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مُحِبُّ الدِّينِ الخَطِيبِ  
(١٣٨٩ - ١٣٠٣)

**MUHIBB AL-DIN AL-KHATIB**  
A Portrait of a Salafi-Arabist  
(1886-1969)

*by*

**SAYYID MUHAMMAD RIZVI**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
MASTER OF ARTS  
in the Department  
of  
History

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is about Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (1886-1969), a transitional figure whose public career spanned the Ottoman, the Egyptian liberal, and the Nasserist eras. Khatib was a political activist, a Salafi-Arabist journalist and writer.

The most important question in modern Middle Eastern history is about the role of Islam in the Arab world. After the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the Arab world found itself without the caliphate system towards which it was always oriented. Various new trends --from Pharaonic nationalism to Arab nationalism-- were tried out by the intellectuals.

In their study of the modern Middle East, the historians have focused more on the secular/liberal group, both the creative as well as the secondary intellectuals. On the other hand, little work has been done on the reformist/salafi writers of the twentieth century. Moreover, the few studies that have been done on the reformist/salafi writers concentrate on the creative intellectuals and have ignored the secondary writers among them.

This imbalanced approach in the intellectual study of the modern Middle East had led quite a few western scholars to write off Islam as a viable political force; they were, therefore, taken by surprise by the present resurgence of Islam in that region.

My thesis attempts to redress the neglect of the secondary Muslim intellectuals by studying Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib and placing this mainstream Salafi-Arabist writer in the proper historical context.

Khatib's life and his voluminous writings show that Islam, in its various forms, was always relevant to the Muslims of the Middle East. Khatib's life not only reflects the diversity which existed in the cultural and intellectual debate in Egypt of the post-World War One era, but it also brings us closer to the continuity of the Islamic trend which mounted a fierce attack upon the elite which was espousing a liberal and secular orientation for the Egyptian society. Khatib belonged to the generation which served as a link in the chain of continuity of Islamic thought in the twentieth century Middle East.

It is the continuity of the Islamic trend in the first half of this century which makes it easier to understand the recent Islamic resurgence among the Muslims of the Middle East.

\* \* \*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

"...but I do not think I had learned the lesson  
well enough when I wrote my own book,  
*Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.  
It now seems to me to have been wrong in  
laying too much emphasis upon ideas  
which were taken from Europe,  
and not enough upon what was retained, even if  
in a changed form, from an older tradition."

Professor Albert Hourani



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my senior supervisor, Professor William L. Cleveland for introducing me to the western academic tradition with which I --having studied in a traditional Muslim system of education-- was not very much familiar, and also for his guidance during all stages of this work. My understanding of the twentieth century Middle East owes much to the readings done under his supervision. I am also grateful to Professor John P. Spagnolo who was very helpful in studying the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire which was the background into which Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib was born.

I am also indebted to my parents whose encouragement meant a lot to me. Finally, my wife, Zahra, is thanked most of all for her understanding and support without which it would have been difficult to complete this work and at the same time fulfill my role as the Imam of the Shia Muslim Community of British Columbia.

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## INTRODUCTION

*It is not necessarily the success of their endeavors but rather their incessant attempts to reshape the image of their community that set intellectuals apart from the rest of society.*

Gershoni and Jankowski

This thesis is about Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (1886-1969), a transitional figure whose public career spanned the Ottoman, the Egyptian liberal, and the Nasserist eras. A Syrian by birth who later settled down in Egypt, Khatib was a political activist, a journalist, and also a religious writer. His voluminous writings addressed the crucial issues of each of the three eras mentioned above as well as the issues which were of constant concern to the twentieth century Arab world, most particularly Arab independence and the role of Islam in modern society.

Khatib was closely associated with the Arab movement from its very inception during the early twentieth century. He was a founding member of Hizb al-LāMarkaziyyah al-Idāriyyah al-'Uthmāniyyah (The Ottoman Administrative Decentralization Party). In 1913, he joined the secret al-Jam'iyyah al-'Arabiyyah al-Fatat (The Young Arab Society). He served during the First World War as editor of *al-Qiblah* which was "the organ of the Arab revolt and the most important forum for the justification of the revolt to Arab society."<sup>1</sup> Then he moved to

---

<sup>1</sup> William L. Cleveland, "The Role of Islam as Political Ideology in the First World War," in *National and International Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Edward Ingram (Totowa, N. J.: Frank Cass & Co., 1986) p. 86.

