

‘SECEDERS’ AND ‘POSTPONERS’?

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ‘KHAWARIJ’ AND ‘MURJI’ LABELS
IN POLEMICAL DEBATES BETWEEN QUIETIST AND
JIHADI-SALAFIS¹

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It is not uncommon for groups engaging in contentious debates to label their opponents in ways that do not reflect their adversaries’ true beliefs. Such labels have the purpose of portraying groups as unjust, wrong and even evil in a single term, preferably one that resonates with the emotions and values of the audience one tries to influence. In this way, the users of such labels not only attempt to delegitimise their opponents but also try to strengthen their own case.

One group of people that engages in such labelling of its opponents is Salafis. Western scholars have divided Salafis into three different branches: quietists or purists, who shun political action but focus on missionary activities (*da’wa*) and education (*tarbiya*); Salafi Islamists or ‘politicos’, who do engage in political debate and action; and jihadis, who believe in the use

¹ I would like to thank Roel Meijer and Harald Motzki for their useful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

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of violence to bring about what they see as truly Islamic rule in Muslim countries.² Although this division can be criticised,³ it is a useful point of departure. This chapter contextualises jihadi ideology by analysing the discourse of jihadi-Salafi scholars (*‘ulama*) in the context of their polemical debates with their quietist counterparts and, more specifically, the labels they attach to one another, namely ‘neo-Khawarij’ and ‘neo-Murji’a’, both referring to early Islamic trends.

The comparison between the Khawarij and radical Muslims has been explored before but mostly in light of the shared tendency towards violence and rebellion.⁴ The most important issue in quietist Salafi scholarly writings comparing modern radicals with the Khawarij—their allegedly shared concepts of faith (*iman*) and unbelief (*kufir*)—is, however, virtually absent in the literature.⁵ Moreover, academic analyses of jihadi-Salafis’ use of the label of ‘Murji’a’ for quietists are, to my knowledge at least, unavailable. This chapter will therefore focus on the accusations between quietist and jihadi-Salafi *‘ulama* pertaining to the Khariji and Murji’i perceptions of faith and unbelief.

As we will see, these debates are not just about religious issues but also involve (or are perhaps even primarily about) Salafi ties to the state and its politics. As such, these debates could be seen as attempts to find religious justifications for Salafis’ different positions in their political environments. While these debates take place between and focus on religious scholars and therefore form no direct justification for acts of terrorism against states in either the Muslim world or the West, they are nevertheless important in radicalisation processes since they are instrumental in discussing and shaping Salafi attitudes towards the state

² Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 248–9; Quintan Wiktorowicz, ‘Anatomy of the Salafi Movement’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 29 no. 3 (2006), pp. 207–8.

³ Joas Wagemakers, ‘A Purist Jihadi-Salafi: The Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 36 no. 2 (2009), pp. 283–96.

⁴ Johannes J.G. Jansen, ‘The Early Islamic Movement of the Kharidjites and Modern Moslem Extremism: Similarities and Differences’, *Orient: Deutsche Zeitschrift für den modernen Orient* 27, no. 1, (1986), pp. 132–5; Jeffrey T. Kenney, *Muslim Rebels: Kharijites and the Politics of Extremism in Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 89–177; Hussam S. Timani, *Modern Intellectual Readings of the Kharijites* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), pp. 99–114.

⁵ Exceptions, which merely refer to it very briefly, are Jansen, ‘The Early Islamic Movement’, p. 133; Timani, *Modern Intellectual Readings of the Kharijites*, p. 104.

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and the society in which they live. This, in turn, may possibly have tremendous impact on radical Muslims’ choices about where to direct their violence. Since jihadi-Salafis, unlike the subservient quietists, are against accepting state policies, the states themselves also have a stake in these debates and are sometimes involved in them, actively promoting the idea that radical Muslims are like the Khawarij—a label they refuse to be associated with—in order to discredit them.⁶ This may have the unintended effect, however, of further emphasising the ‘infidel’ nature of the state itself, thereby confirming jihadi-Salafis’ beliefs.⁷ This, together with the results of the analysis we will turn to now, implies that governments that see quietists as allies against terrorism and want to engage in these debates as part of their counter-radicalisation efforts do so at their peril and are advised to tread softly, if at all.⁸

The historical Khawarij

The origins of the Khawarij can be traced to the Battle of Siffin (657 AD) between the fourth caliph, ‘Ali Bin Abi Talib (r. 656-61), and the man who succeeded him, Mu‘awiya Bin Abi Sufyan (r. 661–80). When the two men and their armies met, the troops of Mu‘awiya—outnumbered and almost certain of defeat—called on ‘Ali and his men to accept arbitration between the two parties. ‘Ali accepted this, but his decision was rejected by some of his supporters who believed that Mu‘awiya’s challenge to ‘Ali, who was the only rightful caliph in their eyes, should be seen as an affront to God’s order. This caused these people to secede from his camp, and they subsequently became known

⁶ For an example of this in Egypt, see Kenney, *Muslim Rebels*. Recent research in the Netherlands has also shown that Dutch quietist Salafis overwhelmingly reject violence, not just for practical but also for ideological reasons, and are even involved in trying to track down radical Salafis. See Ineke Roex, Sjef van Stiphout & Jean Tillie, *Salafisme in Nederland: Aard, Omvang en Dreiging* (Amsterdam: Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies & the Central Bureau for Statistics, 2010), p. 295.

⁷ See, for example, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Al-Risala al-thalathiniyya fi l-tahdbir min al-ghuluw fi l-takfir* available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>] (1998/1999), p. 3. This internet source and all others mentioned were still available when accessed on 14 December 2009, unless otherwise indicated.

⁸ In London, quietist Salafis have also been used on a very small scale in that city’s counterterrorism efforts: see Robert Lambert, ‘Empowering Salafis and Islamists against al-Qaeda: A London Counterterrorism Case Study’, *Political Science and Politics*, vol. 41 no. 1 (2008), pp. 31–5.

