not only did the authorities try to depress the Khariji beliefs, they also spread propaganda about the group. This distorted the Khariji image among

⁸² Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Islam*, 194.

fellow Muslims everywhere. This propaganda also isolated the Khawarij and helped to halt the spread of their beliefs.⁸³

Al-Busa'id writes that the Khawarij emerged with no political goals. They fought in the name of religion, albeit they had a superficial knowledge or understanding of Islam. The Khawarij had neither *ansar* nor *muhajirun* in their ranks, which made other Muslims believe that they were targeted, for the Prophet mentions in one of his sayings that " . . . there will emerge a people who will fly from religion as an arrow flies from a bow."⁸⁴ Al-Busa'id attributes the Khawarij's fanatic attitude and behavior to the hostile desert environment that shaped and reflected their personalities. Their short exposure to the city life and their interaction with other Muslims did moderate their way of life. There is no doubt, al-Busa'id adds, that their conversion to Islam after they lived in the *jahiliyya* created the urge in their hearts to pursue knowledge. Thus, they memorized the Qur'an and from their ranks a group called Qur'an reciters emerged. They read the Qur'an, but their reading of the sacred text was exoteric, so they did not delve into its meaning. Al-Busa'id states that they cannot be

⁸³ Nizar Al-Busa'id, *Judhur al-Shubhat: Qira'a fi Harakat al-Khawarij* (London: Dar al-Baraq, 1996), 190-191.

⁸⁴ Al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, Vol. 1, 5th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1996), 134.

blamed for deviating from the true path because they did not witness the rise of Islam and were not companions of the Prophet.⁸⁵

Moreover, al-Busa'id states that the Khawarij's armed struggle was not used to help the mission of Islam; rather, their fanatic attitude led them to massacre their Muslim brethren. With their own deeds, they destroyed their own political and religious goals. There was a doubt about their belief in Islam although they were considered Muslims. Al-Busa'id states that they were Muslims but not *mu'minun* (believers). Islam did not enter their hearts because they committed un-Islamic deeds, such as the killing of human beings.⁸⁶

Al-Busa'id asks the question: could the Khariji movement have risen if 'Ali had refused the arbitration and had insisted on rejecting it? For al-Busa'id, the Khawarij would have emerged regardless of Ali's decision at Siffin because they did not have a set of political goals. Their aim was to oppose and fight the despotic ruler and to separate themselves from other Muslims whom they considered unbelievers. They failed to gain popularity because they had no political vision.

Although al-Busa'id claimed that the Khawarij had no political goals, as mentioned above, he nevertheless conceded that some of the Khawarij had formed an opinion about a particular cause, viz. the arbitration. This opinion, which had

⁸⁵ Al-Busa'id, *Judhur*, 192.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

crystallized into some form of political thought, especially in the first days of their assembly at Harura', had gradually deviated from the path of Islam. The factor that led al-Busa'id to believe that the Khawarij were transformed from being apolitical to a movement with a political ideology was their belief in an *imam* (*amir*) after they had refused all along the necessity for an *amir*. They were anarchists at first, but later they realized that a leader was necessary to lead the prayers and the *umma*.⁸⁷ Thus, their first leader was Abdallah b. Wahb al-Rasibi who was appointed in Harura'.

Al-Busa'id adds that the Khawarij appointed their leader based on military qualifications, rather than genealogical affiliations. They always needed to be led by the most qualified in military affairs due to their constant engagement in battles. Being militants, the Khawarij were unable to balance their military needs with the establishment of a political program. Al-Busa'id concludes that the Khawarij did not really understand the Qur'an and the *hadith*, and they did not pay attention to theology and philosophy.⁸⁸

Faruq 'Umar Fawzi (1999)

In *Nash'at al-Harakat al-Diniyya al-Siyasiyya fi al-Islam*, Faruq 'Umar Fawzi attributes the rise of the Khawarij to social and political factors that took

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

place in Islamic society before the battle of Siffin. Among these factors, he states, was the Muslims' dissatisfaction with the caliphate due to the political instability that plagued their society towards the end of 'Uthman's reign. The people who were most dissatisfied with the situation were the *qurra*' who envisioned a society based on the principles of equality, social justice, and free will. This ideal theory of a society free of social differences and political divisions created in their minds a radical belief and led them to drift towards extremism.⁸⁹

In addition to being idealistic, the Khawarij were also individualistic and refused to recognize the central authority, which imposed order and discipline. They envisioned a society free of any form of authority or imamate. For them, authorities and rulers failed to achieve stability, justice, and security. The Khawarij, who believed in an authority-free society, were mostly bedouins who roamed the desert without being exposed to any form of rules. The three tendencies in the Khawarij were 1) tribal feeling, 2) religious zealotry, and 3) geographical affiliation. Fawzi indicates that there was a gap between what the Khawarij believed and what they practiced. In other words, their theories were not compatible with their political history. For this reason scholars have given them

⁸⁹ Faruq Umar Fawzi, *Nash'at al-Harakat al-Diniyya al-Siyasiyya fi al-Islam* (Amman, Jordan: Al-'Ahliyya, 1999), 51.

various names such as the “republicans of Islam,” the “democrats of Islam,” the “rebels of Islam,” and the “Bolsheviks of Islam.”⁹⁰

THE KHARIJI POETRY IN ARAB HISTORIOGRAPHY

Very few scholars have tackled the issue of Khariji history based on their poetry. Scholars who wrote about Khariji poetry, such as Ihsan ‘Abbas, Suhayr al-Qalamawi, Abd al-Baqi Muhammad, and Abd al-Raziq Hussein tend to expose a positive image of the Khawarij. Arab poetry in general is a body of literature that portrays the Arab heritage, culture, and pride. What makes the Khariji poetry different is that it was composed in a post-*jahili* era and therefore deemed Islamic rather than Arab. Perhaps this Islamic-oriented Khariji poetry, which was mostly influenced by the Qur’an, contributed to this rather positive image.

Ihsan ‘Abbas (1974)

Ihsan ‘Abbas in his *Shi‘r al-Khawarij* writes that Shi‘r al-Khawarij is Gnostic and revolutionary. For the Khawarij, those who died fighting for their beliefs were considered martyrs, and thus they were the best examples for others. Those martyrs deserved to be praised because they represented good against evil. Therefore, the Khawarij as a group deserved to be praised. For this reason, the subject of Khariji poetry was the human being - the Khariji in particular. The

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

inside motivator of the Khawarij was their pious soul, and their poetry was strengthened by the relationship between their poetry and their practical life. The idea of death left sadness in the Khariji poetry but not despair, because death itself was regarded as hope for those who wished it on themselves. Death had become a vehicle to enter paradise and to reunite with friends and loved ones who had already made the journey.⁹¹

‘Abbas divides the poetry of the Khawarij into three units: 1) the Unit of Ends, 2) the Unit of Particulars, and 3) the Unit of Psychological trends. The Unit of Ends is the center point where the wishes and desires of the Khawarij meet the sacrifice of their souls for God or the seeking of death. As one Khariji poet wrote: “You who are afraid of death/Death is more desirable to my heart than honey/Rushing myself to danger will not speed my death/And taking extreme precautions will not save me from it.”⁹²

The Unit of Particulars consists of fine descriptions that can be said of the Khawarij who “had the most honest beliefs.” This image was claimed by most Islamic sects because it was seen as the ideal and the symbol of the true believer. Their poetry points to the participation of Islamic sects in this idealism of human life. And in this description there are strong ascetic particulars that represent the ideal “ascetic ruler,” who would be able to do good, preserve basic rights, and

⁹¹ Ihsan ‘Abbas, *Shi‘r al-Khawarij*, 3rd edition (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1974), 9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 10.

establish justice. If the messenger in the past had combined these qualities, then the “mahdi” in the future would reflect this image,⁹³ Abbas writes. This reality or belief prevailed during the era of the Khariji rebellions.

The Unit of Psychological Trends is represented in the universal agreement to blame the self for falling behind in performing the duties of the previous Units: the Unit of Ends and the Unit of Particulars. These three Units are common in the Khariji poetry. The religious spirit is represented in their poetry, i.e. zealotry for the belief, but it also is a drive to shorten the distance between man and God. The idea of shortening their lives would achieve two things for the Khawarij: first, it is their opportunity to join God and their brethren in the next world, and second it allows them the opportunity to relieve themselves from this world. Death for them is the true religion. The Khawarij were in constant conflict with destiny; their means to achieve victory over this destiny is death. In contrast to the Khawarij, the Sunnis believe that patience is the road to victory. Also, the Sufis believe that shortening the distance between man and God could be achieved before death, through annihilation and the union with God. Thus, for the Khawarij, the shortening of the distance is crowned with death. For this reason the Khawarij sought death.⁹⁴

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

The poetry also shows that besides their desire to embrace death and join those who preceded them to the next world, the Khawarij also had the desire to prolong their lives in this world. Abbas argues that this conflict between the desire for life and the desire for death is a natural conflict in a human being. The Khawarij also showed boredom for life. One Khariji woman indicates this in a poem: "I am tired of carrying my head/ . . . I wish someone could carry it for me."⁹⁵ 'Abbas translates these lines to mean that the Khawarij's desire for death was their only hope for their departure from this world, and this idea is portrayed in their poetry. Despite their constant rebellions and desire for death, the poetry also shows the Khawarij's discontentment in being constantly chased by the enemy from one place to another. As one poet writes: "I wish I could spend a night away from God's name and His blessings."⁹⁶ Here the poet refers to his companions who before escaping the enemy said, "Let's move on under God's name and His blessings."⁹⁷

'Abbas writes that the Khawarij used their poetry to escape persecution by either praising the leaders of their enemy or by expressing their repentance and their detachment from their beliefs. Abbas doubts that the Khawarij resorted to such passive behavior or betrayal of their beliefs and argues that these stories and

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

poetry that tell of Khariji retreat were made to distort the Khawarij's image.