Syria during Faysal's short-lived government and served in *al-Āsimah*. Finally, in 1920 after the collapse of Faysal's government, Khatib went to Egypt.

In Egypt, Khatib worked in various capacities: he founded the Salafiyyah Press, published a monthly journal and then a weekly paper, helped in editing the first issues of the journal of Ikhwān al-Muslimīn (the Society of Muslim Brothers), and also edited the journal of al-Azhar for five years. Khatib's writings were very diverse: he wrote on purely religious matters as well as on political and social issues of the time. He saw the rise of Pharaonic nationalism in the twenties, and also its demise, and the re-Islamization and Arabization of Egypt in the thirties. Khatib was not just a distant observer, but he participated in the events by writing against Pharaonic nationalism and in support of Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic orientation of Egypt.

Khatib was also actively involved in al-Jam'iyyah al-Shubbān al-Muslimīn (The Young Men's Muslim Association) as its first Secretary General. Established in 1927, the Y.M.M.A. played an important role in raising public awareness and support for the Palestinians during the late twenties and the thirties.

Khatib's involvement in the Islamic reformist circle of Egypt, and his role in the political and social issues of the first half of the twentieth century Arab world make him an important figure and worthy of study.

Most of the studies on the intellectuals and writers of the Middle East, especially in Egypt, have focused on the secular/liberal group of Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh's disciples. One group of his disciples "developed his emphasis on the legitimacy of social change into a *de facto* division between the two realms, that of religion and that of society, each with its own norms."<sup>2</sup> People like Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, Qāsim Amīn, 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq, and Sa'd Zaghlul belong to this group. Another group of 'Abduh's followers "carried his insistence of the unchanging nature...of the essential Islam in the direction of a Hanbali fundamentalism."<sup>3</sup> To this group belong people like Tāhir al-Jazā'iri, Rashīd Ridā and Muhibb al-Dīn al-Khatīb.

In their study of the secular/liberal group, historians have covered both the luminaries as well as the secondary intellectuals. (Intellectual luminaries are those who "create works which extend and change their traditions," whereas the secondary intellectuals are those who follow the general approach laid down by the productive intellectuals.)<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, little work has been done on the reformist/salafi disciples of 'Abduh. If one measures the proximity of the sentiments and ideas of these two groups of Abduh's disciples to those of the masses, he should not be surprised to find that

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1789-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 163; also see Hamilton A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947) pp. 34-35.

<sup>4</sup> The terms "luminaries" and "secondary" are from Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 89.

the second group is much closer to the sentiments of masses than the first group. This is not to claim that the second group, with its insistence on Hanbali fundamentalism, is the exact reflection of the masses. But when compared to the first group, the reformist/salafi group is much closer in reflecting the sentiments of the majority and the continuity of Islamic thought in that region. Almost thirty years after writing his *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Albert Hourani says,

I would not write it now in the same way. It looked too exclusively, I now think, at those movements of thought which accepted ideas coming from Europe, and it saw those movements as embodied in a line of individual thinkers who seemed to be particularly important, or at least to be representative of important strands of thought. Those of us who wrote in this way tended to neglect other thinkers who did not accept ideas coming from Europe, or who, if they accepted them, tried to incorporate them within a framework of thought which still relied on traditional categories and methods. Thinkers of this kind were more important than we believed at that time.<sup>5</sup>

This demands that at least equal attention should be paid to the works and influences of the reformist/salafi group of 'Abduh's disciples upon the society. After all, they represented Islam which was and still is a major force in the politics of the Middle East. Studying this group and the force which it represented will help us in understanding the present Islamic revival which is taking place in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East.

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Hourani, "How Should We Write the History of the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. XXIII (1991) p. 134.