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as Khawarij (seceders, from *kharaja*: to secede, to move out)⁹, a name they also applied to themselves.¹⁰

Beliefs of the Khawarij

This chapter is not the place to deal extensively with the beliefs of the Khawarij, but two aspects of the group's ideas must be discussed since they are relevant to the quietist accusations we will turn to later. The first of these is the Khawarij's belief that revolt against Muslim rulers was allowed if they were deemed insufficiently pious. When 'Ali accepted arbitration with Mu'awiya, the people later known as Khawarij reportedly shouted 'judgement is God's alone' (*la hukm illa li-llah*). In the context of that event, this referred to their belief that only God had the authority to arbitrate, not human beings, and that 'Ali should not have accepted Mu'awiya's offer.¹¹ The slogan later came to represent their broader view that all judgements and rulings should be left to God, thus applying Qur'anic rulings so strictly that they expelled Muslims guilty of major sins from their community and fought them.¹² Because they believed sinful Muslims to be unbelievers (*kuffar*, singular: *kafir*), they directly applied passages from the Qur'an pertaining to jihad against non-Muslims to those of their co-religionists who were less than perfectly pious.¹³ That their application of jihad was not limited to ordinary people but also included fighting the caliph if necessary¹⁴ became clear when they fought 'Ali and eventually assassinated him in 661.¹⁵

⁹ Timani, *Modern Intellectual Readings of the Kharijites*, pp. 12–20; Kenney, *Muslim Rebels*, pp. 21–3; Elie Adib Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), pp. 15–18. See also K.H. Pampus, *Über die Rolle der Harigiya im frühen Islam* (Wiesbaden: Verlag Otto Harrassowitz, 1980), pp. 3–5.

¹⁰ They also used different names, however. See Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij*, pp. 25–6.

¹¹ Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Iman and Islam* (Yokohama: Yurindo Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 5–6.

¹² William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh & Chicago: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), pp. 13–15; *idem*, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London: Luzac & Co., 1948), p. 25.

¹³ Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 30–1.

¹⁴ Kenney, *Muslim Rebels*, p. 33.

¹⁵ Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij*, pp. 17–18.

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The second—and for this chapter more important—tenet of the Khawarij's ideology is their conception of faith and unbelief. The question of what exactly constitutes faith and when a Muslim stops being a believer was answered differently by early Islamic scholars. One of the main issues in this debate was whether deeds or works (*a'mal*, singular: *'amal*) were part of faith or not. Some, including the eponymous 'founder' of the Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence, Abu Hanifa (d. 767), believed they were not. As a result, he equated faith with belief in the heart and confession of this belief with the tongue.¹⁶ Others, including the Mu'tazilites, the Hanbalites and the scholar al-Ash'ari (873/874–935), believed that deeds were an integral part of faith and that *iman* was not complete without them.¹⁷ These disputes led to, among other views, what may be called the 'orthodox' Sunni point of view—and one that seems to be held by almost all Salafis—that faith consists of the assent of faith in the heart (*tasdiq bi-l-qalb*), the verbal confirmation of this faith with the tongue (*iqrar bi-l-lisan*) and corresponding acts with the limbs (*a'mal bi-l-jawarih*).¹⁸ The Khawarij also believe that faith consisted of these three elements, although they place more emphasis on acts than Sunni Islam does.¹⁹

The discussion of what constitutes faith is obviously relevant for determining its opposite: unbelief. If deeds, acts or works are not part of faith, sinful acts also cannot by themselves undo that faith. If, on the other hand, they are part of *iman*, sinful acts hurt or even annul a Muslim's faith. Sunni scholars have distinguished major sins (*kaba'ir*, singular: *kabira*) from other, lesser sins. The former group included acts such as killing one's own child, adultery and—

¹⁶ Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 132–4; A.J. Wansinck, *The Muslim Creed—Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1965), pp. 103 and 125–6. Because Abu Hanifa's views were so close to those of the Murji'a, who are dealt with below, he is often described as one of them. See Joseph van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), pp. 534–44; Wilferd Madelung, 'The Early Murji'a in Khurasan and Transoxania and the Spread of Hanafism', *Der Islam*, vol. 59 (1982), p. 36.

¹⁷ Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 134–5. Al-Ash'ari's followers, however, seem to have deviated from his beliefs by stating that faith did not include acts. See *ibid.*, pp. 135–6.

¹⁸ Wilferd Madelung, 'Early Sunni Doctrine Concerning Faith as Reflected in the *Kitab al-Iman* of Abu 'Ubayd al-Qasim b. Sallam (d. 224–839)', *Studia Islamica*, vol. 32 (1970), p. 233.

¹⁹ Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij*, pp. 32–3.

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the worst of all sins—polytheism (*shirk*). Scholars later separated *shirk* from other major sins by determining that only an act of polytheism would turn a Muslim into an unbeliever immediately, justifying his or her excommunication from Islam (*takfir*). In such a case, further proof of a person's unbelief through verbal 'confirmation'²⁰ of this with the tongue was not necessary. Other major sins were considered serious and deserved punishment but did not by themselves turn the believer into a *kafir* without further proof.²¹ The Khawarij disagreed with this point of view. One of their beliefs was that a Muslim guilty of any major sin should be declared an unbeliever, with or without further proof. Their creed thus lifted 'ordinary' major sins to the level of *kufir*, making them quicker to apply *takfir* than the adherents of what later became known as Sunni Islam.²²

A final point about the Khawarij's conception of *iman* and *kufir* relevant to this study is the effect that sinful acts have on a person's faith. Apart from sins amounting to *shirk*, sinful acts were considered by most scholars to decrease faith, while good deeds increased *iman*.²³ This entailed the understanding that faith was flexible. The Khawarij, however, believed that faith could not vary and was either present or lost as a whole through major sins.²⁴ This latter point stressed once more that the Khawarij constituted a group which was clearly radically different from other believers, as expressed in its use of jihad against other Muslims (including the ruler) and deviant ideas on faith. A group that opposed many of the beliefs of the Khawarij was the Murji'a.²⁵

²⁰ For a more detailed explanation of what the word 'confirmation' entails in practice, see Joas Wagemakers, 'The Transformation of a Radical Concept: *Al-Wala' wa-l-Bara'* in the Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqqisi', in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 97–9.

²¹ Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, pp. 39–40, 46–7 and 49.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 47; Salem, *Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij*, pp. 34–5; William Montgomery Watt, 'Kharijite Thought in the Umayyad Period', *Der Islam*, vol. 36 no. 3 (1961), p. 224.

²³ Madelung, 'The Early Sunni Doctrine', p. 244; Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 135–6.

²⁴ Louis Gardet, 'Iman', in Bernard Lewis et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition* (henceforth *EI2*), vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p. 1173.