'Abbas writes that the word "Khariji" could be attributed to any rebel against the ruler (*sultan*) and does not necessarily mean only the Khawarij of Siffin, Nahrawan, or the ones called *shurat* (those who sold themselves to God). Abbas adds that the poetry, which shows the Khawarij's passiveness, may have been attributed to other rebels who never belonged to the Khawarij movement, or the *shurat*.⁹⁸

'Abbas tells us that the Khariji poetry attacked the disabilities of the society and the state. Their criticism against the rich was minimal because the Khawarij did not see a gap between wealth and poverty, at least among their people. The Khawarij felt that they did not need to rise against the wealthy. Abbas writes that if the poetry shows any criticism of the rich, it was directed against those outside the realm of the Khawarij. The Khariji poetry also attacks poets who used their poetry to collect money. In addition, Politics was also criticized in the Khariji poetry. As one poet writes "We neither see justice that we can live in, nor do we see supporters for those who preach for basic rights."⁹⁹

'Abbas concludes that we have to suppose that the poetry of the Khawarij provoked social criticism in other groups because their poetry exposed social disabilities in the society. The Khariji poetry served two purposes: 1) it praised

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

those who sacrificed their lives for the Khawarij's beliefs, and 2) it attacked those who retreated from pursuing the Khariji beliefs and goals. The rest of their poetry praised the noble principles of the Khawarij and showed their desire for martyrdom.¹⁰⁰

Abd al-Raziq Hussein (1986)

Abd al-Razzaq Hussein in *Shi'r al-Khawarij* tells us that the Khawarij differed from other Islamic groups in their implementation of Qur'anic verses in their poetry. "We rarely see Khariji poetry without the mention of Qur'anic verses. This would indicate that the Khawarij's first priority was to worship and obey God."¹⁰¹ Hussein adds that the Khawarij's profound interest in the Qur'an had its impact on their poetry. The Qur'anic teachings of tolerance, brotherliness, equality, justice, and obedience to God's commands were represented in their poetry. The Qur'anic verses that emphasize tolerance and reject the idea of the group or Arab feeling are widely mentioned in Khariji poetry. Hussein describes their poetry as purely Islamic. Ahmad al-Shayib agrees with Hussein when he says that "the Khariji poetry . . . was the new Islamic literature."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰¹ Abd al-Razzaq Hussein, *Shi'r al-Khawarij* (Amman: Dar al-Bashir, 1986), 32.

¹⁰² Ahmad al-Shayib, *Ta'rikh al-Shi'r al-Siyasi*, 4th ed.(Cairo: al-Nahda Al-Masriyya, 1966), 186.

Hussein adds that the Khawarij used the Qur'an as a guide in their daily lives, and conducted their "ethical rebellions" (*thawrat akhlaqiyya*) according to the teachings of the Qur'an. The Khawarij, he continues, put up an "ethical constitution" (*dastur akhlaqi*) based on Qur'anic revelations to reform what had been corrupted. A reform based on an "ethical theory" (*nazariyya akhlaqiyya*) was needed in order to restore justice and security. Hussein declares that ethics is the basis on which nations are built. If these nations are built based on "ethical values," they will flourish and advance; but, if they are built on corruption and tyranny, they will eventually collapse. For the Khawarij, the *umma* does not flourish and advance unless its ethics, ideals, and values are purified from corruption. This belief in holding to ethics, ideals, and values, according to Hussein, was considered radical to many people. The Khawarij not only held to this belief but also campaigned and fought for it. They attacked corruption and social disabilities with their poetry. Their criticism was constructive and within the context of the Qur'anic criticism of these disabilities.¹⁰³

Hussein states that the Khawarij promoted ethical values in their poetry. Their people were extremely pious, and their ethical values were purely Islamic. They were dissatisfied with implementing ethical values on themselves only; instead, they felt obliged to command the good and prohibit evil. Thus, they

¹⁰³ Hussein, *Shi'r al-Khawarij*, 46.

started their ethical revolts against the corrupt social system. For Hussein, the Khawarij rose in revolt to fight corruption. Moreover, Hussein sees rebellion against rulers and tyrants in their poetry: the Khawarij condemned the government's excessive force and brutal treatment of the Muslims. The Khawarij challenged such policies because they deemed it un-Islamic. Islam is a religion of tolerance, justice, and forgiveness. Khariji poets criticized the state policy in their poetry. Hussein tells us that the Khawarij expressed in their poetry how they felt about oppression and wrote that rebellion against tyrants is part of their belief.¹⁰⁴

Also in their poetry the Khawarij attacked "social disabilities," i.e. wealth and the acquiring of property. Khariji poets were unhappy with the way Muslim soldiers replaced social values with wealth. Hussein argues that the Khariji poetry attacked the wealthy and those who longed to acquire wealth because in the Khariji belief wealth is a means not an end. They contended that the acquiring of wealth is un-Islamic because it distracts the Muslim from his duties towards God, his brothers, and his family. Thus, the Khawarij stood up against the corruption that prevailed in Muslim society. They fought corruption with the belief that they were defending and preserving Islam against deviant Muslims.¹⁰⁵

In the last chapter of his work, Hussein compares the Khariji poetry with Shi'i and Umayyad poetry. The Khariji poetry differs from other Islamic poetry in

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

that it distanced itself from tribal and ethnic feeling and affiliation. For the Khawarij, there was no difference between an Arab and a non-Arab Muslim. This is evident in their poetry. On the contrary, Shi'i poetry showed profound bias for the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*). Shi'i bias, though, was not racial or tribal, it was rather a form of belief in the piety of the Prophet and his family. The Umayyad poetry, however, represented the Arab tendency and was not any different from *jahili* poetry. The Umayyad poetry, Hussein concludes, propagated and promoted Arab ethnicity.¹⁰⁶

Unlike the Shi'i poetry, which expressed anger and sorrow for *ahl al-Bayt*, and unlike the Umayyad poetry, which promoted political beliefs, the Khariji poetry had a revolutionary tone and a call for sacrifice, and the Khawarij put their poetry into practice. Unlike the Shi'a and the Umayyads, Khariji poets did not revert to reasoning and logic in their poetical discourse with other Muslims; instead, they turned to religion and emotion to attract believers to their cause. Khariji poets wrote poetry solely for the Khariji "faith" and principles, unlike the Shi'a and the Umayyads whose poetry promoted groups that served their interests.¹⁰⁷

'Ali Jaffal (1990)

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 186-170.

‘Ali Jaffal studies the Khariji poetry in his *al-Khawarij: Tarikhuhum wa Adabuhum* and discusses the life of some of their prominent poets. His book is worth discussing in this chapter because he provides a lengthy analysis of Khariji poetry, which reflects their social values and character. Jaffal, like other Khariji scholars who focused on the poetry, gives the Khawarij a positive image. His book is divided into five chapters: the first chapter provides an overview of Islamic history. The second chapter deals with the identity and background of the Khawarij. In the third and fourth chapters, Jaffal discusses the poetry. And, the last chapter touches on the Khariji influence on literature and the Muslims.

In a chapter on Khariji poetry, Jaffal lists the subjects that the Khawarij touched on in their poetry. First, is the notion of courage. He writes that many historians agree that courage was very important to the Khawarij; therefore, their poetry emphasizes their battles with the enemy. Jaffal writes that the Khawarij used their poetry to attract “fellow Muslims who would help them achieve social, political, and religious reform.”¹⁰⁸ Jaffal adds that a Khariji poet encouraged Muslims to join the Khariji insurgencies as he tells them that the abode of non-Khariji Muslims is an abode of ignorance and infidelity. The poet warns that a

¹⁰⁸ ‘Ali Jaffal, *Al-Khawarij: Ta’rikhuhum wa Adabuhum* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), 56.

Khariji would intoxicate his soul if he got near this abode. So, to keep his soul pure, he is obliged to leave that abode and to join the insurgents.¹⁰⁹

The Khawarij expressed their opinions and beliefs not only through poetry, but also through discourse (*khataba* or *ahadith*). The Khawarij used the *khataba* and *ahadith* to communicate with Muslims. *Khataba*, Jaffal states, was a perfect means to attract people to the principles of their movement. Unlike poetry, *khataba* was a plain language. Thus, the Khawarij felt more comfortable and freer to express their opinions in that method. For instance, the Khawarij used *khataba* to express their opinions about the caliphs, to boast of their courage in battles, to mobilize people for wars (*al-had 'ala al-jihad*), to discuss piety and ethics, to communicate, to debate with other groups, and to call for *jihad*.¹¹⁰

Muhammad 'Abd al-Baki (1991)

In *al-Ru'ya al-Fanniya fi Shi'r al-Shi'a wa al-Khawarij*, Muhammad 'Abd al-Baki discusses the roots and development of the poetry of the Khawarij. He tells us that the poetry of the Khawarij is reminiscent of Arab the poetry that prevailed towards the end of the *jahili* period, when wealth replaced social values; social status was determined by wealth, not values. 'Abd al-Baki analyzes a Khariji poem that tells about a *jahili* knight named 'Urwa who became dissatisfied

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 67-73.

with the new reality and therefore decided to rebel against the new dominant power, wealth. 'Urwa mobilized impoverished people like him and led them in invasion ('Abd al-Baki does not say against whom). 'Urwa refused to live in poverty, so he went out brandishing his sword seeking better social status for himself.¹¹¹

The Khariji poetry tells about the relationship between the Khariji man and his wife. 'Abd al-Baki writes that the Khariji man relates to his woman based on his profound belief and according to his material conveniences. The Khariji woman was transformed from a passive human being to an independent entity, but with some limitations. The Khawarij wrote poetry to either mourn their dead wives or to express their feelings towards them. The poetry shows that the Khariji woman possessed the same beliefs as her male companion and sacrificed her life for these beliefs. 'Abd al-Baki adds that the Khariji women fought for the Khariji cause, and their status was equal to Khariji men.¹¹²

The poetry also tells about the Khawarij's dissatisfaction with this world. They saw that people sacrificed everything to achieve wealth. Their answer was to leave this world, and that was achieved by seeking death. The Khawarij believed that death through martyrdom was their path to the next world. This is in

¹¹¹ Muhammad Abd al-Baki, *Al-Ru'ya al-Fanniya fi Shi'r al-Shi'a wa al-Khawarij* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Amana, 1991), 122.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 130.

contrast to what we see in the *jahili* poetry where the poet rejected the idea of death and martyrdom and justified his purpose for living. The Khawarij believed that this world is a step stone to the next one. For the Khawarij, glory is not measured by the length of life.¹¹³ ‘Abd al-Baki concludes that the Khariji poetry was an expression of a distinguished experience.