Moreover, the few studies that have been done on the reformist/salafi disciples of 'Abduh concentrate on the intellectual luminaries and have ignored the secondary intellectuals. Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib was definitely not an intellectual luminary or a seminal intellectual figure. He belongs in the category of the secondary intellectuals. But in studying the phenomenon of Islamic reform in twentieth century Egypt, it is insufficient to deal solely with the intellectual luminaries like Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Ridā. It is equally important to deal with the secondary intellectuals among the Islamic-oriented writers of Egypt. What Gershoni and Jankowski wrote about the secondary liberal intellectuals that they "are perhaps even more important than leading intellectuals in diffusing new ideas and moulding the 'common culture' or 'moral unity of a society'"<sup>6</sup> is equally true about the second rank Muslim writers of Egypt. As Edward Shils explains,

The development of a common culture ordinarily depends on reproductive intellectual institutions such as schools, churches, and newspapers...By means of preaching, teaching, and writing, reproductive intellectuals infuse into those sections of the population which are intellectual neither by propensity nor by role beliefs which they would otherwise lack.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*, p. 91.

7 Edward Shils, "Intellectuals," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 7 (New York, 1968) p. 411.

I hope that my thesis will at least partially redress this neglect of the secondary Muslim intellectuals by studying Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib and placing this mainstream Salafi-Arabist writer in the proper historical context.

\* \* \*

I have used the term "Arabist" to describe Khatib not as an Arab nationalist, but as someone who supported the political reform of the Ottoman Empire in general and the revival of Arab culture in particular. (The desire to revive Arab culture, in the minds of most Ottoman Arabs, was not necessarily connected to any separatist political agenda. The desire to form an independent Arab state was a later development which grew in the context of the First World War.)

The prefix of "Salafi" with "Arabist" is intended to show that the revival of the Arab culture was desired not as an end in itself but as a stepping stone for the revival of Islam. The combination of "Salafi" and "Arabist" also reflects the view held by Khatib that the Arabs hold a special status in the Islamic world order.

\* \* \*

#### *A Note on Sources:*

In my search for the primary sources for this thesis, I did not find any work in Arabic or English exclusively devoted to the life and activities of Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib. Khatib has written a short autobiography entitled *Sirah al-Jayl* (The Tradition of a Generation), but, unfortunately I was unable to



locate it anywhere in North America or England.<sup>8</sup> Fortunately, after some research during my occasional visits to Toronto, Montreal and Chicago, I was able to locate the three main papers and journals edited by Khatib: *al-Qiblah*, *al-Zahrâ'* and *al-Fath*. An entire set of *al-Qiblah* in microfilm is located at the libraries of the University of Chicago and University of Toronto; the latter also has the bound copies of the entire set of *al-Zahrâ'*. After a long search through the inter-library loan department, I was able to locate *al-Fath* at Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts but was also informed that it is a non circulating item. However, Harvard officials agreed to photo-copy the issues of the two years that I had requested and sent them to me just two months before I finalized my thesis. I have studied all the issues of *al-Qiblah* under Khatib's editorship and also all the issues of *al-Zahrâ'*. I was also able to obtain and study copies of some of the booklets authored by Khatib on various religious and sectarian issues.

Among the secondary sources, two Arab historians have each devoted a complete chapter on Khatib in their books: Anwar al-Jundi in *A'lâm al-Qarn al-Râbi' 'Ashar al-Hijri* (The Luminaries of the 14th Islamic Century) and Sulaymân Musa in *Wujûh wa Malâmiḥ* (Faces and Features). A third scholar, Suhaylah al-Rimâwi interviewed Khatib for her Master's thesis on political

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8 *Sirah al-Jayl* was serialized in *Majallah al-Thaqâfah* of Algeria in 1972. It was later published in 1979 as *Muhibb al-Dîn al-Khatîb: hayâtuhu bi qalamihî* [Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib: An Autobiography] by Matbu'ât al-Tamaddun al-Islâmi, Damascus.

parties in Syria from 1908 to 1920. During her research, she was also able to see the rich personal library of Khatib and wrote a paper on it entitled "Awraq Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib" (The Documents/Papers of al-Khatib).<sup>9</sup>

The scholars writing in English who have mentioned and quoted Khatib in more than a passing manner are Israel Gershoni in his "Arabization of Islam: the Egyptian Salafiyya and the Rise of Arabism in Pre-revolutionary Egypt," Professor William Cleveland in his "The Role of Islam as Political Ideology in the First World War," and David D. Commins in his excellent recent book *Islamic Reform* on politics and social change in late Ottoman Syria.