²⁵ It should be borne in mind that the Khawarij were not a single entity but were split into several factions. See, for example, Wilferd Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988), pp. 54–76.

The historical Murji'a

Most scholars trace the genesis of the Murji'a to conflicts between the third caliph, 'Uthman Bin 'Affan (r. 644–656), and his successor 'Ali Bin Abi Talib.²⁶ Others contend that the movement arose in the aftermath of the civil war that began after the death of caliph Mu'awiya Bin Abi Sufyan in 680.²⁷ Both theories, however, link the Murji'a's ideological roots to conflicts between 'Uthman and 'Ali. The Murji'a refused to take sides in these conflicts, instead opting for postponement (*irja'*) of judgement in such matters; God is left to decide. The notion of (*irja'*) became central to the movement that came to be known as the Murji'a (postponers), whose initial name is said to have been *ahl al-'adl wa-l-sunna* (the people of justice and sunna).²⁸

The beliefs of the Murji'a

The term *irja'* as meaning 'postponement' was later traced back to the Qur'an by the Murji'a, especially *sura* 9:106, which states that 'others are postponed to God's commandment' (*wa-akharuna murjawna li-amri-Allah*). The term used for 'postponed' (*murjawna* or, in other readings, *murja'una*) is linguistically related to *irja'* and provided the Murji'a with a Qur'anic basis for their decision not to choose sides between 'Uthman and 'Ali.²⁹ As such, the term *irja'* became the central tenet of the Murji'a's beliefs. This led to a detailed creed, of which two points deserve mentioning as they are relevant to jihadi-Salafi accusations against quietists.

²⁶ Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 29; Josef van Ess, 'Das *Kitab al-Irga'* des Hasan b. Muhammad al-Hanafiyya', *Arabica*, vol. 21 (1974), p. 30; G. van Vloten, 'Irdja', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, vol. 45 no. 2 (1891), pp. 163–4; Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 124–6; Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 104.

²⁷ Madelung, 'The Early Murji'a', p. 32; *idem*, 'Murdji'a', in Bosworth *et al.* (eds.), *EI2*, vol. 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), p. 605.

²⁸ Madelung, *Religious Trends*, p. 15.

²⁹ Saleh Said Agha, 'A Viewpoint of the Murji'a in the Umayyad Period: Evolution through Application', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 8 no. 1 (1997), p. 1; Khalil Athamina, 'The Early Murji'a: Some Notes', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, vol. 35 no. 1 (1990), pp. 110–11; Madelung, 'Murdji'a', p. 605; Watt, *The Formative Period*, pp. 123–24. For an explanation of the term in an early Murji'ite treatise, see Joseph Schacht, 'An Early Murci'ite Treatise: The *Kitab al-'Alim wal-Muta'allim*', *Oriens*, vol. 17 (1964), pp. 110–11.

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First, as the above shows, the term *irja'* was originally applied to political conflicts, but the concept took on greater and broader theological meaning in the eighth century.³⁰ The Murji'a began to apply the term *irja'* to people's faith, meaning that they postponed judgement over anyone's *iman* and left it to God.³¹ It seems that a movement arose supporting this idea, applying it to Muslims in general and also to the Umayyads, the rulers of the Muslim world in the seventh and eighth centuries. Unwilling to pass judgement on their faith, the Murji'a were generally loyal to these rulers,³² although they were not absolute backers of their rule and occasionally supported revolts against them³³ (but, according to Athamina, not to overthrow the regime).³⁴

A second and closely related tenet of the Murji'a is of importance here, namely their conception of what constitutes faith and unbelief. Unlike the Khawarij and 'orthodox' Sunni Muslims, the Murji'a believed that faith only consisted of belief in the heart and its confirmation by speech of the tongue, thus excluding acts.³⁵ In practice, therefore, they believed that acts alone should not dictate whether a person is deemed a Muslim or a *kafir*. This was particularly relevant when dealing with the question of when someone became an unbeliever and when *takfir* of such a person was justified. In contrast to the

³⁰ Agha, 'Viewpoint', pp. 4–25; Athamina, 'The Early Murji'a', p. 111; Cook, *Early*, pp. 29–30; Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, pp. 122–3; Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, vol. 2 (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1889), p. 91.

³¹ Madelung, *Imam*, pp. 229–30; *idem*, 'Murjji'a', p. 606; William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962), pp. 32–3.

³² Goldziher, *Muhammedanische*, pp. 89–92; Wilferd Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qasim ibn Ibrahim und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1965), pp. 17, 23, 229–35 (Madelung qualifies this position on p. 235, however); Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 38.

³³ Michael Cook, 'Activism and Quietism in Islam: The Case of the Early Murji'a', in Alexander S. Cudsi and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (eds.), *Islam and Power* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 18–19; Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, pp. 33–4; Madelung, 'Murjji'a', p. 606; Madelung, *Religious Trends*, pp. 14–15; Joseph Schacht, 'New Sources for the History of Muhammadan Theology', *Studia Islamica*, vol. 1 (1953), p. 39; Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 125;

³⁴ Athamina, 'The Early Murji'a', pp. 115–16, 118–26, 128–30.

³⁵ Madelung, 'The Early Sunni Doctrine', p. 233; *idem*, *Religious Trends*, p. 15; J. Meric Pessagno, 'The Murji'a, Iman and Abu 'Ubayd', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 95 no. 3 (1975), pp. 383, 386–7; Schacht, 'An Early Murji'ite Treatise', pp. 106–7.

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Khawarij, the Murji’a stated that major sins as such could not expel someone from Islam³⁶ unless such a person verbally confirmed his unbelief.³⁷ They extrapolated this reasoning to include sins of polytheism. Whereas Sunnis considered such acts (including worshipping other gods) unquestionable proof of someone’s disbelief, the Murji’a went so far as to require verbal confirmation of a Muslim’s *kufir* to legitimate *takfir* even in such cases.³⁸

Precisely because the Murji’a excluded works from faith, they believed it could not be impaired by sinful acts. They also believed faith could not increase or decrease but was an indivisible whole that could only be taken away in its entirety by *kufir*.³⁹ Although they were not in complete agreement on this issue,⁴⁰ the Murji’a can be said to have generally shared this point of view with the Khawarij but were at odds with the ‘orthodox’ Sunni belief. As we have seen, however, the Murji’a represented the extreme opposite of the Khawarij in their attitude towards the rulers and their conception of *iman* and *kufir*. It is also as extremes that the labels of “neo-Khawarij” and “neo-Murji’a” are used by quietist and jihadi-Salafi scholars to vilify each other, to which we must now turn.