The fact that the Khariji poetry was preserved by, and circulated among, the Khawarij themselves, this may lead us to believe that the poetry was shaped, influenced, and edited by transmitters who advocated different views than those views transmitted by Sunni historians.¹¹⁴ The Khariji poetry focuses more on the Khariji piety rather than on the early community itself. Fred M. Donner compares the Khariji piety told in their poetry to the piety mentioned in the Qur’an. He argues that some of early Khariji poetry parallels some of the themes of the Qur’an.¹¹⁵ Piety is the main theme, a ritual exercise that requires the believer to shun worldly desires and seek death so he (or she since female Khawarij assumed an active role in the Khariji struggle) can join the deceased comrades.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹¹⁴ Fred M. Donner, “Piety and Eschatology in Early Kharijite Poetry,” in *Fi Mihrab al-Ma‘rifa* (Beirut: Dar Sader Publishers, 1997), 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2; see also Wadad al-Qadi, “The Limitations of Qur’anic Usage in Early Arabic Poetry: The Example of a Kharijite Poem,” in Wolfhart Heinrichs and Gregor Schoeler (eds.), *Festschrift Ewald Wagner Zum 65. Geburtstag*, Band 2. *Studien zur arabischen Dichtung* (Beirut: in Kommission bei Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1994), 162-181.

For the Khawarij true piety requires the believer to attack evil wherever he or she may be. Resistant to tyranny and the call for attacks on a stubborn tyrant are seen in verses that are quite common in Khariji poetry. Donner proclaims that piety gave rise to the metaphor that was used to identify the Khariji movement: that of buying and selling, to buy a ticket to paradise by selling one's life to God. From the early poems, the Khawarij referred to themselves as buyers/sellers (shurat).¹¹⁶

In their poetry, the Khawarij sought death and martyrdom in the struggle. Death for the Khawarij was a way to leave this world to "an eternal abode" in the afterlife. The Khawarij, therefore, sought death for this purpose only. The Qur'an, on the contrary, requires its believers to defend the faith; not seek death. But, those who die defending the faith are martyrs and they are rewarded in the afterlife. The Khariji poetry and the Qur'an represents two different notions of the belief in heaven and hell. The Khawarij believed that the Last Judgment is imminent; therefore, there was a sense of urgency to die in martyrdom before it is too late. Although the Qur'an warns the believers of the coming of the Hour (al-sa'a), later Islamic tradition, as Donner puts it, "takes great pains to deny any

¹¹⁶ Donner, "Piety and Eschatology," 3.

suggestion that Muhammad . . . may have been possessed by an apocalyptic eschatological vision. . . .”¹¹⁷

Donner explains the failure of early Khariji poetry to mention an apocalyptic End-time in three ways. The first explanation suggests that the Khawarij never believed in apocalyptic ideas. The second explanation concludes that their poetry that contained verses with apocalyptic content was suppressed or revised. In the third explanation, Donner argues that the Khawarij did not mention the End-time because they considered the events of their own day, i.e., the *ridda* wars and the Muslim conquests, were indeed the End-time itself. Since the End-time was upon them, it was not something to anticipate. The belief that time was at its end urged them to make whatever sacrifices to secure a victory for the righteous community of Believers.¹¹⁸ Donner sees the latter explanation to be most compatible with the Khariji belief in “no judgment but God’s” (*la hukma illa lillah*), a phrase that is mentioned in early Khariji poetry. The Khawarij believed that the time they lived in was the Judgment Day. Being participants of the first events of that Day, the Khawarij believed that any settlement to the quarrels between believers and tyrant rulers must be the work of God alone.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

THE KHAWARIJ IN THE HERITAGE (*TURATH*)

Arab and Muslim historians have rewritten the Islamic *turath* using the Khawarij as an ideal group to promote certain ideologies, beliefs, and religious and political affiliations. Others went further to demonstrate that modern day theories and ideologies, such as nationalism, Marxism, and Islamic fundamentalism, had already existed in early Islamic culture and had never been alien to Islam, as many have argued. Thus, in their writing of the *turath*, Arab historians tackled the history and role of the Khawarij from four different perspectives: 1) from an Arab nationalist point of view, 2) from a Marxist point of view, 3) from an Islamist point of view, and 4) from a feminist point of view. The nationalist approach, which was introduced by Ahmad Amin, stresses the Arabness of the Khawarij. This view suggests that Arab nationalism is a classical tendency that emerged in the Arab culture in early Islam to preserve Arab identity against foreign cultures, languages, and ethnicities that penetrated the Arab society. The Marxist point of view of Hussein Mruwah shows the Marxist-type behavior of the Khawarij. This view suggests that the roots of class conflict go back to early Islam when the Arabs invaded foreign lands and collected the wealth. The Islamist point of view of Mahmoud Isma'il suggests that extremist thought has been in Islam since the birth of the Khawarij. The feminist point of view of Leila Ahmed affirms through the Khawarij that the practices and

regulations set by Muhammad on issues related to women were ephemeral and not binding on later Muslim communities. She shows that the behavior of the Khawarij toward women differed from those affirmed by the Islamic establishment.

The Khawarij have also been discussed in the *turath* by some prominent Arab and Muslim scholars; however, this section will discuss only the above mentioned authors for the main ideologies they represent. In other words, in this chapter, I shed light on how and why the Khariji image was used in the modernist/romantic interpretation of the *turath*.

The Nationalist Approach

Nationalism is, indeed, a powerful force that has been instrumental for political mobilization. It can also be seen as a form of ethnic nepotism, giving rise perhaps to racism, and as a social process through which people are united as a unique force against “the others.” This understanding of nationalism would definitely apply to the nationalist views of the Khawarij suggested by Ahmad Amin.

Amin says that most of the Khawarij “were Bedouins extremely biased to their own [Arab] ethnicity (*shadidu al-‘asabiyya li jinsihim*).”¹²⁰ He adds that the Khawarij appealed only to people of Arab ethnicity and shut the doors of their movement against everybody else.¹²¹ This Arab-oriented tendency of the Khawarij introduced by Amin was also mentioned by Ceasar E. Farah, who asserts that the Khawarij were elitists who argued that “Islam was targeted specifically for Arabs.”¹²² This theory suggests that the Khawarij were Arab nationalists (*‘urubiyyun*) whose views and ideologies were Arab- rather than Islamic-oriented. Amin’s views suggest that the Arab nationalist tendency had already existed in first-century Islam¹²³ and should not be regarded as a modern phenomenon in the Arab world. In other words, the Khawarij believed in the relationship between Islam and Arabism.

For the Khawarij, the idea of Arabism was more than a mere identity. It was a dominant ideology and a social force for preserving the Arab identity against newly Islamized foreign cultures on one hand, and for mobilization and action on the other. The strong belief in the compatibility between Arabism and

¹²⁰ Ahmad Amin, *Fajr al-Islam*, 8th ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Masriyya, 1961), 262.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Caesar E. Farah, *Islam*, 5th ed., (NY: Barron’s, 1994), 172.

¹²³ See also Rif’at Sayyid Ahmad, *Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya fi Misr wa Iran* (Cairo: Sina, 1989), 55.

Islam led the Khawarij to declare that Islam was a religion for the Arabs only.¹²⁴ On the contrary, the general view of modern Islamic fundamentalists (including *Takfir wa-Hijra*) is that they strongly rejected the idea of Arab nationalism and looked at it as a foreign element and therefore un-Islamic, if not anti-Islamic. This total rejection of Arab nationalism and the assertion of Islam had sprung from the Qur'anic definition of a nation (*umma*).¹²⁵ According to the Islamist view, what determines membership in the *umma* is not ethnic or geographical affiliations but belief.¹²⁶ Where Islam exists, there is an *umma*. This theory conflicts with the idea of nationalism in general, and Arab nationalism in particular. The Islamists argue that the idea of Arab nationalism belongs to the past,¹²⁷ especially to 19th-century Europe where nationalisms began to rise.

The Islamist Approach

Mahmoud Isma'il,¹²⁸ who represents the Islamist trend, portrays the Khawarij as the defenders of Islam against internal and external enemies. In a chapter entitled "Al-Khawarij: Min al-Thawra ila al-Nidal al-Sirri," [From

¹²⁴ Farah, *Islam*, 172.

¹²⁵ Ahmad al-Baghdadi, "Al-Madmun al-Siyasi li-Mafhum al-Umma fil-Qur'an," *Social Science*, No.2 (June 1982): 10-25.

¹²⁶ Abdul Majid Zamzami, *Al-Islam wal-Qawmiyyat* (Geneva, n.p., 1985), 2-6.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Mahmoud Isma'il, *al-Harakat al-Sirriyah fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1973).

Revolution to Secret Struggle] Isma'il asserts that the Khawarij were devoted Muslims whose aim was to defend Islam against the Quraysh¹²⁹ and the Sufyanid aristocracies on one hand, and against an invasion by foreign cultures on the other.¹³⁰ In this view, Isma'il shows the similarities between the Khawarij and the contemporary modern extremist movements. Isma'il adds that the revolts of the Khawarij in the past resemble very much the rise of modern extremists. For instance, in early Islam, the Khawarij revolted against the religious institution of Quraysh because it tolerated the un-Islamic deeds of the political regime of the Sufyanid family.¹³¹ Following in the steps of the Khawarij, modern extremists also showed dissatisfaction with the religious institutions of al-Azhar because it tolerated the western-oriented regimes of the Arab world. Al-Azhar, in fact, has tolerated the implementation of Western laws in Islamic societies and the adoption of Western cultures and values by Arab governments. Therefore, modern extremists rejected both religious and governmental institutions.

