

Social Inequality and Discontent in the Umayyad Period: A Historical Review

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Abstract

Umayyad Caliphate, which conquered big parts of the Islamic empire, had very severe problems related to increase of social differences (chasm). This paper will explore the Umayyad state from 661 to 750 AD on the basis of its cauldron of disturbance. It, by its front and center, analyzes all the reasons of that the whole society was so restless, like all those tremendous inequalities in wealth distribution, the use of conversion policies which the Arab gentlemen only could use, and that the people who were Muslim, but not Arab, experienced the devastating results of these things. Through this examination, it reveals that it is one of the major identified triggers for the uprisings. The Mukhtar al-Thaqafi Movement is just one example while Shia dissent provide another example of of this issue. By a careful examination of the historical documents, its interpretation by the scholars today, the social complexities that were present will be made plain and they will throw some light into the reason for the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate.

Keywords: Umayyad Caliphate, Social Inequality, Discontent, Shia Dissent

Introduction

The Umayyad Caliphate, which was a succession of the Rashidun Caliphate, was one of the eras that marked the beginning of Islamic history. Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan was the first to be in charge in the year 661 CE. Subtly, he established the Umayyad dynasty (Kennedy, 2004). Being from the Quraysh tribe of Mecca, the Umayyads were less powerful but with a lot of influence.

They consolidated power greatly from the lands that stretched from Spain to Central Asia (Hawting, 2000). The latter period of these two dynasties was marked by robust economic development and territorial expansion - the Arab world's trade routes expanded rapidly and military campaigns successfully conquered lands from all over. The Umayyad economy was, notwithstanding agricultural factors, most definitely boosted by the bustling trade routes which played a role of roadways and epicenters of commerce and cultural movements within the Abbasid territory (Hawting, 2000). Trade post-cities became the most important spots of economic activity, which furthered the caliphate's increases to economic power. Also, military campaigns increased the size of caliphate's territories, and it was then certain that the caliphate controlled the vital regions like the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa and several parts of Central Asia (Kennedy, 2004).

However, this facade of the lavishness of their outward lifestyle conceals the covert social inequalities and unfairness which became the causes of the discontentment of their oppressed subjects. Outwardly, the Umayyad situation seemed promising, but within it some ethnic groups felt like lifetime slaves while some benefited from what was going on (Kennedy, 1986). The regime of Egypt under the leadership of Abbas II led to the enrichment of Arabs and the elite class, which further distanced the Muslims and the poor classes from power, and hence the division and resentment, largely contributed to the unrest (Kennedy, 1986). The inequity in the distribution of resources as well as the ever-decreasing chances for social mobility led to a bigger gap between the entitlement's classes and the disfranchised. This shattered the unity of the Islamic realm, thus it became fragmented (Hawting, 2000).

Suddenly, the Umayyads were faced with the challenge of oppositional social movements that delegitimized their authority in the eyes of a substantial portion of the subjects they ruled, leading to internal discord and threats to their leadership. This paper tries to investigate into the

causes and implications of the existence of social inequality within the Umayyad Caliphate. Being a historical paper, the aim is to outline, through using historical sources, scholarly interpretations, and primary accounts, how the complex dynamics of social stratification that complex dynamics are correlated with social stratification and its consequences on the Umayyad society. This paper seeks to give a detailed analysis of the factors that contributed to social unrest and dissent during the sixth Islamic century through an extensive discussion of the economic insights, administrative practices, and the social framework.

Roots of Inequality

The economic policies of the Caliphate were not helpful to eradicate economic disparity among the people by sharing the wealth between the selected elites (Kennedy, 1986). The taxation system of the caliphate, which required to pay heavy fees from those who were not Arabs, transferred the wealth from the landowners and rich merchants to the Arab aristocrats and ruling families (Hawting, 2000). Also, the Umayyad administrators awarded lands, the lucrative concessions of trade, and administrative positions to the rich supporters which in order to further consolidate the economic power of the privileged who were a small elite (Kennedy, 2004). Such policies maintained a relationship of inequality in which the wealthy elite got richer at the expense of others, thus driving the wide population to the borderline of poverty and, as result, to the rise of social tensions and grievances. Umayyad dynasty brought the stratified social structure which marks the Arab Muslims as prevailing power over the non-Arab converts (Mawali) and the non-Arab Muslims (Hawting, 2000) who have been marginalized. During the Arab Islamic domination, the Arab Muslims enjoyed dominant positions in the society to this extent they had more connections to the political power, economic fields and social privileges (Kennedy, 1986). The sometimes less privileged groups which consisted of non-Arab Muslims, including the

inhabitants of new conquered lands who were converted Muslims, were oppressed and only had hopes of reaching a better position within the caliphate (Kennedy, 2004).

Such a pernicious practice inflicted suffering and ease of withdrawal from the caliphate by creating hostility towards non-Arabs (Hawting, 2000). Umayyad's marginalized religious minorities among which Shiites were a big part, escalating further psychological tensions and disunity among the Islamic brethren (Kennedy 1986). The Umayyad rulers who were part of the Sunni tradition sold its Shia Muslims to persecution and discrimination. Shia Muslims, who stressed the idea of 'Ali and his succession and repression associated with the Umayyad rulers [3], had their faiths repressed while they were marginalized. The prohibition of Shia religious traditions was especially inimical to peace and harmony, which was worsened by political oppression and economic discrimination of Shia communities. This, in turn, fueled resistance and dissent within the caliphate and led to internal war (Hawting, 2000).