Quietist Salafis on the ‘Neo-Khawarij’

Ironically, arguably the most important book that encouraged quietist Salafis to refer to their jihadi-Salafi counterparts as Khawarij was not written by a jihadi. This book, *The Phenomenon of Postponement in Islamic Thought*, was the PhD thesis of Safar al-Hawali (b. 1950), a Saudi political Salafi whose work was supervised by Muhammad Qutb, brother of Sayyid Qutb.⁴¹ Because of al-Hawali’s criticism of the Saudi rulers and the way he expressed his ideas on faith and unbelief in his dissertation, the book generated negative attention among quietist Salafis. Important quietist scholars such as Muhammad Nasir

³⁶ Madelung, ‘Murjī’a’, p. 605; Schacht, ‘An Early Murjī’ite Treatise’, p. 109.

³⁷ Schacht, ‘An Early Murjī’ite Treatise’, p. 113.

³⁸ Madelung, ‘Murjī’a’, p. 605; Van Vloten, ‘Irdjī’a’, p. 163; Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 124.

³⁹ Madelung, ‘Murjī’a’, p. 607; Pessagno, ‘The Murjī’a’, pp. 386, 393–4; Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 45.

⁴⁰ For more on the diversity of the Murjī’a, see Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief*, pp. 85–92.

⁴¹ Safar b., ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Hawali, *Zahirat al-irja’ fi’l-fikr al-islami* (1986) [<http://www.tawhed.ws>].

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al-Din al-Albani (d. 1999) and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Bin Baz (d. 1999) openly compared al-Hawali and thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb to the Khawarij.⁴²

Rebellion against the rulers

Although al-Hawali never joined a rebellion against any ruler of the Muslim world and—his criticism of the Saudi royal family notwithstanding—did not call for the overthrow of the al Sa‘ud, he and other politically committed scholars like Qutb are often lumped together by quietists with rebellious groups and scholars, including jihadi-Salafi ones.⁴³ While there are clear differences between Qutb and jihadi-Salafis, there is no doubt that the latter have in common with Qutb that they believe the current rulers of the Muslim world are apostates who should be overthrown. As such, quietist scholars refer to them as Khawarij ‘who rebelled (*kharaaju*) against ‘Ali [...] and continue to do so in every time. [...] In this time of ours, they rebel and corrupt as you can see and hear from the bombings and the attack[s] on Muslims [...]’⁴⁴ Similarly, today’s ‘Khawarij’ are accused of ‘demonstrating and mobilising (*yaqumuna bi-l-mudhabarat wa-l-masirat*) against the ruler’ and ‘waging war on the ruler (*wa-atlaqu l-harb li-l-hakim*) and even on his government [...]’; just like the original Khawarij did.⁴⁵

Extremism in *takfir*

The parallel between the Khawarij and jihadi-Salafis as Muslims who rebel(led) against their rulers is—leaving exact ideological motivations and historical dif-

⁴² See, for example, ‘The Speech of the Scholars upon Salmaan and Safar: Part 1: Shaykhs Ibn Baaz, al-Albaani and Ibn Uthaymeen’ (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>]; ‘Observations Against the Book Supporting the Madhhab of the Khawarij’ (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>]; Jamal Bin Farihan al-Harithi, ‘The Khawarij Perform Takfir on Account of Major Sins’ (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>].

⁴³ See for example ‘An Explanation of the Saying of the Biased Partisans’ (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>], pp. 4–5; ‘AbdusSalaam Bin Saalim Bin Rajaa’ as-Sihaymee, ‘The Ideology of Terrorism and Violence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Its Origins, the Reasons for its Spread and the Solution’ (2007), available at [<http://www.salafimanhaj.com>], pp. 44–46.

⁴⁴ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Bin Rayyis al-Rayyis, ‘*al-Wasatiyya bayna l-ifrat wa-l-tafrit*’ (2005), available at [<http://www.islamancient.net>], p. 12.

⁴⁵ Badr Bin ‘Ali Bin Tami al-‘Utaybi, ‘*Thalathun ‘alama tadullu ‘ala anna ha’ula’i l-mukharribin Khawarij*’, (2004), available at [<http://www.islamancient.com>], p. 6.

ferences aside—undeniable. This is clearly an issue that concerns the quietists very much, since they believe criticism of a leader should be expressed through privately-given advice in order to avoid civil strife or chaos (*fitna*). Quietist writings on the modern-day Khawarij nevertheless concentrate more on jihadi-Salafi ideas on *iman* and *kufir*. This is perhaps unsurprising since fighting Muslim rulers is often preceded by the application of *takfir* to them, which has everything to do with faith and unbelief.

One of the reasons quietist scholars accuse jihadi-Salafis, as well as the more politically-oriented scholars mentioned above, of being like the Khawarij is their apparent willingness to apply *takfir* to Muslims who are only guilty of major sins but not of *kufir*.⁴⁶ This accusation becomes particularly important with regard to the quietist accusation that the ‘neo-Khawarij’ apply *takfir* to the rulers of today’s Muslim world. One book, for example, states that ‘all of this intellectual garb’ (referring to the theoretical writings of al-Hawali) actually leads to ‘the justification [...] of absolute and unrestricted *takfir* of the rulers who do not rule by what Allaah has revealed [...],’ which the author refers to as a ‘Kharijite doctrine.’⁴⁷ Similarly, Muhammad Bin Salih al-‘Uthaymin (d. 2001), a Saudi *mufti* and one of the most influential Salafi scholars of recent years, referred to Muslims who apply *takfir* to the rulers as ‘the inheritors of the Khawarij’, comparing them to those who rose up against caliph ‘Ali Bin Abi Talib. He stresses that if a ruler does indeed make a decision that is contrary to the *shari‘a* (Islamic law), one has to establish proof of a leader’s supposed unbelief before applying *takfir* to him.⁴⁸

According to quietists, the reason these ‘neo-Khawarij’ readily apply *takfir* to the rulers is due to their misunderstanding of what those leaders do, leading them to misinterpret the rulers’ deviations from the *shari‘a* as forms of *kufir* instead of *kaba‘ir*. They subsequently apply verses from the Qur’an regarding