Isma'il's and Rahman's correlations between the Khawarij and the contemporary extremist movements have intrigued scholars to argue that if modern fundamentalists rose against the supposedly corrupt Islamic societies and governments of today, then classical Islamic states, which provoked the Khawarij

¹²⁹ According to Isma'il, the Khawarij accused Quraysh of using their power for their own benefits. This behavior was un-Islamic for the Khawarij.

¹³⁰ Isma'il, *al-Harakat al-Sirriyah*, 14.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

to revolt, were no better and could no longer be used as an ideal. In such a correlation, we are left to wonder how and to what extent the Khawarij and contemporary fundamentalist movements shared the same roots and views in the face of their hated political systems. One thing is certain, however. It seems that despite their radical views, the Khawarij catered to people of different beliefs and backgrounds, whereas some contemporary Islamic extremists, in addition to their rejection of the ideologies around them, also rejected "Islam as we know it, with the exception of the Koran."¹³²

The Marxist Approach

Khariji history was also written by contemporary scholars from a Marxist perspective. Hussein Mruwah, known for his leftist views, writes in *Al-Naz'at al-Madiyyah fi al-Falsafa al-'Arabiyyah* that the Khawarij consisted of peasants who revolted against landowners. Mruwah, using Marxist terminology, says that the Khawarij supported the peasants' uprisings in Basra against al-Hajjaj, and their movement attracted both the peasants of the countryside and the workers of the cities.¹³³ In this view, Mruwah shows that the Khawarij led a social revolution of the lower class against Islamic capitalism. Mruwah's views of the Khawarij are

¹³² Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 80.

¹³³ Hussein Mruwah, *al-Naz'at al-Maddiyah fi al-Falsafa al-'Arabiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1978), 512.

not different from what Marxism is about. One of the main ideas found in Marxism suggests that the economic base determines the political and ideological superstructure, and it is the development of the economic structure that produces social change.

It seems that Mruwah's history of the Khawarij was clearly based on his Marxist ideology, as mentioned above. His study was mainly focused on the type of people the Khawarij attracted, rather than focusing on their political agenda or doctrine. In his analysis, he finds that the movement attracted a specific class that was centered in Iraq, where the largest portion of the poor lived. He also argues that Syria did not appeal to the Khawarij because its inhabitants were largely landowners.¹³⁴

Mruwah claims that the Khawarij were tolerant of non-Arabs and non-Muslims. In this view, Mruwah asserts that they were free from the *'asabiyya* tendency that Amin had suggested. Despite their religious extremism, they dealt with others from a belief based on equality, rather than on blood relations and religion. Mruwah contends that the Khawarij had developed some liberal thinking despite their radicalism. Mruwah goes on to address two factors that led to their liberal thought:¹³⁵ 1) following the death of 'Ali, their opposition and hatred to the

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 513.

¹³⁵ The Khawarij were egalitarians, liberals, and democrats, at least in theory. For example, they advocated that the *khilafa* should not be restricted to Quraysh, but

Umayyad authority attracted supporters from every ethnic and religious group, and 2) early in the first stages of its emergence, the Khariji movement recruited members from different tribes and organized them in a way that kept them united, despite their tribal affiliations and clashes before they joined the movement.¹³⁶

The Feminist Approach

Women remain invisible in the history of Islam despite the growing scholarship on women's issues and history in the last two decades. The discourses on women, in particular the veil, were sparked by Qassim Amin who, in his *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (1899), advocated women's emancipation and education and called for reforms in matters of polygamy and divorce. His book was a positive response to the Europeans who argued that the veil represented inferiority and that it came between the Muslim woman and her advancement as a citizen in her own society. Following Amin's book, the first half of the twentieth century Middle East witnessed the rise of the first feminists in Islam who in their turn contributed to the debate. These feminists, such as the westernized Huda Sha'rawi (d. 1947) and the Islamist Zaynab al-Ghazali, left their marks on society and history as well.

should be open to any Muslim even a slave. Thus, they rejected both Sunni and Shi'i dominant theories of the *Khilafa*. They welcomed all Muslims regardless of race or social class and also called for the equal distribution of wealth among all Muslims.

¹³⁶ Mruwah, *al-Naz'at*, 513.

The discourses on women have continued in recent times between Islamists and secularists - the advocates of the veil and those who want to do away with it. Muslim feminists have also contributed to this debate by rewriting Islamic history from a feminist point of view. Feminists like Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahamad, and Nawal al-Sa'dawi, among others, studied the life of the Prophet, challenged conventional histories and canonical texts, and provided interpretation focusing on semantics. The Algerian novelist Assia Djebar focused on Fatima, Muhammad's daughter and 'Ali's wife, and portrayed her as a symbol of rebellion against social injustice.

In this debate, the Khawarij made their presence in Leila Ahmed's classic *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992). Ahmed argues that the Khawarij "rejected concubinage and the marriage of nine-year old girls . . . even though Muhammad had owned a concubine and had married A'isha when she was about nine."¹³⁷ She adds that in early Islam women's participation in battle was evident in the Khawarij who formalized "that role and institute[d] *jihad*. . . as a religious duty, along with prayer, pilgrimage, fasting, and almsgiving, for women as well as for men."¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 71.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

As for women engaging in battle, the Khawarij argued, according to Ahmed, that the practice was a religious duty for women because women in early Islam participated in Muhammad's expeditions and fought in his battles. Ahmed tells us that "a number of Khariji women won renown for their prowess in battle, among them Ghazala, who defeated al-Hajjaj in a duel."¹³⁹ But, the role of women in battle, according to Ahmed, was suppressed by the "orthodox" who not only opposed *jihad* for women, but also "killed and exposed naked the women captured in their battles with the Kharijis."¹⁴⁰ Ahmed believes that this attitude toward women's role in the battle, which led Khariji women to withdraw from the battlefield, was different from the role women played in the first Muslim community.¹⁴¹

Ahmed argues that the role of women in battle came to an end only when orthodox Muslims assimilated with non-Arabs after the conquest. Thus, because the early Khawarij were Arabs - later Khawarij attracted non-Arab elements such as Persians, Berbers, and Kurds - they preserved the Arab tradition that allowed their women the freedom to participate in battle, a tradition that "endured longer among them than among orthodox Muslims. . . ."¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the Khawarij in modern Arab/Muslim historiography from three different perspectives: first, Arab historians told the history of the Khawarij as it was transmitted with criticism or favoritism. Second, the story was told based on Khariji poetry. Scholars who touched on the poetry exposed a positive history of the group. Last, the history of the Khawarij has been rewritten based on four different ideologies: nationalism, Marxism, Islamic fundamentalism, and Islamic feminism. The first group of scholars studied the Khawarij from an Arab nationalist point of view. This approach seems to suggest that Arab nationalism emerged with the rise of the Khawarij. Other scholars, who have studied the Khawarij based on the Marxist ideology, have shown the Marxist-type behavior of the Khawarij. The aim of these scholars is to suggest that the roots of class conflict go back to early Islam. The third group studied the Khawarij from an Islamic fundamentalist point of view and correlated them to modern Islamic fundamentalists. The feminist group exposed the role of women in early Islam through the history of the Khawarij, who allowed *jihad* for women.

The significance of the Arab/Muslim interpretation of the Khawarij lies in its totality as a revisionist and a reinventing history aimed at rehabilitating the Khawarij in modern Arab/Islamic thought. The positive image of the Khawarij

proved to be an important and primary issue in the *turath*. This has prompted Arab/Muslim writers to use the rational-choice approach in their interpretation of medieval Muslim historiography as a way to promote ideological discourses. They blended historical events with modern philosophy; thus, their history emerged not as a story that tells what happened in the past, but as a rational innovation of a past that can be utilized in modern Islamic discourses. Arab/Muslim writers played a key role in transmitting the positive image of the Khawarij because they were entrusted in writing the *turath*. And it is important to mention that for Arabs and Muslims, the *turath* represents something more than a past. It is an ideology. Arab/Muslim writers, therefore, have introduced the *turath* to their readers as a past blended with ideologies that can be adopted in the present.

Chapter Four

The Khawarij and Their Contemporary Relevance: The Legacy Lives on

Indeed, something of [the Khawarij's] radical spirit (although not overt influence) has been relived not only in certain outstanding individuals in medieval Islam but in several relatively recent movements inspired by radical idealism such as the Wahhabis in the 12th/18th century, and, in a more moderate spirit and more recently, the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab Middle East.¹

Islamic extremism is not a twentieth century trend as some observers contend; in fact, extremist thought in Islam first appeared with the Khawarij in the 7th century and, ostensibly, did not die with the downfall of the movement. Certain behaviors and terminology of contemporary extremist groups, such as al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra,² can be traced to the Khariji movement. In part one I explore the historical background of al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra as sociopolitical movements. In part two I discuss the meaning and implications of *takfir* (excommunication), *hijra*

¹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 170.

² Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra (excommunication and emigration) is a name given to the group by the Egyptian press for their views on the concepts of *takfir* (denouncing all Muslim societies as infidels) and *hijra* (the withdrawal from such infidel societies to places where they can perform Islamic duties away from the *kuffar*). Also, *hijra* is performed when the group is weak. Once power and strength are attained, the emigrants would return to claim the society. The concepts of *takfir* and *hijra* are discussed in later sections of this chapter.

(emigration), and *hakimiyya* (the rule of God) and how these concepts were practiced by both the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra.

The Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra shared similar ideological backgrounds and used certain concepts, such as *al-hakimiyya*, *takfir*, and *hijra*, which were the cornerstones of their beliefs and thoughts. Such beliefs led the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra to reject the authority of men in all forms - mainly political and religious - and to deviate from mainstream Islam. Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra movement merits special attention because it is considered one of the most extremist movements in Egypt, and perhaps the Middle East, and its views correlated with those of the Khawarij. Therefore, a study of al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra in light of the Khawarij is essential, and sheds light on the origins and causes for the emergence of both movements.

Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra

Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra is an offshoot movement (*haraka*) of the Muslim Brotherhood, a traditional and moderate movement. The latter is a “purely religious society and a reformist Islamic movement”³ founded by Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949) in 1928. The Brotherhood believed in pan-Islamism vis-a-vis Egyptian

³ Abdel Azim Ramadan, “Fundamentalist Influence in Egypt: The Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Takfir Groups,” in *Fundamentalisms and the State*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 154.

or Arab nationalism, and, based on this belief, its ultimate goal was to seize power and establish an Islamic government.⁴ To achieve its goals, the Brotherhood appealed to and mobilized the Egyptian educated class. This policy, which did not appease the Egyptian rulers, led to clashes with the political powers in Egypt. By 1949, the Egyptian royal palace realized the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the same year, al-Banna was assassinated.

In the years following the death of al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to ally itself with the military officers of the July Revolution in order to gain a foothold in the new political system. But the ideological differences between the officers and the Brotherhood created a conflict, resulting in the dissolution of the Muslim Brothers on January 14, 1954 and in the arrest and imprisonment of its leaders.⁵

The Muslim Brothers' suppression and the long-term imprisonment of their leaders did not silence the Muslim Brotherhood. Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), who was the ideologue of the Muslim Brothers and a prisoner himself, forged a new ideology for the Muslim Brothers. With this ideology, Qutb officially broke away from the traditional and mainstream fundamentalism of the Muslim Brothers and made the transition to radical fundamentalism. In his *Ma'alim fil Tariq* (Signposts or Signs on the road), Qutb denounced the entire Egyptian society as being in the

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

state of ignorance (*jahiliyya*) and considered the remaining Islamic societies to be infidels (*kuffar*).⁶ Also, Qutb believed in the *hakimiyya* (the sovereignty of God alone) and rejected the sovereignty of men. Qutb's writings were considered extreme and were therefore rejected by both the Muslim Brothers and Muslim jurists at al-Azhar mosque. For instance, the Muslim Brothers did not categorize the Egyptian society as *jahili*⁷ and the '*ulama*' (the religious scholars) of al-Azhar condemned the *Ma'alim fil Tariq* of Qutb as "abomination and heresy."⁸

Influenced by such radical views, some members of the Brotherhood drew their ideas from Qutb's work and formed their own extremist movements, which came to be known as the Takfir groups. These extremists based their ideologies on the concepts of *hakimiyya* and *takfir*. Hence, four different Takfir groups emerged from the main Muslim Brotherhood: the first group appeared in early 1974 under the leadership of Salah Abd Allah Siriyya, a Palestinian. Siriyya rejected the "gradualist approach to seizing power - by [means of] first preparing the individual, then preparing the society, then ultimately establishing the Islamic state."⁹ Such a strategy was initially adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood and

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 62.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹ Ramadan, "Fundamentalist Influence," 157.

Sayyid Qutb. Siriyya's strategy was "first to seize control of the state through the overthrow of the Egyptian order."¹⁰

The second organization was al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra founded by Shukri Mustafa in the early 1970s.¹¹ This group abandoned the idea of taking over the state and urged its members to make the *hijra* (emigration),¹² which means to sever their ties with Egyptian society and live in isolation. The third group, the Jihad Organization, was formed in Alexandria in 1975 under the leadership of Ahmad Salih 'Amir. Its strategy aimed at overthrowing the state without preparing the individual and then the society for future empowerment.¹³ The fourth movement, which was formed under Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj, also invoked the concepts of *hakimiyya* and *takfir*, but, unlike Mustafa and Siriyya who deemed the entire society as infidel, Faraj believed that the ruler alone was the *kafir*.¹⁴ All the Takfir groups, except for al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra, bear the name *jihad* (holy struggle). This chapter will focus on only one group, al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ There is doubt as to when al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra was founded. Some scholars assert that the group was founded after Mustafa's release from prison in 1971; others indicate that Mustafa founded the group during his imprisonment (1965-1971). See, for example, Rif'at Sayyid Ahmad, *Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya fi Misr wa Iran* (Cairo: Sina, 1989), 103; and Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 75.

¹² The concept of *hijra* and the political thought of al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹³ Ramadan, "Fundamentalist Influence," 159.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

There are three factors that led to the emergence of al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra: historical, economic, and ideological/political. These three factors are similar to those that led to the emergence of the Khawarij in the seventh century. First, the historical factor: contemporary Islamic fundamentalism had begun to take shape and form at the turn of the last century. The subsequent Egyptian governments in the pre- and post 1952 Revolution periods rallied behind Islam to mobilize and use the masses for their own (temporal) goals - political, cultural, and social.¹⁵ As a result, contemporary Islamic fundamentalist movements rejected the Islamism of the secular governments, and this rejection was expressed in their speeches, demonstrations, press, call for *jihad*, and political violence.¹⁶ This antigovernment attitude is reminiscent of the views expressed by the Khawarij when they accused the Quraysh of using Islam to enforce their political influence over the Muslim community.¹⁷

Second, the economic factor: the economic liberalization that was pursued by the late Egyptian president Anwar Sadat (r.1970-1981) contributed to the rise of contemporary Islamic extremists. The idea of liberalizing the Egyptian economy did not appeal to the fundamentalists because it did not offer a solution to the deteriorating Egyptian economy on the one hand, and because its outlines

¹⁵ Ahmad, *Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya*, 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁷ Muhammad 'Ali Mukhtar, *Dirasat fi T'arikh al-Arab* (Cairo: Dar al-Nahda, 1976), 117.

were vague and general on the other. The Muslim extremists expressed their dissatisfaction with new laws that permitted the investment of Arab and foreign capital and the establishment of free zones in Egypt.¹⁸

Muslim extremists were dissatisfied with the new economic policy for several reasons: (1) it widened the gap between social classes, (2) it exposed the Egyptian people to the superiority of foreign products vis-à-vis the national products, thus leading to a crisis in self-confidence, (3) it led to the deterioration of the Islamic culture, and (4) it “corrupted” the Sadat family, especially his brothers and wife who benefited from the new policy.¹⁹ Similar economic factors provoked the Khawarij to rise in revolt against the Islamic caliphates. For instance, the Khawarij showed dissatisfaction with the emergence of a land owning class in Syria and with ‘Uthman when he distributed the wealth amongst his relatives.²⁰ The unequal distribution of wealth and the rise of a class society played a key role in the rise of the Khawarij as an opposition force.²¹

Third, the ideological/political factor: the concept of *hakimiyya* raised by Sayyid Qutb influenced al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra to reject the leadership and authority of men. Similarly, the Khawarij raised the concept of *hakimiyya* at Siffin and

¹⁸ Ahmad, *Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya*, 85.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁰ Mukhtar, *Dirasat fi Tarikh al-Arab*, 120.

²¹ Ali Jaffal, *Al-Khawarij*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), 24.

rejected the arbitration (*tahkim*) of men. Thus, the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra shared similar factors that led to their emergence.

Ironically, the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra recruited members from the deserts and rural areas, which were not subject to direct rule by the authorities. For example, the majority of the Khawarij “especially in the early days, belonged to the Bedouin element in the military camps of Kufa and Basra.”²² They were isolated in the remote villages and unaware of the events that were happening in the advancing Arab society in the cities. As a result, they became alienated and felt that they owed no loyalty to the rulers and *walis*.²³ Moreover, the freedom the Khawarij had enjoyed in the deserts when they were Bedouin Arabs provided them with security and self-rule. When these Bedouins moved to more advanced and government-controlled areas, they found their freedom and security curbed by the newly established government. Therefore, their rebellion expressed their rejection of authority, and their withdrawal from society meant a return to the desert freedom and security.

Similarly, the majority of al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra members were recent migrants to the big cities from small towns and rural communities in Upper Egypt,

²² G. Levi Della Vida, “Kharidjites,” in M. TH. Houstma, A.J. Wensinck, T.W. Arnold, W. Heffening and E. Levi-Provencal, eds., *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill, 1987).

²³ Jaffal, *Al-Khawarij*, 25.

representing middle-and lower-middle-class backgrounds.²⁴ Shukri Mustafa, their leader, was “born in an out-of-the-way region traditionally resistant to the penetration of the central state, in a forgotten corner of Egypt. . . .”²⁵ Muslim extremists in Egypt “exhibit a certain primitivism in view of their remoteness from urban centers and foreign influences. Thus, they become politically threatening only when their leadership decides to relocate in the capital city,”²⁶ as was the case with Mustafa. The latter came to Cairo from the village of Abu Khurus in Middle Egypt,²⁷ where the authority’s presence in the area was no more than episodic.²⁸ Thus, it seems that the Khawarij’s and al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra’s upbringings in delinquent, remote, and authority-free regions led to their alienation from and disloyalty to an authority they both deemed “un-Islamic.”

Despite their ideological backgrounds and their political agendas, the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra were regarded by some scholars as mere “criminals against civilization.” For instance, their withdrawal from society paired with their violent behavior prompted the Egyptian press to present them as “emotionally disturbed, criminally insane crackpots who ought to have been taken

²⁴ R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, 2nd ed., (New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1995), 90.

²⁵ Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 73.

²⁶ Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, 97.

²⁷ Sayyid Qutb’s village was also in Middle Egypt. The villages of this region have generally been known as Islamist breeding-grounds, (see, for example, Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 73).

²⁸ Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 73.

into custody long before.”²⁹ Similarly, the Khariji movement attracted individuals “whose purpose was to escape taxation, and to pillage in war against the Government.”³⁰

MAIN CONCEPTS

In addition to the above purported similarities in historical backgrounds, the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra shared three main ideological concepts: *takfir*, *hijra*, and *hakimiyya*. *Takfir al-mujtama'* (the act of denouncing a society as infidel) is “one of the most dangerous and extreme acts.”³¹ The act of *takfir* is a serious charge that has dire consequences on the person being denounced as *kafir*. For instance, Muslims who are accused of *kufur* (infidelity or unbelief) are likely to lose their lives and properties, be separated from their spouses and children, forced to cut all ties with other Muslims, and forbidden to inherit or leave a will. When a *kafir* dies, his or her body will not be washed according to Islamic rituals, nor will he or she be buried in a Muslim cemetery. Also, fellow Muslims do not pray for their souls.³²

²⁹ Jansen, *The Dual Nature*, 82.

