

Progressive Islam in Practice

Takfir Series: Part II

The Roots of Takfir

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The Roots of Takfir

- The phrase *takfir* dates back to the 7th century CE with the establishment of the Kharijites who *takfired* and subsequently killed the caliph Ali after he agreed to arbitration with his rival during the first Islamic Civil War.
- The Kharijites declared both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to be *takfir*, and therefore worthy of death.
- Using the justification of *takfir*, the Kharijites often attacked Muslim civilians during wartime.
- In the 14th century, the scholar Ibn Taymiyyah became one the first scholars to declare *takfir* against Muslim leaders if they did not mandate and enforce Shari'a law, and to call for their killing.
- Ibn Taymiyyah specifically declared Shi'a Muslims, Sufis, Mu'tazila, and the Tartars to be *takfir*.

The Roots of Takfir Cont.

- In the late 18th century, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab used the fatwas of Ibn Taymiyyah to promote his interpretation of Islam, declaring that a number of self-proclaimed Muslims, including everyone belonging to Sufi and Shi'a sects, were actually unbelievers.
- Wahhab also alleged that a number of common Islamic practices were also shirk (polytheism) and bid'a (innovation of a religion), including the swearing by the names of the Prophet, Shi'a Imams or saints.
- These teachings, now known as Wahhabism, were disseminated across the Muslim world in the later 20th century with the help of billions of dollars of financing from Saudi Arabia, whose government is made up of his descendants.

The History of Takfir I

A Timeline

7TH CE

The Khawarij break off their support of the caliph Ali and eventually *takfir* and kill him.

9TH CE

During the Abbasid Caliphate, enemies of the Mu'tazilites, the ruling class at the time, were considered *takfir* and punished.

10TH CE

The celebrated Sufi poet & teacher, Mansur al-Hallaj was accused of apostasy and killed.

12TH CE

Al-Ghazali, the famous Persian theologian, preached against excessive *takfir*, which he found too common among his fellow theologians.

12TH CE

Al-Qadi Ijad, becomes the first scholar to call for death penalty of those accused of *kafir*.

The History of Takfir II

A Timeline

13TH CE

During the Mamluk Sultanate more than 30 people accused of *takfir* were executed, including Sufis, Shi'as, Rafidis, and Christian reverts.

14TH CE

Ibn Taymiyyah, a Sunni scholar *takfired* the Mongols, who attacked the Middle East, for continuing to follow their traditional *Yasa* law after converting to Islam.

18TH CE

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab the founder of the Wahhabi movement *takfired* swaths of Muslims as nonbelievers for "*kufr* practices".

19TH CE


An Armenian teen was accused of *takfir* after he reverted to Christianity in the Ottoman Empire and was subsequently beheaded.

20TH CE

In Afghanistan, Muslims who converted from Sunni Islam to Ahmadiyyah were stoned to death.

The History of Takfir III

A Timeline

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- 1964**
A prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb, embraced Ibn Taymiyyah's fatwa calling Muslims who did not practice Shari'a law apostates.
 - 1974**
Pakistan amended its Constitution to *takfir* Ahmadiyya, stating they are not Muslims.
 - 1981**
Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat was assassinated by Tanzim al Jihad, who accused him of *takfir* because he didn't rule according to Shari'a law.
 - 1989**
The famous British novelist, Salman Rushdie was *takfired* by Ayatollah Khomeini in a fatwa, which called for his execution.
 - 2011**
The new Constitution of Tunisia criminalized *takfir* by banning fatwas that promoted the practice.

Kharijites

- An Islamic sect considered to be the original 'arch-*takfiris*' in Islamic history.
- Originally followers of the caliph Ali, they defected from him after he agreed to arbitration with a challenger.
- They claimed that this judgement belonged to God alone and that challengers to God's judgement should be fought.
- In 661 CE, the Kharijites assassinated Ali and continued their rebellion well into the Umayyad Caliphate.
- They believed that any Muslim who committed a grave sin was *kafir* and worthy of death unless they repented.
- Their interpretation of *kafir* and *kufr*, differed from the mainstream interpretation of the two words, as it assumed that rather than an unbeliever or non-Muslim, the individual who bore the title was actually a pseudo Muslim who rejected the true teachings of Islam.
- This interpretation came to be known as *takfir*, the phrase we know today, used to accuse a fellow Muslim of being an apostate.

Ibn Taymiyyah

- A 14th century scholar from the Mamluk Sultanate (spanning modern day Egypt & Syria), Ibn Taymiyyah was a Sunni theologian who issued fatwas calling a number of minority groups *takfir*.
- Included in the groups he *takfired* are Shi'a Muslims, Sufis, the Mongols, and the Mu'tazi.
- He issued a fatwa calling for Muslims to combat other Muslims who place themselves outside of Shari'a, referring to the Mongols, who were invading the Middle East.
- This fatwa was used to justify the jihad against the Mongols, under the justification that they were apostates, not true Muslims, because they abided by *Yasa* law rather than Shari'a law and therefore violence against them was obligatory.
- His teachings, including the reliance on *takfir* to justify oppression and violence by othering groups, remain deeply popular today within the ultra radical, conservative Salafi-Jihadist movement, and individuals.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab

- Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was an 18th century scholar who lived and taught in present day Saudi Arabi.
- His teachings and philosophies, based on the ultra conservative principles of Ibn Taymiyya, are the basis of the modern day Wahhabi movement.
- Along with his followers, he made serious allegations of *kufr* practices against the Muslim community, claiming that a significant number of Muslims were apostates.
- Among the practices he criticized were a belief in omens and auspicious and inauspicious days, reverence of Muslim saints, reverence of shrines and tombs of Muslim saints, and attribution to Prophets.
- Upon the completion of a religious-political pact with the Saud dynasty, his power was sealed and to this day, the government of Saudi Arabia, made up of his descendants, continues to spread his ultra conservative and often violent teachings across the globe, which included a mass *takfir* of his fellow Muslims.

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