⁴⁶ Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, ‘*Fitnat al-takfir*’, in Musa Bin ‘Abdallah Al ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (ed.), *al-Maqalat al-manhajiyya fi ‘Hizb al-Tahrir’ wa-l-Jama‘at al-Takfiriyya* (Riyadh: Dar al-Buhuth wa-l-Dirasat al-Mu‘asira wa-l-Tarajim, 2006), p. 16; Al-Harithi, ‘The Khawarij Perform Takfir’; ‘Abd al-Malik Ahmad Bin al-Mubarak al-Ramadani, ‘The Khawarij are the Muji’yyah [sic]’ (n.d.), available at [<http://www.allaahuakbar.in>], [website no longer available], note 1; ‘An Explanation of the Saying’, pp. 13, 33; ‘Observations’, p. 1; ‘Speech’, p. 8. Interview with ‘Ali b. Hasan al-Halabi, Amman, 19 January 2009.

⁴⁷ ‘An Explanation of the Saying’, pp. 15–16.

⁴⁸ Muhammad Bin Salih al-‘Uthaymin, ‘Imaam Ibn Uthaimen on the Khawarij of the Era, the Kharijite Ideologists, the Preachers of Revolution and Destruction’ (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>], p. 1.

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kufir, especially 5:44 ('And whoever does not rule [*wa-man lam yabkum*] according to what God has revealed, they are the unbelievers'), to rulers and people in general who are only guilty of major sins, as the Khawarij had done.⁴⁹ According to the Jordanian quietist scholar 'Ali al-Halabi (b. 1960), the danger in this lies not only in the *fitna* that may result from *takfir* of the rulers but also in the limitless implications it may have if the concept is generalised to include whole groups of people. *Takfir* may not stop at the rulers but may continue until everyone who works for the government is labelled a *kafir*,⁵⁰ a fear echoed by others who accuse Osama Bin Laden ('Usamah Ibn Laadin al-Khaarijee') of attacking the '*ulama* working for the Saudi government.'⁵¹

Jihadi-Salafis' defence

At first sight, the quietists' claim that jihadi-Salafis—like the Khawarij—apply *takfir* on account of major sins, particularly with regard to the rulers of the Muslim world, may look quite credible and seems as obvious as the accusation that they rebel against the rulers. However, while jihadi-Salafis do not contest the claim that they want to overthrow their own regimes, they vehemently deny that they have the same views on *takfir* as the Khawarij. One jihadi-Salafi author acknowledges that 'the Khawarij agreed with the Sunnis (*abl al-sunna wa-l-jama'a*) in their understanding of faith', namely as 'conviction in the heart, speech of the tongue and works with the limbs' as we saw above, but stresses that 'they differed with the Salaf in their *takfir*'.⁵² Another states that jihadi-Salafis do indeed apply Qur'an 5:44 to the rulers but not in a wrong way, as quietists suggest. Moreover, using this verse does not necessarily lead to *takfir* of Muslims in general (*takfir 'umum al-muslimin*), he maintains.⁵³

In trying to explain why quietists accuse jihadi-Salafis of being 'neo-Khawarij', Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (b. 1959), a Jordanian jihadi-Salafi scholar, attacks the basis of the quietists' argument, namely that jihadis mistake major sins for *kufir* and base their application of *takfir* on this mistake. This, al-Maqdisi

⁴⁹ Al-'Utaybi, *Thalathun*, pp. 6, 11–13.

⁵⁰ Interview with al-Halabi, Amman, 19 January 2009.

⁵¹ 'The Advice of Shaykhul-Islam Ibn Baaz (d. 1420H) to Usamah Ibn Laadin al-Khaarijee' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>], p. 5, note 9.

⁵² Abu Sakhr al-Yafawi, '*Radd i'tida'at Murji'at al-khalaf 'ala manhaj al-Salaf*' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>], p. 19.

⁵³ Abu 'Abd al-Malik al-Tawhidi, '*Kashf ma alqabu Iblis 'ala qalb 'Abd al-'Aziz Bin Rayyis al-Rayyis*', (2009), available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>], p. 68.

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states, is simply not the case. He maintains that jihadi-Salafis only apply *takfir* on the basis of *kufir* sins that expel the person guilty of it from Islam. The comparison with the Khawarij, who did not make the distinction between *kufir* and *kaba'ir*, is therefore utterly wrong according to al-Maqdisi.⁵⁴ This is echoed by several other writers, one of whom states that the real modern-day Khawarij are the extremists who believe that ‘the root in people today is unbelief’ and therefore apply *takfir* too randomly.⁵⁵

The real bone of contention in these disputes on *takfir* is the protagonists’ position towards the rulers. Al-Maqdisi explains that, just like quietists, jihadi-Salafis view incidental rulings by presidents and kings outside the bounds of the *shari'a* as only major sins, not as forms of *kufir*, provided they are committed without any confirmation of the ruler’s unbelief. When they become structural, however, and a ruler in effect exchanges the *shari'a* for an entirely different system of laws (*tabdil*), this act in itself shows his true unbelief and therefore no further confirmation of his *kufir* is necessary.⁵⁶ Since jihadi-Salafis equate following non-Islamic laws with worshipping other gods,⁵⁷ they believe that *tabdil* is a form of polytheism and therefore justifies *takfir*.⁵⁸

Jihadi-Salafis on the ‘Neo-Murji’a’

While jihadi-Salafis deny the accusations quietists level against them and try to refute them as much as possible, they also employ ideological attacks of their own. These, like those used by the quietists themselves, focus on the relations between the ‘neo-Murji’a’ and the rulers, and their ideas on *iman*, *kufir* and *takfir*.

⁵⁴ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, *Imta al-nazr fi kashf shubhat Murji'at al-'asr* (1999/2000 [1991/1992]), available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>], pp. 83–7; *idem*, *Tabsir al-'uqala bi-talbisat ahl al-tajabhum wa-l-irja'* (1996), available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>], pp. 107–8, 117–19.

⁵⁵ Abu 'Abdallaa al-Tunisi, *Mujmal aqwal a'immat al-Salafi dhamm al-irja' wa-ablihi* (2004), available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>], p. 1.