³⁰ Elie Adib Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1956), 19.

³¹ 'Umar Abdullah Kamel, *Al-Khawarij al-Judud: Al-Mutatariffun* [The Neo-Khawarij: The Extremists] (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islamic, 1998), 131.

³² *Ibid.*, 132.

Takfir was first practiced by the Khawarij when they expressed their dissatisfaction with the ‘Ali’s agreement to arbitration at Siffin. After they seceded from ‘Ali’s camp, the Khawarij denounced ‘Ali, his followers, and all non-Khawarij Muslims as infidels (*kuffar*) and contended that they were the only true Muslims. The Khawarij, thus, cut all ties with the Muslim community and established their own communities after they lived in isolation, away from the “infidels.” Similarly, al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra denounced the Egyptian government and the Egyptian people as infidels and lived in isolation at the periphery of the Egyptian society. For instance, like the Khawarij who forbade their women to marry non-Khawarij,³³ al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra isolated themselves by confining marriage and family relations to the group. If a member married someone outside the group, that member was denounced as a *kafir*, and if one of a couple joined the group and the other partner refused to join, the marriage contract was declared void. Al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra also forbade employment with the state and enrollment in Egyptian schools.³⁴ Prayer and Islamic rituals were performed under the supervision of the group’s prayer leaders.³⁵

³³ Mukhtar, *Dirasat*, 151.

³⁴ Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 88.

³⁵ John O. Voll, “Fundamentalism in the Sunni Arab World: Egypt and the Sudan,” in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 382.

For al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra, not only the secular Egyptian society was denounced as *mujtama' kafir*, but so also were the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra came to assert that its members were the only true Muslims, hence, other Muslims who failed to join them were considered *kuffar*.³⁶ Similarly, the Khawarij denounced as *kuffar* not only non-Khawarij Muslims, but also those Khawarij who would not emigrate to their camp and join their rebellion. They held the killing of non-Khariji Muslims licit.³⁷ Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra held the view that Islam is represented in a combination of duties that must be performed by every Muslim. Failing to perform such duties or performing only part of them would make a person non-Muslim.³⁸ Mainstream Muslims contend that this belief has no base in Islam.³⁹ It is true that Islam is represented in a combination of duties, as mentioned above, but failing to perform all the required duties would not make a Muslim *kafir*.⁴⁰

In *Al-Firqah wa'l-Jama'at al-Islamiyya al-Mu'asira wa Judhuruha al-T'arikhiyya* [Contemporary Islamic Sects and Groups and their Historical Roots], Sa'd al-Din Sayyid Saleh discusses the concept of *takfir*. He writes that the

³⁶ Ahmad Jali, *Dirasah 'an al-Firqah fi Tarikh al-Muslimin: Al-Khawarij wa al-Shi'a* (Riyad: King Faisal Center for Islamic Research and Studies, 1988), 109.

³⁷ Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 56.

³⁸ Jali, *Dirasah 'an al-Firqah*, 112.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

concept of *takfir* is one of the most dangerous issues that was introduced by al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra. "It is a concept that has its roots in classical Islamic sects, such as the Khawarij and many of the Shi'a groups."⁴¹ Saleh adds that although the Khawarij denounced some prominent individuals, such as 'Uthman, the people of the Camel, 'Amr b. al-'As, and Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, as infidels, they fell short of denouncing the whole society as infidel. Saleh accuses al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra of adopting more extremist views than the Khawarij.⁴²

The Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra insisted that a Muslim who commits a grave sin (*murtakib al-kabira*) would be expelled from Islam and, therefore, would be denounced as a *murtadd* (apostate). Saleh indicates that al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra's views on this issue were prompted by their misunderstanding of the difference between Islam and belief, although the Qur'an and the Sunna differentiate between the two concepts. God said: "The bedouins say: 'We believe.' Say: 'You believe not but you only say, 'We have surrendered (in Islam),' for Faith has not yet entered your hearts.'"⁴³ So, "because the bedouins did not believe in the message of God, the Prophet denied them belief. But, because

⁴¹ Sa'd al-Din al-Sayyed Saleh, *Al-Firqah wa al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya al-Mu'asira wa Judhuruha al-Tarikhiyya* [Contemporary Islamic Sects and Groups and their Historical roots] (n.c.: Dar Uhud, 2000), 214.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Sura 49, verse 14.

they believed in God and his messenger, the Prophet proclaimed them Muslims.”⁴⁴ Thus, Saleh argues that al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra defied the Prophet's teachings by declaring all Muslims who failed to perform the duties of Islam unbelievers, although they uttered the *shahadatayn*. This act, according to Saleh, shows that al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra failed to understand or to differentiate between the concept of Islam (submission to one God) and the concept of *iman* (belief). Saleh concludes that the only other Muslims who misunderstood the concepts of Islam and belief beside al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra were the Khawarij and the Mu'tazila.⁴⁵

Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra established the differences between its members and the rest of the Muslims by claiming that a society cannot be branded Islamic until it proves that its individuals had performed the duties of Islam. They declared that Muslims who lived outside the abode of al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra had no proof that they performed the complete duties of Islam. Therefore, the group issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling) making all Muslims who lived outside al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra infidels.⁴⁶ Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra further indicated that the Qur'an and the *Shari'a* (Islamic laws) did not differentiate between *al-khata' fil iman* (erring in belief) and *al-khata' fil 'amal* (erring in deeds).⁴⁷ Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra came to realize that the implementation of Islam in real life cannot be achieved without *jihad*.

⁴⁴ Saleh, *Al-Firaq*, 218.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Jali, *Dirasah 'an al-Firaq*, 116.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

These extremists had expected to be assisted in achieving their dreams of a dignified Muslim life; instead, they found themselves in jails and torturing cells.⁴⁸

Similarly, the Khawarij pushed

their moral strictness to the point of refusing the title of believer to anyone who has committed a mortal sin and regarding him as a *murtadd* (apostate)...he who has become an infidel in this way can never re-enter the faith and should be killed for his apostasy along with his wives and children. Of course all non-Kharidji Muslims are regarded as apostates.⁴⁹

Saleh asserts that *kufr* and belief are two different concepts, and one can easily differentiate between them. Saleh writes:

What we understand and what the '*ulama*' understand is that Islam has its own concepts and the five pillars. Whoever believes in them is a Muslim, even if he or she utters only the shahadatayn [to bear witness that no God but God and that Muhammad is his messenger]. Also, what we know is that *kufr* has its concepts and signs. Whoever performs these signs is an unbeliever.⁵⁰

God said: "Verily, Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with Him (in worship), but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom He wills. . . ."⁵¹

"Say: 'O 'Ibadi (My slaves) who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: verily, Allah

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁹ Della Vida, "Kharidjites."

⁵⁰ Saleh, *Al-Firaq*, 219.

⁵¹ Sura 4, verse 48.

forgives all sins. . . .”⁵² Despite these Qur’anic verses, Saleh contends, al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra, like their ancestors the Khawarij, denounced Muslims who committed minor sins as unbelievers.⁵³

The second concept shared by the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra is *hijra* (emigration from such an “un-Islamic” society). For instance, the Khawarij performed the first *hijra* when they withdrew from ‘Ali’s army to a town called Harura’ (hence their name Khawarij or Haruriyya). Later on, the Khariji refugees of Kufa and Basra performed the second *hijra* when they carried their cause east into Iranian territory,⁵⁴ and then west to the Maghrib, where they established their own societies. Confined to their own society, the “Khawarij were intolerant of those who did not share in their beliefs, refusing to have any social intercourse with them. . . .”⁵⁵ Similarly, al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra withdrew from the Egyptian society and established their own. Both movements insisted on the need for *hijra* to “form a model, uncontaminated Muslim community on the analogy of Muhammad’s original *umma* at Medina . . . as [the Prophet] withdrew from pagan

⁵² Sura 39, verse 53.

⁵³ Saleh, *Al-Firaq*, 219.

⁵⁴ Madelung, *Religious Trends*, 56.

⁵⁵ Farah, *Islam*, 173.

Mecca when he undertook the *hijra*, until he has gathered enough like-minded Muslims about him and is strong enough to overcome it.”⁵⁶

Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra believed that *hijra* occurs when Muslims perform un-Islamic acts so “true” Muslims would be forced to leave the *jahiliyya* (Age of Ignorance). Here, al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra proclaim that all Muslims in Egyptian society are unbelievers, and their un-Islamic deeds forced members of al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra to leave the land of *jahiliyya* on the promise that they will return one day waging *jihad*. Thus, the formula, according to Saleh, is Belief + *Hijra* + *Jihad* = Reinstatement of Islamic society.⁵⁷ The *hijra* of al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra is identical to the *hijra* of the Khawarij, who were the first Islamic movement to perform *hijra* from ‘Ali’s army and the society as a whole.

The classical *hijra* of Muhammad and his followers in 622 meant the destruction of the *jahili* system and the establishment of the Islamic State on its ruins. Similarly, “the qualifications of the Egyptian society as *jahiliyya*, and the belief that this society had to be destroyed and a Muslim society erected on its ruins lay at the root of Shukri Mustafa’s thought.”⁵⁸ Shukri Mustafa and his al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra group divided the concept of *hijra* into two stages: the first is an internal *hijra* within Egypt, where followers would desert all places that were not

⁵⁶ Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The politics of Islam* (New York: Random House, 1982), 288-290.

⁵⁷ Saleh, *Al-Firaq*, 227.