Expressions of Discontent

Social injustice resulted in an evolution of the Umayyad Caliphate seen through the rebellions and movements (Khalidi, 2010). The Arab uprising led by Mukhtar al-Thaqifi in Kufa is an example well known as grumblers among non-Arabs Muslims and Shias supported the last messenger's family (2005). This in turn brought the rebels of the radical sect known as the Kharijites, who opposed the authority of Umayyad and called for egalitarianism, equal rights, and treatment of people, as well as the caliphate's claim to be just. (Robinson, 2003) Indeed, these demonstrations of great wrath of the people and rebellion against tyranny meant that there was no longer a facade of flirtation between the Umayyads and the majority of the people. The causes for the outbreak of conflicts and rebellions against the Umayyad Caliphate were due to the ideological disputes on the ruling of the caliphate (Hinds, 2013). - This is demonstrated in the Mukhtar al-Thaqafi movement (Hinds, 2013), where the main objective was to contest the legitimacy of the rulers and

make justice and equality a priority in the leadership Kampf des Propheten family. The Kharijites, like the Kharijites, argued that the Umayyads were guided by their personal interpretation of the Qur'an and were deviating from the principles of Islam, and therefore advocated for returning to the pristine teachings of Islam (“Chutahi’ Under the Abbasid Dynasty,” 2003). These actions sought to actualize their vision for social justice and the re-establishment of a religious purity that disenchanted many subjects, who were disillusioned with Umayyad domination.

Shiism became the main movement that challenged the power of the Umayyad caliphate and simultaneously acted as a center of religious opposition and rebellion (Hodgson, 2005). Shi'a adherents who insisted on the rebellious nature would not have any deal with the Umayyad rulers. As a result they began their civil war against the Muslim community and defended their community's integrity in vain because of the advocacy of injustice on their part (Mashadi, 2005). In the end, with all their active opposition, Shia Muslims were persecuted, and they were forced to be marginalized even under the Umayyad rulers. The Abbasid Revolution, a fire lit among the Muslims unhappy with the Umayyads with their ineffective governance in the history (Khalidi, 2010), was a spark that led to the overthrow of the Umayyads. The revolution harnessed the resentment of several groups beyond Sunni Muslims, just like the Shia Muslims, who in the view of Umayyad, aimed at rebelling and establishing a fairly equitable rule. These movements being supported in the religious ideology and spreading prejudice against the Umayyad, an important contribution of Shia Muslim is evident as they helped in making some of Caliphate's legitimacy fade away, marking the end of an era in Islamic history.

Impact on the Caliphate

The effect of political discontent, among others, was that the Umayyad power slipped away from its legitimacy and stability, thereby sabotaging its control of the vast Islamic empire (Hawting, 2000). Power and wealth being only inequitably distributed among Arab elite drove many non-

Arab Muslims and oppressed groups speak out against with their resentment and dissatisfaction towards the world being unfair (Kennedy, 1986). Economic disparities, discriminatory mechanisms, and social tensions made public to the point of disintegration of the Umayyad society and its lack of operative support among the ruled (Kennedy, 2004). The inability of the Umayyad to divert from their shortcomings resulted to the disintegration of their credibility and contributed to internal conflict thus creating a pathway for challenges revolving around their authority.

The internal stresses and the social strife possessed by the Umayyad Caliphate were the ingredients of the rise of new political forces. The highest level was the Abbasid Revolution (Kennedy, 1986). The unrest with Umayyad authority, together with a multitude of rebel groups from among "the religious and ethnic community" would not go away, fighting all the way and making the mediaeval world (Hawting 2000). The Abbasids, which tapped into the widespread discontent in the society and making them to use religion and ethnicity as their card, stirred up the various factions that were already dissatisfied with Umayyad tyranny (Kennedy, 2004). The military actions and political programs of Abbasid revolutionaries who were motivated by the ideas of justice, equality, and religious tolerance as well as their anti-Umayyad position explained why they achieved massive popular support and seized power, thereby creating a new political reality within the Muslim world.

The long-lasting effects of social discrimination, which characterized the Umayyad age, featured among the major factors applicable to the formation of Islamic society (Hawting, 2000). While the Abbasid Revolution brought around a change in political governance, social stratifications still abounded, proving to be a vital element that shaped the socio-economic situation in the Islamic World for years to come (Kennedy, 2004). Stratification of society on the basis of ethnic lines, religion, and economics was a factor that drastically affected social mobility.

Social mobility was impeded, stagnated innovations, and social injustices were cemented. Again, suppression of some sects, such as non-Arab Muslims and the minority Shia, enhanced the sectarian-nature of conflicts and helped the development of an identity crisis among the Muslims, exposing deep rifts within the group (Kennedy, 1986). As a result, the social backing of inequality that was the testament under the Umayyad's continued to echo throughout the history of Islam, affecting the patterns of reign, social interactions, as well as their culture for the years that came into being.

Conclusion

To Conclude, Social Inequality In Umayyad Times Shows How Many Factors Have To Work Together In Towards The Direction Of The Caliphate. As the established facts emphasize the damages which economic disparities, gender discrimination, and marginalization of minority people as a result of the Umayyad period. Thus political order became shaky due to internal fighting, at the same time, the government lost its supremacy. The arrival of new political movements, during the Abbasid Revolution, represent the singular moment when everything explodes, for years the society has been suffering from corruption and the populace is calling for justice and equality. Nevertheless, the awareness of social diversity within the Umayyad Empire is unlimited and precise, broadly defined by such factors as religious background, lineage, and cultural heritage. Among them, social inequality occupied a central position as it galvanized changes but it never operated alone; it interacted with or was influenced by various other factors, including politics, economics, and culture that produced the course of the revolutionary events. In the end, it is no exaggeration to say that social inequality played into the political life and the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate, for it gave birth to the processes of internal instability, external threats, and ultimately, the downfall of the Umayyad dynasty.

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