

Progressive Islam in Practice

Takfir Series: Part V

Takfir Case Studies Part II

Countries & Individuals

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Algeria

- During the Algerian Civil War, the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA) issued a manifesto claiming that the majority of Algerians had forsaken their religion after they refused to join the ranks of GIA.
- Following this declaration, in 1997, at the start of the year, and the month of Ramadan, massacres targeting civilians began across the country.
- The massacres continued well into 1997, culminating in August and September.
- The massacres, which saw pregnant women and children slaughtered, were declared by the GIA to be justified because the civilians had not joined the GIA following the manifesto and were therefore *kafir*.

Al-Hallaj

- Mansour Hallaj was a 9th century Sufi mystic, poet, and teacher.
- As a teacher, he encouraged individuals to find God within their souls and when he claimed "I Am the Truth" people interpreted this as his claim to divinity, which qualified as blasphemy.
- Caught in between the power struggles of the court at the time, al-Hallaj fled Baghdad when the Shi'i chief minister began to target Sunni sects.
- Eventually he was captured and brought back to Baghdad where he was imprisoned for 9 years on charges of blasphemy and apostasy.
- After 9 years in prison, he was subject to a public torture and execution before being burned and thrown into the Tigris River.

Anwar El Sadat

- President of Egypt from 1970 to 1981, Anwar Sadat was assassinated during an annual victory parade in October of 1981.
- After his death, a document was found by police stating that Sadat was assassinated because he and his government did not abide by Shari'a law.
- The document also condemned governments of other Muslim majority countries for their failure to rule according to Shari'a.
- The author of the document, Muhammad abd-al-Salam Faraj, the leader of the Cairo based terrorist group al-Jihad, cited the fatwa issued centuries earlier by Ibn Taymiyyah *takfiring* those who place themselves outside of Shari'a and calling for violence towards them as justification for the murder.

Egypt

- In 1971, Jama'at al Muslimin, also known as Takfir wal-Hijra, was founded by Shukri Mustafa, a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood.
- The movement embraced the most extreme and violent parts of the Salafist jihad movement.
- At the height of their movement, they declared the President, Anwar Sadat, to be *kafir* and accused all of Egyptian society to be *kafir*, as they were not fighting Sadat and his government.
- The government cracked down on the group in 1977, after the kidnapping and murder of an Islamic scholar and politician but the group reorganized and individuals with ties to the group were later linked to President Sadat's assassination in 1981.

Nasr Abu Zayd

- Nasr Abu Zayd was an Egyptian academic and liberal theologian.
- As an academic and theologian, he argued for the interpretation of the Qur'an as a cultural and historical text, rather than a religious text.
- As a result of this work, conservative Muslim scholars issued a lawsuit against him and he was subsequently declared an apostate by an Egyptian court.
- In that same court decision, he was forced to divorce his wife, as the court claimed a Muslim woman could not be married to an apostate.
- As a result of the outrage directed at him during the public trial, he and his wife were forced to flee Egypt and live in exile.

Nigeria

- Boko Haram follows the extreme Wahabism ideology, which denounces the followers of other forms of Islam as infidels.
- Throughout the country, the terrorist group has declared minority Sunni and Shi'a sects to be *kafir*.
- The group also declared mainstream Sunni Muslims, who refused to join their ranks, as *kafir*.
- The group used *takfir* to justify the killing of fellow Muslims, including government officials, women, children, and religious leaders.
- In 2016, the leader at the time, Abubakr Shekau declared that once a woman begins to engage in a democratic movement, regardless of her devotion to Islam, including prayer and fasting, she can be captured and killed.

Salman Rushdie

- In 1988, Salman Rushdie, a British-Indian author, published his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*.
- The novel sparked outrage across the Muslim world because of its content and as a result he received a number of death threats, accusing him of apostasy.
- The book was banned in a number of Muslim countries and threats were made to bookstores that sold the book in western countries.
- Just months after publication, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa, accusing Rushdie of apostasy and calling for the death of both the author and his publishers, with a bounty of 6 million dollars.
- As a result of the fatwa, he was forced into hiding for 9 years.

Syria

- During the Syrian Civil War, the different combatant groups, all from various sects of Islam, often cast enemy groups as *kafirs*, calling one another infidels and non-Muslims in an attempt to dehumanize their enemies and justify the bloodshed and killing of their fellow Muslims.
- The Shi'a Hizbollah referred to their Shi'a opposition and Sunni groups as *takfiri*.
- A well known Sunni cleric, Yusuf al-Qaradawi declared Nusayris bigger infidels than Jews or Christians at a conference that called for jihad in Syria.
- Video clips of Shi'a terrorists executing rebels claimed that they were "performing their *taklif* (responsibility), not seeking personal vengeance".

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