⁵⁶ al-Maqdisi, *Imta'*, pp. 46, 49–61, 88–92; *idem*, *Tabsir*, pp. 44–9, 129–32.

⁵⁷ For an explanation of this reasoning, see Wagemakers, ‘The Transformation of a Radical Concept’, pp. 92–3.

⁵⁸ See, for example, al-Maqdisi, *Tabsir*, p. 122; al-Tawhidi, *Kashf ma alqabu*, p. 45.

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Subservience to the rulers

As we saw above, the original Murji'a's willingness to postpone judgement over the sinful acts committed by Muslims caused them to overlook the ruling Umayyads' transgressions and generally to obey them. Similarly, jihadi-Salafis blame the 'neo-Murji'a' for overlooking contemporary rulers' unbelief and remaining subservient to them. Al-Albani, for instance (a frequent target of accusations of *irja'*), was criticised for refusing to sanction jihad against Muslim rulers, even in cases when he acknowledged that the ruler did not live up to his Islamic duties.⁵⁹ In fact, some authors claim that the 'neo-Murji'a' 'sell' their religion to the rulers,⁶⁰ with the latter being 'delighted with [their] *irja'* [...]'.⁶¹ Some authors even accuse the 'neo-Murji'a' of assisting the rulers in their fight against 'true' Muslims who resist their regimes' rule, thereby making such scholars complicit in their rulers' actions against jihadi-Salafis.⁶²

While some of these accusations are exaggerated, it is nevertheless clear that quietist Salafi scholars subject themselves to the regimes under which they live, or even actively support them and are employed by them. Their unwillingness to engage in politics and speak out against the rulers is, of course, the reason why I and others refer to them as quietists in the first place. One jihadi author's words that such 'mercenaries' (*murtaziqa*), as he calls them, 'dominate the heads of *irja'* in this age' may be less of an exaggeration than it seems.⁶³

Negligence in *takfir*

The (correct) 'accusation' that quietist scholars do not revolt against their political leaders but accept their rule even if the latter violate Islamic laws is obviously closely connected with the issues of faith and unbelief. An oft-heard accusation against some quietist Salafis is that they exclude works from faith, just like the Murji'a once did.⁶⁴ From this point of view, jihadi-Salafis scold certain quietists for not applying *takfir* when they should, namely in cases when

⁵⁹ Abu 'Ubayd 'Abd al-Karim al-Shadhili, '*Ta'asis al-nazr fi radd shibh mashayikh Murji'at al-'asr*' (1999/2000), available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>], p. 8.

⁶⁰ al-Maqdisi, '*Tabsir*', p. 33; al-Yafawi, '*Radd i'tida'at*', p. 17.

⁶¹ al-Maqdisi, '*Tabsir*', p. 65.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 96; *idem*, '*Imta'*', p. 96; al-Tawhidi, '*Kashf ma alqabu*', p. 7-9.

⁶³ Al-Yafawi, '*Radd i'tida'at*', p. 17.

⁶⁴ Al-Hawali, '*Zahirat*', p. 107; Abu Basir al-Tartusi, '*Mulahazat wa-rudud 'ala risalat "Mujmal masa'il al-iman al-'ilmiyya fi usul al-'aqida al-Salafiyya"*' (2001), available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>], pp. 2-3.

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acts of major *kufir* take place, and only label someone an unbeliever if his act of *kufir* is confirmed by his explicit verbal rejection of Islam.⁶⁵

Again, this accusation of excluding acts from faith and the subsequent negligence in *takfir* is particularly clear in jihadi-Salafi writings on dealing with the rulers. This is summed up in a book by Abu ‘Abd al-Malik al-Tawhidi in which he criticises the Saudi scholar ‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. Rayyis al-Rayyis, who, like al-Albani, is also a recurring target of accusations of *irja’*: ‘The core of the conflict between us [...] and others like this Murji’ [al-Rayyis] is the exchange (*tabdil*) of the root of the *shari’a* [...].’⁶⁶ As we saw above, jihadi-Salafis distinguish between a ruler’s incidental deviations from the *shari’a*—provided they are not explicitly confirmed by the ruler’s true unbelief—and systematic un-Islamic rule in the form of a complete exchange of Islamic law for a different legislative system. While they see the former as a major sin, jihadi-Salafis believe that *tabdil al-shari’a* ensures that every ruling will systematically be rooted in non-*shari’i* laws. This, in their view, makes the unbelief of the ruler responsible for this *tabdil* unequivocal, meaning no further proof of such a person’s unbelief is necessary: his actions suffice.

It is precisely the unwillingness of some quietists to label *tabdil al-shari’a* as an act of *kufir* that is the main reason why jihadis accuse them of postponing their judgement.⁶⁷ In the words of the Syrian-British jihadi-Salafi ideologue Abu Basir al-Tartusi (b. 1959): ‘You [the ‘neo-Murji’a’] equate disobedience (*ma’siya*) with unbelief ... and you treat someone who does not rule according to what God has revealed at all as someone who does ... so [only] once.’⁶⁸ Jihadi-Salafis therefore contest the notion that they apply *takfir* because of major sins, as they do not believe *tabdil* is only a *kabira* but claim instead that it is an act of *kufir*. Interestingly, some of the books that jihadi-Salafis claim were written by ‘neo-Murji’a’ have also been accused of having traces of *irja’* by other quietist Salafis, chiefly

⁶⁵ Hamid Bin ‘Abdallaa al-‘Ali, *Bayan haqiqat al-iman wa-l-radd ‘ala Murji’at al-‘asr fima khalafu fihī mahkam al-Qur’an* (n.d.), available at [http://www.tawhed.ws], pp. 1–2; Abu l-Fadl ‘Umar al-Huddushi, *Ikbar al-auliya’ bi-masra’ ahl al-tajabhum wa-l-irja’* (n.d.), available at [http://www.tawhed.ws], pp. 14–15; Ahmad Bin Humud al-Khalidi, *al-Tanbihat ‘ala ma fi kalam al-Rayyis min al-waratat wa-l-ughblutat* (n.d.), available at [http://www.tawhed.ws], (n.d.), pp. 3–7, 16–18; al-Maqdisi, *Tabsir*, pp. 23–24; al-Tawhidi, *Kashf ma alqabu*, pp. 28–9.

⁶⁶ Al-Tawhidi, *Kashf ma alqabu*, p. 23.