\* \* \*

This thesis consists of three chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One presents the historical and social background of the society into which Khatib was born and raised in Syria. Chapter Two studies the political activities of Khatib in Damascus and Cairo culminating in the Arab Revolt and the Syrian Arab government in 1920. Chapter Three, which covers Khatib's life in Egypt as a Salafi-Arabist journalist and writer, begins with a discussion on the salafiyah movement in

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<sup>9</sup> While preparing the final version of this thesis, I came across another book at the library of the University of Toronto which should be added to this list: *Ta'rikh 'Ulamā' Dimishq (fi al-qarn al-rābi' ashār al-hijri)* [History of the Damascene 'Ulamā' of the 14th Islamic Century] by Muhammad Muti' al-Hāfiz and Nizār Abādah (1986) who have devoted fifteen pages to the biography of Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib. It was interesting to note that what these two authors have written had already been covered by my thesis in much more detail. However, this book helped me in sorting out some minor details which were not clear in other sources.

general and Khatib's version of salafism in particular; followed by Khatib's ideas and thoughts on the social and religious issues of the time. This is followed by a conclusion.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE FORMATIVE YEARS

#### THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Until the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was a powerful state covering three continents--Europe, Asia, and Africa. But towards the seventeenth century, the West started to assert its military and political superiority. Nothing heralded this change more markedly than the treaty of Sitvatorok, signed with Austria in November 1606: it was the first treaty concluded outside Istanbul; it was a negotiated settlement rather than a grant of peace by the sultan to Christian applicants; and it was a treaty wherein the Habsburg monarch was for the first time treated as the sultan's equal.<sup>1</sup>

The decline in the status of the empire convinced the Ottoman leaders that reforming the government institutions was necessary if they wanted to regain their strength and glory. Early reformers looked to the golden age of the Ottomans and proposed to stop the decline by rejuvenating the traditional institutions. However, the traditional reforms failed.<sup>2</sup> It was not until the late eighteenth century, during the reign of

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1 Roderic H. Davison, *Turkey* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1968) p. 64; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) p. 36.

2 Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963) p. 19; Haluk N. Goze, *Modernism and Traditionalism in the Ottoman Empire 1790-1922* (Ph.D. diss., American University, Washington, D.C., 1964) p. 33.

Selim III (1789-1808), that the first glimmer of westernizing reform made its appearance. Mahmud II (1808-1839) opened the way for further westernization and the Tanzimat by removing the main forces against change.<sup>3</sup>

The Tanzimat contributed to the emergence of the Young Ottomans who viewed the Tanzimat reforms as superficial and believed that to counter European superiority, the Empire should not only adopt Western technology and science but also Western political institutions and values.<sup>4</sup> The Young Ottomans took advantage of the international crisis of 1876 to pursue their goal. Finally, Sultan Abdul Hamid II promulgated the constitution on December 23, 1876.<sup>5</sup>

The constitution, however, had many flaws. The most serious flaw was the powers retained by the Sultan: appointment of ministers, convoking and proroguing of the parliament; the requirement of his *irade* before any bill became law; and his ability to expel any one he considered dangerous to the state. The very first victim of the excessive power of the Sultan was the drafter of the constitution himself, Midhat Pasha, who was sent into exile. Then, with the Russians almost at the gates of

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3 Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 35.

4 Arif T. Payasliolu, "Political Leadership and Political Parties," in *The Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey*, eds. Robert E. Ward and Dankwart A. Rustow, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) p. 414.

5 Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963) pp. 41-48.

Istanbul, the Sultan dissolved the parliament and suspended the constitution on February 14, 1878.<sup>6</sup>

After suspending the constitution, Sultan Abdul Hamid ruled the Ottoman empire with an iron fist for thirty years. His suspicious nature and fear of "revolutionary" activities led to more centralized control over the provinces, and made the Hamidian regime more tyrannical and despotic.