⁵⁸ Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 72.

under their control. This way “retribution will descend upon them, and not fall upon us; mercy will descend upon us, and will not fall upon them. . . .”⁵⁹ The second *hijra* is an external one, to a foreign country where God alone is worshipped. Since most members of al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra made the external *hijra* to oil-rich Arab states, it became obvious that the purpose of that *hijra* was to generate money for the movement. Therefore, the dominant instinct of al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra

was one of escape - from a defiled world into the discipline of the movement. To avoid the pollution of society, the members thought it best (like the Prophet himself) to undertake a *hijra*, a migration, to an isolated plot of land. There they could create their own society and set their own laws.⁶⁰

The third concept shared by the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra is the rejection of religious and political authority of men over men, or *hakimiyyat al-bashar*. The term *hukm* appears more than a hundred times in the Qur’an⁶¹ and does not indicate political authority. It is either used to mean wisdom (*hikma*) and law as in the Qur’anic verse: “Those were the people to whom We gave the Book

⁵⁹ Ramadan, “Fundamentalist Influence in Egypt,” 158.

⁶⁰ Fouad Ajami, “In the Pharaoh’s Shadow: Religion and Authority in Egypt,” in *Islam in the Political Process*, ed. James P. Piscatori (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 28.

⁶¹ Muhammad Fu’ad ‘Abd al-Baqi, *al-Mu’jam al-Mufahras li Alfaz al-Qur’an al-Karim* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’rifa, 1994), 269-73.

and the Law and the Prophethood,”⁶² or to indicate judgment and reconciliation between people: “...and that when you judge among the people do so equitably.”⁶³ Also, the term *al-hakim* is not used in the Qur’an to mean the ruler, the king, or a political authority, but it refers to judges only.⁶⁴ Many scholars believe that the term *hakimiyya* was originated in the Khawarij at Siffin. The terms *al-hukm*, *al-tahkim*, and *al-hukuma* were used by the Khawarij to express judgment among people.⁶⁵ Thus, the Khawarij used the term *hukm* to settle political conflicts. It is important to mention that the Khawarij never used the term *hakimiyya*, although *hakimiyya* and *hukm* have similar meaning. The concept of *hakimiyya* acquired political connotations only in the last century when it was introduced in the writings of Abu al-A‘la Mawdudi (1903-1979) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966). Both thinkers stressed *hakimiyyat Allah* (the rule of God) rather than *hakimiyyat al-bashar* (the rule of man). For instance, Mawdudi used the term *takfir* to evaluate contemporary Muslim societies. He states that Muslim societies that do not apply *al-hakimiyya al-ilahiyya* (Divine Authority) are ignorant societies.⁶⁶

⁶² Al-An‘am, 89.

⁶³ An-Nisa, 58.

⁶⁴ ‘Abd al-Ghani ‘Imad, *Hakimiyyat Allah wa Sultan al-Faqih* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali‘a, 1997), 11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁶ Abu al-A‘la Mawdudi, *al-Mafhum al-Haqiqi li Kalimat al-Muslim* (Cairo: al-Salam, 1980), 7.

Hence, Mawdudi and Qutb gave the term a political meaning and associated it with authority.

In recent times, some Islamic groups have stressed the concept of *hakimiyya* in their political discourses. Like the Khawarij who held that there is no rule and authority except in God and that the Qur'an is the supreme guidance, al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra claimed that there is no science except in God and no knowledge except in the Qur'an.⁶⁷ The Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra argued that God is the absolute sovereign and men cannot play such a role. This argument was presented at the battle of Siffin by the Khawarij who objected to 'Ali's acceptance of the arbitration (*tahkim*) of men.⁶⁸ Similarly, al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra, perhaps inspired by the Khariji theory of *la hukma illa lillah* and by Mawdudi's⁶⁹ and Qutb's theories of *hakimiyya*,⁷⁰ directed their hostility against al-Azhar and argued that the '*ulama*' throughout the centuries had "interposed

⁶⁷ Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 79.

⁶⁸ During the battle of Siffin, Mu'awiya and 'Ali selected two men ('Amru bin al-'As and Abu Musa al-Ash'ari) to negotiate a peace accord. The Khawarij objected to men's judgment and claimed that the Muslims should refer their matters to God alone (hence their motto *la hukma illa lillah*).

⁶⁹ Mawdudi and the Khawarij based their concept of *takfir* on the absence of *al-hakimiyya al-ilahiyya* from Muslim societies.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fil Tariq* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1964); Qutb believes that the Islamic world lives in a state of ignorance because the concept of *hakimiyya* is misunderstood. He advocates the replacement of man's rule with God's authority.

themselves between God and the believers,”⁷¹ and issued “*fatwas* tailored to fit the views of the sovereign”⁷² It seems that al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra’s first major dissatisfaction with al-Azhar took place when the ‘*ulama*’ gave their approval to Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem. Prior to that historic visit, the ‘*ulama*’ issued a *fatwa* in May of 1979 stating that the ‘*ulama*’ of al-Azhar

believe that the Egyptian-Israeli treaty is in harmony with Islamic law. It was concluded from a position of strength after the battle of the *jihad* [holy struggle] and the victory realized by Egypt on the tenth of Ramadan of the year 1393 [A.H.]. . . .⁷³

For al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra, the role of the ‘*ulama*’, therefore, indicates that “the ‘worship of man by man’ and the ‘sovereignty of man over man,’ still prevailed, albeit in altered form.”⁷⁴ Hence, the ‘*ulama*’ were charged as *kuffar*. To these charges, Muslim writers and scholars⁷⁵ accused al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra of adopting the concept of denouncing religious scholars as infidels from the Khawarij. ‘Umar ‘Abdullah Kamil, a leading Islamic scholar, writes that the “Khawarij of this era” have justified the killing of the ‘*ulama*’. They issued legal injunctions (*fatwas*) permitting attacks and insults on the ‘*ulama*’. “The ‘*ulama*’

⁷¹ Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 79.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷³ Ajami, “In the Pharaoh’s Shadow,” 15.

⁷⁴ Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 72.

⁷⁵ ‘Umar ‘Abdullah Kamil, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and others.

have always been targeted by those who have sickness in their hearts. These are the extremists, the Khawarij of this age.”⁷⁶

The *fatwas* against the ‘*ulama*’ were immediately answered by members of al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra, who kidnapped and killed Shaykh Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabi, a former minister of *waqfs* and a symbol of official Islam. In his trial in November 1977, the judge asked Shukri Mustafa whether al-Dhahabi was a Muslim or a *kafir*. Shukri Mustafa replied that he was a *kafir*. The judge ended the trial with no further questions. Shukri Mustafa was sentenced to die. Citing the Qur’an (Sura II, ‘The Cow’ verses 216 or 232) that *God knows and you know not*,⁷⁷ Shukri Mustafa argued that whatever came after the Qur’an and the *hadith* or *Sunna* (the utterances and deeds of Muhammad) are invalid, including the four *Sunni* schools of law and the *ijtihad* (legal opinion) of the *ulama*.⁷⁸ In his testimony, Shukri Mustafa told the court: “Islam has been in decline ever since men have ceased to draw their lessons directly from the Qur’an and the Sunna, and have instead followed the tradition of other men, those who call themselves *imams*.”⁷⁹

For the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa’l-Hijra, the terms *la hukma illa lillah* and *al-hakimiyya* are synonymous with ultimate sovereignty. The concept, which

⁷⁶ Kamil, *Al-Khawarij*, 134.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

originated with the Khawarij, became the slogan of modern extremists. *Al-hakimiyya* appeared in the writings of Sayyid Qutb, who said that the meaning of the term is an expression of a strong rejection to and a revolution against human sovereignty of any shape, be it an *imam*, *amir*, *ra'is* or *hakim*.⁸⁰ "There is no governance except for God, no legislation but from God, no sovereignty of one over the other because all sovereignty belongs to God."⁸¹

Al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra not only accepted the concepts of *al-hakimiyya*, but also developed it to express more extremist views than those seen in the Khawarij and Qutb. For instance, what the Khawarij and Qutb meant by their concept of *hakimiyya* was the application of the Qur'an, the tradition, and the Shari'a in the society. In fact, this was not the case with al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra who had doubts about the basic tenets of Islam. According to Johannes J.G. Jansen:

Shukri [Mustafa] rejected Egyptian society in its entirety. He dismissed Islamic law in its accepted and traditional form, had doubts about the reliability of the transmission of the Koran, did not accept the authority of the Muslim professional men of religion. . . . Whereas mainstream Islamic fundamentalism wants to apply the Shari'a whatever the cost, the Shukri movement wanted to do away with it.⁸²

With the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalists, more writers seem to compare or correlate the latter to the Khawarij. Fazlur Rahman and Malise

⁸⁰ Qutb, *Ma'alim*, 28.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸² Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 89.

Ruthven show the similarities between the two groups.⁸³ For instance, Rahman acknowledges the influence of the Khariji political theory on modern fundamentalists and argues that the latter adopted such theories because they saw in them political goals that can be achieved. In Rahman's own words:

. . . Something of their radical spirit (although not overt influence) has been relived not only in certain outstanding individuals in medieval Islam but in several relatively recent movements inspired by radical idealism such as the Wahhabis in the 12th/18th century, and, in a more moderate spirit and more recently the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab Middle East.⁸⁴

Ruthven also argues that the Khawarij were a radical political movement that aimed to change the political structure of the existing system. In Ruthven's point of view, this description also applies to the Muslim Brotherhood. Ruthven writes:

In their first secessionist movement . . . the Kharijis had created a tradition. . . of seeking to realize the Islamic vision through deliberate political action. . . [Their] attitude of treating Muslim sinners as infidels closely resembles that of modern fundamentalist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸⁵

Although early and modern extremists shared radical views, the Khawarij catered to people of different beliefs and backgrounds, whereas Al-Takfir wa'l-

⁸³ Rahman, *Islam*, 170; Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).185.

⁸⁴ Rahman, *Islam*, 170.

⁸⁵ Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, 185.