⁶⁷ Muhammad Abu Ruhayyim, *Haqiqat al-khilaf bayna l-Salafiyya al-shar’iyya wa-ada’iha* (1998), available at [http://www.tawhed.ws], pp. 69–70; al-Tartusi, *Mulahazat wa-rudud*, pp. 16–19; al-Yafawi, *Radd i’tida’at*, p. 14.

⁶⁸ al-Tartusi, *Mulahazat wa-rudud*, p. 28.

for supposedly misinterpreting the correct definition of faith, including with regard to the question of *tabdil*. The Saudi Permanent Council for Knowledge Studies and Fatwas states that the Jordanian quietist al-Halabi misquotes the work of the famous scholar Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya, an extremely important source among Salafis and also with regard to this subject. Ibn Taymiyya, the council states, believed that *tabdil al-shari'a* does not require confirmation of the culprit's faith but automatically leads to *takfir*, unlike al-Halabi's claims.⁶⁹ Predictably, this confirmation of jihadi-Salafi claims coming from a quietist source is eagerly used by jihadi writers to cement their case against the 'neo-Murji'a'.⁷⁰

Quietists' defence

As with the jihadi-Salafis' acceptance of their rebellious reputation, the quietists accused of *irja'* do not contest the idea that they are subservient to the rulers, presumably since it is evident that they ultimately accept the regimes of their leaders. Also similarly to the jihadis, they fiercely deny being part of the Murji'a. To defend themselves from claims that they are 'neo-Murji'a', quietists stress that unlike the early Murji'a they do accept deeds as part of faith and view them as an integral part of *iman*.⁷¹ Also, even though it is not a major issue in the dispute with jihadi-Salafis, quietists stress that, again unlike the historical Murji'a, they do not believe faith to be one indivisible whole but state that it increases and decreases depending on a person's behaviour.⁷²

Quietists also confront the important issue of *takfir* of the rulers and their allegedly un-Islamic legislation in a way similar to jihadi-Salafis' treatment of

⁶⁹ *'al-Lajna al-da'ima li-l-buhuth al-'ilmiyya wa-l-ifta'* (n.d.), available at [<http://www.alifta.net>], *fatwa* no. 21517.

⁷⁰ See, for example, al-Huddushi, *'Ikbar al-awliya'*, which deals extensively with the Council's criticism.

⁷¹ See, for example, Khalid Bin 'Ali Bin Muhammad al-'Anbari, 'The Murji'ah of the Era!' (2006), available at [<http://www.salafimanhaj.com>], pp. 23–36; Iman al-Asbahani, 'The Issues Pertaining to Imaan and Refutation of the Murji'ah' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>]; 'Ali Bin Hasan al-Halabi, *al-Tabsir bi-qawa'id al-takfir* (Cairo: Dar al-Manhaj, 2004), pp. 12 and 14; Muhammad Bin Salih al-'Uthaymin, 'Al-'Allaamah Saalih Ibn Muhammad [sic!] Ibn al-'Uthaymeen on the Accusation of Irjaa', against Imaam Albaanee' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.allaahuakbar.in>], (website no longer available).

⁷² See, for example, al-Halabi, *al-Tabsir*, pp. 12, 15–16; 'Imaam Ibn Baz on Imaan, Kufr, Irjaa' and the Murji'ah' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>], p. 4; 'Abd al-'Aziz Bin Rayyis al-Rayyis, *Al-Albani wa-l-irja'*, (2000), available at [<http://www.islamancient.net>], pp. 10–11.

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the accusations levelled at them. Quietists state that incidental un-Islamic rule is only a major sin unless it is accompanied by further proof of the culprit’s unbelief,⁷³ a statement with which jihadi-Salafis agree, as we have seen above. The question of *tabdil*, however, is answered differently. Some quietist scholars believe it should also necessarily be accompanied by a confirmation of unbelief before it can lead to *takfir*,⁷⁴ while others believe that the act of *tabdil al-shari’a* is a form of *kufir*.⁷⁵ The differences of opinion on this issue are also recognised as such, but quietist scholars mostly seem to acquiesce in them.⁷⁶

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Given the discussion above, to what extent can quietist and jihadi-Salafis actually be compared to the Khawarij and Murji’a of early Islam? Besides the obvious parallel between jihadi-Salafis and the Khawarij as well as between quietists and the Murji’a, when it comes to their attitude towards rebelling against the rulers the case for applying the labels of ‘seceders’ and ‘postponers’ is more nuanced than the writings discussed suggest. Jihadi-Salafis do indeed apply *takfir* without confirmation to rulers guilty of *tabdil*, but only because they believe it is a form of *kufir*, not despite their belief that it is only a major sin. Similarly, some quietists refrain from applying *takfir* without confirmation to rulers guilty of *tabdil*, but only because they believe it is just a major sin, not despite their belief that it is *kufir*.

Quietists’ treatment of acts

One could be forgiven for thinking that the labels quietists and jihadis use for each other are partly correct and partly based on a misrepresentation (and perhaps even a misunderstanding) of the other party’s beliefs. There is, however, one other issue in this debate that may not justify the use of the label ‘neo-Murji’a’ but certainly shows that jihadi-Salafis have a stronger case than is sug-

⁷³ ‘Ali Bin Hasan al-Halabi (ed.), *Al-Tabdhir min fitnat al-ghuluw fi l-takfir* (Bir Nabala, Palestine: Sharikat al-Nur li-Tiba’a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi’, 2002 [1996]), pp. 16–18, 25–8; ‘Imaam Ibn Baz [...]’, pp. 3–4; as-Sihaymee, ‘The Ideology of Terrorism and Violence in the Kingdom’, p. 36.

⁷⁴ See, for example, ‘Imaam Ibn Baz [...]’, pp. 3–4.

⁷⁵ See, for example, ‘Shaykh Abdul-Azeez ar-Raajihee on Secular Laws, Changing the Whole of the Deen, and the Accusation of Irjaa’ Against Ahl us-Sunnah’ (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>], pp. 1–3.

⁷⁶ See, for example, al-Halabi (ed.), *al-Tabdhir*, pp. 34–5.