However, it also was "a period of searching, by both sultan and dissidents, for a form of loyalty which could unite as large a section of the variegated Ottoman population as possible and so preserve the Empire."<sup>7</sup> While Abdul Hamid adopted the Pan-Islamic cause and tried to revive the authority of his caliphate, his Arab subjects were engaged in "a search for identity, a desire to meet the challenge of Western superiority with the strongest possible platform. And, as was the case with the Ottoman Turkish intellectuals, the Arab search was primarily directed towards the preservation of the Empire."<sup>8</sup>

It was in the background of the authoritarian rule of Abdul Hamid and in the setting of the religious and political reformist movement among the Syrian Arabs that Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib was born.

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6 Davison, *Reform*, p. 407-408.

7 William L. Cleveland, *The Making of An Arab Nationalist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) p. 5.

8 *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

## THE FAMILY OF AL-KHATIB

Muhibb al-Dīn al-Khatīb was born in late July 1886 in Damascus. His father was Abu al-Fath, Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Qādir bin Sālih al-Khatīb. His mother was Asiya bint Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Shamādah al-Jallād. From his father's side, Khatīb belonged to an *ashrāf* family, descending from 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilāni al-Hasani, a Sufi shaykh of the twelfth century.<sup>9</sup> Khatīb's mother hailed from a land-owning and merchant family of al-Jallād.<sup>10</sup>

The family name "al-Khatīb" means "the preacher;" it reflects the family's aristocratic status in Damascus: by 1869, the post of *khitābah* (preaching) in the great Umayyad Mosque devolved on this family.<sup>11</sup> The *khitābah* of the Umayyad Mosque was a very influential post. "As the most important preacher in Damascus, the Khatīb at the Umayyad Mosque served as an important link between imperial government and local leadership, a conduit for information and a moulder of public opinion, and this gave the incumbent considerable political and religious leverage."<sup>12</sup>

In the Ottoman system, public office was the highest social position for the Arabs. As Ernest Dawn writes, "The Ottomans

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9 'Umar R. Kahhālah, *al-Mustadrak 'ala Mu'jam al-Mu'allifīn* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1985) p. 576-577; Bassām 'A. W. al-Jābi, *Mu'jam al-A'lām* (Cyprus: Al-Jaffān & Al-Jābi, 1987) p. 652; Suhaylah al-Rimāwī, *Awrāq Muhibb al-Dīn al-Khatīb* (Damascus: Jāmi'ah 'Ayn Shams, 1976) p. 105.

10 Philip S. Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p. 118.

11 Sulaymān Musa, *Wujūh wa Malāmiḥ* (Amman: Wizārah al-Thaqāfah, 1980) p. 134.

12 Khoury, *Urban Notables*, p. 13.

did not rule Syria and the other Arab provinces directly by Turkish officers and soldiers. Instead, Syria was governed by a small number of high-ranking Turks and a large number of Arabs who occupied all but the highest positions. The traditional Near Eastern ethic sanctioned the use of public office for the furtherance of personal and family ends. Consequently, the service of the state attracted the nouveaux and the well established alike. Competition for state position was endemic within the Arab elite."<sup>13</sup> However, as the aristocratic families became large, the competition for state office became more and more tense. Consequently, not all members of later generations could obtain public office.

The Khatib family very well portrays the competition for state positions. 'Abd al-Qādir, the grandfather of Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, had three sons. Abu al-Nasr became a *sharī'ah* judge and Abu al-Khayr became the *khatīb* of the mosque. But the third son, Abu al-Fath, the father of Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, could not obtain a public office. He was a religious teacher, obviously depending for his income on *awqāf* and influential people. Finally, he was appointed by the al-Jam'iyah al-Khayriyyah al-Islāmiyyah (Islamic Benevolent Society) as the director of al-Zāhiriyyah public library from 1879 until his death in 1897. Even this directorship was most probably due to his close friend Shaykh Tāhir al-Jazā'iri who was one of the

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13 C. Ernest Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973) p. 170. Even within an individual category of the elite (for example, the '*ulamā'*'), there was fierce competition. See Khoury, *Urban Notables*, p. 31.



founding members of al-Jam'iyah al-Khayriyyah.<sup>14</sup> This occupational difference was carried on to the next generation. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Khatib, son of Abu al-Nasr, became a *sharī'ah* judge; and Zaki al-Khatib, son of Abu al-Khayr, became a governor. However, their cousin, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib held no position in either the government or the religious hierarchy.