Hijra in addition to their rejection of the ideologies around them, also rejected “Islam as we know it, with the exception of the Koran.”⁸⁶

Religious extremism - classical and modern, i.e., the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra - may be attributed to ignorance of the faith, as 'Umar Kamil argues. Kamil states that a large number of Muslims interpret the Qur'an blindly without understanding the meaning of the text. Kamil asserts that the calamities that Islam faces today are the distortion of genuine Islamic thought. These calamities are caused by a small group of people who read Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, but, unfortunately, misunderstood their works.⁸⁷ Like modern extremists, Kamil contends, the Khawarij were closed-minded people whose jurisprudence (*fiqh*) was superficial, and who merely understood the Qur'an. For this reason they were described as those “who killed the Muslims and practiced polytheism.”⁸⁸

Moreover, Kamil accuses the Khawarij and modern extremists of following Qur'anic verses that are not entirely clear (*'ittiba' al-Mutashabihat*), and abandoning verses that are entirely clear (*tark al-Muhakamat*). God said: “So as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation (from the truth) they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking *al-Fitna* (polytheism and trials), and

⁸⁶ Jansen, *The Dual Nature*, 80.

⁸⁷ Kamil, *al-Khawarij al-Judud*, 147.

⁸⁸ Al-Bukhari, 3344, Muslim 143/1064.

seeking for its hidden meanings.”⁸⁹ Kamil writes that the Khawarij followed Qur’anic verses that are not entirely clear and ignored verses that are entirely clear. This led the Khawarij to deviate from the truth, i.e., to denounce non-Khariji Muslims as infidels. Like the Khawarij who followed this extremist path, according to Kamil, modern day “preachers of *takfir*” (*du‘at al-takfir*) have deviated by following what is not entirely clear and ignoring what is entirely clear.⁹⁰ Modern day extremists have denounced individuals and groups as *kuffar* because of their “superficial understanding” of the Qur’an, and their hasty judgement of other Muslims’ actions.⁹¹

Kamil continues to say that the Khawarij and modern day extremists also share weaknesses in their ability to understand the true message of Islam. This misunderstanding of Islamic conceptions has had negative effects on others, especially when sensitive issues and concepts like belief, infidelity, polytheism, innovation, hypocrisy, and ignorance are involved. Weakness in understanding Islam also stems from learning religious teachings from books rather than from the ‘*ulama*’. Muslims are better enlightened if they learn their faith from the ‘*ulama*’, Kamil writes. He also states that learning Islam from books and the media has distorted the true message of Islam, led to ideological and educational chaos, and

⁸⁹ Sura 3, verse 7.

⁹⁰ Kamil, *al-Khawarij al-Judud*, 147.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

paved the way for the emergence of extremist thought in Islam.⁹² Kamil concludes that the Khariji movement has reemerged anew in Islamic history although in different forms, and that modern extremists have carried Khariji thought.⁹³

Sociologists across the Arab and Islamic world have written about the circumstances that led to the emergence of religio-political extremist movements. They all agree that harsh climate and geographical circumstances played a key role in shaping and developing extremist thought in Islam. Mild and fertile nature, however, produced a moderate Islamic thought. On this phenomenon, the leading Islamic sociologist Mahmud Isma'il argues that religious extremism penetrated the Islamic society in early Islam, and the emergence of these sects reflected a social conflict.⁹⁴

Isma'il adds that moderation and extremism were the product of geographical factors. They were also shaped by historical and social developments. Therefore, the interpretation of the religious text varied to serve the goals of the parties in conflict. This environment formed a "historical culture" that played a key role in shaping political thinking since Islam began to take shape in the seventh century. Geographical factors are central to the sociology of religion. It is not coincidental that societies with mild terrain, rivers, plains, and

⁹² *Ibid.*, 150.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 331.

⁹⁴ Mahmud Isma'il, "Al-Judhur al-Tarikhiyya lil Tatarruf al-Dini" [The Historical roots of Religious Extremism], *Al-Hilal* (June 1987): 59-60.

valleys have produced moderate, tolerant, and productive thinking, whereas naturally closed societies with mountains and a harsh environment produced radical thoughts, which were receptive for heresies and false prophecies. For instance, societies in mountainous regions and remote areas in Syria, India, and northwest Africa (*atarif al-Maghreb al-Aqsa*) were more receptive to religious extremism, and have preserved it until today.⁹⁵

Isma'il refutes the claims that Egypt has been a breeding ground for extremist groups with Khariji roots. He contends that due to Egypt's fertile land and mild climate, all religions, since ancient times, have advocated tolerance and moderation. For this reason, Isma'il finds it hard for extremist groups like the Khawarij to spread their roots in Egyptian society. He adds that Egypt in the past rejected religious extremism. This explains why the Khawarij and the Shi'a failed to spread their religio-political agendas in Egypt. Muslims in Egypt have always preserved their moderation vis-a-vis extremism. Although Egypt was the center of the Fatimid-Isma'ili dynasty, its people never adopted this faith.⁹⁶ Al-Azhar has remained an "Islamic university" for all Muslims from the east and the west, and has never been influenced by extremist thought.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Isma'il, however, concedes that religious extremism has penetrated the moderate Egyptian society only in the twentieth century in the form of violent and terrorist attacks committed by the Muslim Brotherhood and other more extremist groups. Isma'il sees the roots of these extremists in the Khawarij themselves whose cultural history seems to be alive and present in a place that rejected them centuries ago. Isma'il asserts that modern day extremists have been struggling to establish "the second state of God" on the model of the first state. For the extremists, this utopia could be achieved only through *jihad*. The concept of *jihad* for these groups does not distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims who are equally responsible for what they describe as the *jahiliyya* of the twentieth century. Isma'il concludes that the radical thinking of modern Islamic extremists has made them ignorant of the basic tenets of Islam. This ignorance will likely lead to the inevitable annihilation of modern day extremists just as ignorance of the faith led to the destruction of their ancestors, the Khawarij.⁹⁸

CONCLUSION

The Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra had similar ideological backgrounds that helped develop their thought and radicalized their social and political behavior. They both believed in God's governance (*hakimiyyat Allah*) and

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

objected to men's authority. Men's interference between God and Muslims provoked both the Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra to withdraw from a society they called *jahiliyya* and to pursue an extremist and violent approach to achieve their objectives in establishing an "Islamic" state. In other words, they both rejected the sovereignty of men over men and claimed that Muslims must be ruled directly from God, through the words of the holy Qur'an. They argued that the '*ulama*' have ruled over Muslims by interpreting the Qur'an and practicing *ijtihad*. They also claimed that the Qur'an needs no interpretation, and that no Muslim should be allowed to practice *ijtihad*. The Khawarij and al-Takfir wa'l-Hijra shared two additional ideological concepts: *takfir* and *hijra*. Both groups denounced other Muslims as infidels and established their own societies. They performed the *hijra* to dissociate themselves from the infidels, with a plan to return to reclaim society and establish an Islamic State.

Conclusion

With the rise of modern Islamic fundamentalism, modern scholarship has given more attention to the study of the Khawarij in both Muslim and Western literature. For instance, the Khawarij have become a more important element in the modernist/romantic interpretation of the Islamic heritage (*turath*), and their characteristic image has been increasingly mentioned in the modern Islamist debate. This study has discussed the vast modern literature on the Khawarij, and has argued that the socio-political history of the movement has been used to promote and reflect modern ideologies and religious beliefs.

Historians have demonstrated that in their interpretations of the Khawarij, they reinvented history rather than discussed their topic. They narrated a new story based on classical facts. Here, the authors try to present the facts that best suited their psychological visions. Some scholars wrote the Khariji history based only on historical facts. These scholars made the past their main subject of study in that they focused on the events, at what period of time the events happened, and who the major players or central figures were in these events. Other historians tackled the issue of the Khawarij from a philosophical point of view. These scholars utilized and employed their ideologies to create a relationship between history and their beliefs. In other words, they thought of history as an ideological

innovation. Scholars who possess this vision try to focus on the positive side when discussing their subject and try to find philosophical roots to their arguments.

The Khawarij serve as a symbol for many Muslims across the Arab and Islamic World. For instance, in the *turath*, where the Khawarij are represented as ideal Muslims, their positive image prevails, especially in the scholarly literature and school textbooks. This image is also used as an ideal to promote ideologies that may be considered alien to Islam, e.g. nationalism and Marxism.

The positive image of the Khawarij seems to gain ground in the minds of Arab/Muslim intellectuals whose aim was to promote a western-type liberal modernism based on an early Islamic model. For these writers, the Khawarij represented this model. In the *turath*, the Khawarij are portrayed as liberal in their theory of the caliphate, egalitarian in their attitude towards the poor, nationalists in their behavior towards people of other races, tolerant in their treatment of women, and, most importantly, pious Muslims. Although these qualities may sound western, the *turath* writers have shown that they are Islamic in nature and that early Muslims accepted them. It is important to differentiate between the Khawarij as a military force, which posed a threat to the regime, and the Khawarij as a philosophical movement. Arab/Muslim intellectuals have capitalized on and promoted the latter.

On the other hand, Sunni Muslims in general and the ‘ulama’ in particular have propagated a negative image of the Khawarij. The rise of Islamic extremism in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East sent shock waves across the Arab and Muslim world. Muslim extremism has been a threat to moderate regimes in the region, especially in Egypt. The ‘ulama’ who are supported by the Egyptian government felt obliged to protect the regime by suppressing modern extremism. Labeling these extremists as Khawarij was enough to portray them as deviant, psychologically unstable, and ignorant of the true tenets of the faith. These two images of the Khawarij have been debated and propagated by liberal and traditional Muslims who seem to advocate completely opposite agendas.

The Khawarij represent a resurgence of the past in the present. The first century of Islam is the locus of historical significance. This period is largely represented in history books across the Arab and Islamic world. The Khawarij have been marginalized in the modern Arab/Muslim historiography, although they played an important role in the early period and are part of the *turath*. Arab-Muslim historians advance a conception based on an idealization that everything in the first century of Islam was sacred and utopian. This conception of the sacred and utopian past becomes less sacred and utopian when the Khawarij make their appearance in the *turath* as a deviant group. For this reason, when writing about the past and the *turath*, Arab/Muslim historians try to avoid discussing the

Khawarij. But, when they are discussed, although briefly, their positive image prevails.

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