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gested by what we have seen so far. This pertains to the different levels of faith that Salafis generally agree on. Salafis distinguish *sibhat al-din*, *wajib al-din* and *kamal al-din* (respectively the bases of the religion, the compulsory elements of the religion and the perfect fulfilments of the religion). The first refers to the most basic tenets of Islam, such as the belief in one God. Any disbelief in issues on this level immediately renders such a person a *kafir*. This is not the case for sins against beliefs included in *wajib al-din*, which are necessary although violations of them do not turn a Muslim into a *kafir* without further proof of his unbelief. The third category refers to acts and beliefs which are commendable but not necessary; violating them therefore does not damage one's faith.⁷⁷

Some jihadi-Salafi scholars have shown in their work that—even while claiming otherwise—they realise quietists do not really exclude acts from faith. They nevertheless see sufficient reason to apply the term 'neo-Murji'a' because of the quietists' use of these different levels of faith. Several jihadi-Salafi scholars (correctly) point out that some quietists⁷⁸ state that sinful beliefs and speech can take place on all three levels of faith, while acts can only be in either or both of the *wajib al-din* and *kamal al-din* categories. In other words, whereas *kufri* beliefs and speech immediately change one into a *kafir*, an act of unbelief only reduces one's faith but cannot take it away by itself since it is excluded from the *sibhat al-din* category.⁷⁹ Therefore *takfir*, in effect, cannot be applied to Muslims guilty of an act of *kufri* but instead only to those whose beliefs or speech show their apostasy. That, in turn, suggests that while quietists, unlike the Murji'a, overtly include works in faith and believe it can increase and decrease, their conclusion that *takfir* should only be applied on the basis of *kufri* beliefs or speech is exactly the same as that of the Murji'a. It is this end

⁷⁷ For more on this, see Wagemakers, 'The Transformation of a Radical Concept', pp. 97–9.

⁷⁸ See, for example, 'Ali Bin Hasan al-Halabi, 'Who Are the Murji'ah and What Are Their Beliefs?' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>], pp. 2–3; 'Sheikh Alee Hasan and Imaam al-Albani on Kufri, the Conditions of Takfir, and Istihlaal' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.allaahuakbar.in>], (website no longer available), p. 2; 'Shaykh Ahmad an-Najmee and Shaykh Ubayd al-Jaabiree on the *Qutubiyah*, Khaarijiyyah Who Accuse al-Albaani of Irjaa' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.salafipublications.com>], pp. 3–5.

⁷⁹ Muhammad Bin Salim al-Dawsari, '*Raf' al-la'ima 'an fatwa l-lajna al-da'ima*' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>], pp. 26–8; al-Tartusi, '*Mulahazat wa-rudud*', p. 2, 4–5; Abu Qatada al-Filastini, '*al-Farq bayna rajul Murji' wa-bayna rajul fihirja*' (n.d.), available at [<http://www.tawhed.ws>], pp. 2–3.

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result that explains why one jihadi scholar states that ‘the difference [between some quietists and] the Murji’a [...] is a superficial difference, not an actual one.’⁸⁰

Conclusion

The analysis above shows that the labels of ‘Khawarij’, an early Islamic group which rebelled against Muslim rulers and applied excommunication (*takfir*) to people on account of major sins, and that of ‘Murji’a’, a trend that generally obeyed its rulers and excluded deeds from faith, are often applied by contemporary quietist and jihadi-Salafi scholars against each other. These labels seem only partly correct, however, even if one ignores the different historical time-frames. Jihadi-Salafi scholars do indeed advocate rebellion against their rulers but do not apply *takfir* on the basis of major sins, as quietists claim, except in the case of a complete exchange of Islamic law by Muslim rulers (*tabdil*), which they see as an act of unbelief. Quietist scholars, on the other hand, while subservient to the rulers, do not exclude works from faith and do not condone acts of unbelief except *tabdil*, which some of them deem merely a major sin. The jihadis’ accusation that quietists only allow sinful acts to hurt a Muslim’s faith on levels below that of unbelief—when *takfir* is out of the question—is true and leads to a similar result as with the Murji’a but nevertheless shows a different ideological motivation.

For three reasons, the labels of ‘neo-Khawarij’ and ‘neo-Murji’a’ can be said to be very useful to the people who apply them. Firstly, as we have seen, they are partly accurate. Secondly, the reasoning behind them is complicated and they are therefore difficult to disprove. Thirdly, they provide plausible alternatives to labels such as ‘unbelievers’ (*kuffar*), which are used more often with regard to other Muslims but are absurd when applied to Salafis who are highly religious and pious. The labels ‘neo-Khawarij’ and ‘neo-Murji’a’ therefore fulfil the need for accusatory epithets but do so in a way that is nuanced enough to be taken seriously. For these three reasons, the labels of ‘neo-Khawarij’ and ‘neo-Murji’a’ will probably, in spite of their not being entirely accurate, continue to be used for quite some time.

The outcome of the debates mentioned may have important repercussions for Salafis’ views of their own position as strict Muslims in non-Muslim states and societies: are they willing to live as full citizens in countries overwhelm-

⁸⁰ Al-Tartusi, ‘*Mulahazat wa-rudud*’, p. 4.

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ingly ruled and populated by non-Muslims, and will they dismiss views more radical than their own as 'Khariji'? Or is a compromise impossible in this regard, and will a willingness to co-exist be labelled 'Murji'i'? These are questions that are of significant relevance to those in policy circles working on counter-radicalisation. However, if governments decide to use quietist Salafis for this purpose, they may (in the eyes of jihadi-Salafis) even emphasise the 'infidel' nature of their states, thereby creating the opposite effect of what was intended. Moreover, as may be concluded from the analysis above, this is not the only reason to be cautious about using quietist Salafis against radicalisation: the discussions on the 'neo-Murji'a' and the 'neo-Khawarij' are complicated and mostly theological in nature; one may justifiably question whether it is a government's job to engage in ideological and polemical battles such as these. Furthermore (and perhaps more importantly), a detailed look at the Salafi discussions on these issues shows that jihadi-Salafis may actually have better arguments than their quietist counterparts. Although jihadi-Salafi writings can sometimes be criticised for their dubious reasoning, selective use of sources and false premises, once one adopts Salafi terminology, arguments and sources, the radical scholars in this particular debate may in fact have a stronger case than their quietist opponents give them credit for. This does not necessarily mean that quietist Salafis are of no use in counter-radicalisation efforts, perhaps even with regard to this issue, but it should certainly cause policy-makers to consider carefully before engaging in such an endeavour.