Ernest Dawn has clearly shown that such occupational differences were significant in forming the loyalties of Arabs *vis-a-vis* the Arab-Ottoman conflict, and has actually mentioned the Khatib family as one of the examples: while Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib was an Arabist from the very beginning, his cousins were Ottomanists and converted to the Arab cause only after the demise of the empire.<sup>15</sup>

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14 On the friendship of Khatib's father and al-Jazā'iri, see Khatib, *al-Zahrā'* II, p. 225; Rimawī, *Awraq*, p. 105. On al-Jazā'iri, see Joseph H. Escovitz, "'He was Muhammad 'Abduh of Syria' A Study of Tāhir al-Jazā'iri and His Influence," p. 294; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1789-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) p. 222; David D. Commins, *Islamic Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) pp. 41-42, 89-98.

15 Dawn, *From Ottomanism*, pp. 166, 170-171.

Zakī al-Khatib joined a nationalist society in 1919; became a deputy in the Syrian government in 1928 and 1932, and a minister in 1941-1942. He was the Justice minister in the short-lived People's Party government of Nazim al-Qudsi in 1949. (Dawn, *op. cit.*, p. 176; Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria* [London: Oxford University Press, 1965] pp. 84, 91-92; Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987] p. 254; Stephen H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* [London: Oxford University Press, 1958] p. 191, 322.)

'Abd al-Qādir al-Khatib was member of the Syrian General Congress and the Committee of National Defense; he was the director of *Awqāf* in 1928-1934 and was implicated in embezzling *awqāf* funds for Shaykh Taj. (Dawn, *op. cit.*, p. 176; Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, pp. 259, 335,

## KHATIB'S EDUCATION & POLITICAL AWARENESS

Khatib was seven years old when his mother died in 1 . he was raised, thereafter, under the direct care of his father. Khatib's childhood years were not very stable, especially where education was concerned. Khatib began his elementary education in al-Taraqqi al-Numudhajiyyah School which was located behind his father's al-Zāhiriyyah library. He completed his elementary education with high distinction in 1896.<sup>16</sup> In the next year, Khatib was enrolled in Maktab 'Anbar, Damascus's sole higher secondary school "which served the city's elite;"<sup>17</sup> but his father died before he could join the school. His relatives thought it appropriate for Khatib to follow his father's footsteps in acquiring religious knowledge. Therefore, he started attending the lectures of the 'ulamā' in Damascus. This continued for almost two years until he met his father's close friend, Shaykh Tāhir al-Jazā'iri.

After meeting Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, the Shaykh decided to reserve the directorship of al-Zāhiriyyah library for this thirteen year old orphan son of his friend--provided someone filled his place until Khatib became old enough to take over the office of his father. In his capacity as the founding

330) Other examples of post-1919 Arab nationalists are Sāti' al-Husri and Yāsīn al-Hāshimī. (Cleveland, *An Arab Nationalist*, p. 40-41)

16 Rimawi, *Awrāq*, 105; his certificate is dated July 5, 1896 (Muharram 23, 1314). Also see, Muhammad Muti' al-Hāfiz and Nizār Abādah, *Ta'rikh 'Ulamā' Dimisq*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Dār al-Firk, 1986) p. 847.

17 On Maktab 'Anbar school, see Khoury, *Urban Notables*, p. 71, 125. Also see Commins, *Islamic Reform*, p. 95, 97.

member of the Islamic Benevolent Society and the inspector of libraries from 1898 to 1902, al-Jazā'iri could decide on such matters. (Finally, Muhibb al-Khatib's cousin, 'Abd al-Qādir, accepted the directorship of the library temporarily.<sup>18</sup>) It seems very plausible that al-Jazā'iri persuaded Khatib to continue with his secondary education at Maktab 'Anbar as the Shaykh believed that "every student of the Islamic sciences should also learn a trade or commercial skill so as to be independent and not to need to beg money from the great and influential or be dependent on the revenue from some awqāf."<sup>19</sup> While waiting for the new year of the secondary school, Shaykh Tāhir al-Jazā'iri would select some manuscripts of the books written by past Muslim scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah, and ask Muhibb al-Khatib to copy them in order to increase his own knowledge and also earn some money.<sup>20</sup> Reading of such books had a lasting influence on his inclination towards the *salafiyah* movement and Hanbali fundamentalism.

In Maktab 'Anbar secondary school, besides the modern sciences and Arabic language, Khatib was also taught Persian and French languages. The instruction medium for all subjects, including Arabic language, was Ottoman Turkish. Khatib's years at Maktab 'Anbar were significant in the sense that it was in its atmosphere that he became politicized and made others politicized as well. A year before the completion of his

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18 al-Hāfiz and Nizār Abādah, *Ta'rikh 'Ulamā' Dimisq*, vol. 1, pp. 460-461.

19 Escovitz, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

20 Rimāwī, *Awrāq*, p. 105; Anwar al-Jundi, *Mufakkirūn wa 'Udabā'* (Beirut: Dar al-Irshad, 1967) p. 201.

secondary education, he moved to Beirut. There he enrolled in another government school and earned the I'dādiyyah certificate on July 9, 1905 (Jumādī I 6, 1323).<sup>21</sup>

Khatib's schooling years were not like those of an ordinary youth of his age. By the age of sixteen he had already become active in the political and Islamic reform circles of Damascus. Naturally, a youth with Khatib's personal background, combined with the mentorship of Shaykh Tāhir al-Jazā'iri could not have developed otherwise. Referring to al-Jazā'iri, Khatib used to say, "I have learnt my Arabism (*'urubati*) and my Islam from this wise shaykh."<sup>22</sup>

**The Circle of Shaykh Tāhir al-Jazā'iri:** At the beginning of this century, Shaykh Tāhir al-Jazā'iri had emerged as a reformist Muslim leader in Syria. Muhibb al-Khatib describes him as "the founder of Syria's present movement, father of its freedom-fighters and leader of its enlightened scholars."<sup>23</sup> This "'Abduh of Syria" was the center of a circle of reformist *'ulamā'* and intellectuals which came to be known as *halqatu Dimashq al-kabīrah* (the bigger or senior circle of Damascus). Khatib was familiar with the senior circle from his childhood. He writes, "My father died when I was twelve years old. Then Shaykh Tāhir al-Jazā'iri took my hand and guided me to the true Islam...The Shaykh used to hold a circle every week after the

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21 Rimāwī, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6; Khatib, *al-Zahrā'*, vol. 2 (article on Dr. Qambaz).

22 Al-Hāfiz, *Ta'rikh 'Ulamā' Dimishq*, vol. 2, p. 848.

23 In Khatib's review of *Tanwīr al-Basā'ir*, *al-Zahrā'*, vol. 3 (1926) p. 144.

Friday prayers."<sup>24</sup> These meetings were mostly held at the house of Rafiq al-'Azm. The al-'Azms were socially the most prestigious and politically the most influential family in Damascus. They held more top provincial and imperial posts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century than any other Damascene family.<sup>25</sup>

Shaykh al-Jazā'iri's circle was known as "bigger" because there was another circle consisting of a younger generation known as *halqatu Dimashq al-saghírah* (the smaller or junior circle of Damascus). According to Escovitz, the bigger circle "dealt mainly with the Arab Islamic literary and religious heritage and the problem of borrowing from the West...It is most likely that the discussions became more political after the second group joined the circle."<sup>26</sup> Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib was actively involved in forming the more politicized smaller circle of Shaykh Tāhir al-Jazā'iri. In a memorial article for Dr. Qanbaz, Khatib informs us that, "In that year [1902], I formed a small group of youths who pledged to sacrifice their lives for Allah and for the homeland (*al-watan*), and to devote themselves for the public welfare...The ideal of this small group, even though it was still in its schooling days [at Maktab 'Anbar], was to work with the activists in reviving the spirit of Arabism and in implementing the idea of Islamic

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24 Anwar al-Jundi, *A'lâm al-Qarn al-Râbi' 'Ashar al-Hijri* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Anjlo al-Misriyya, 1981), pp. 383-384. Also see Commins, *Islamic Reform*, pp. 92-93.

25 On the al-'Azm family, see Khoury, *Urban Notables*, pp. 36-37; also see Commins, *Islamic Reform*, footnote no. 18 on p. 167.

26 Escovitz, *op.cit.*, p. 295.

reform...The bigger circle was the model for the youth circle, and during all that period, I was associated with both circles."<sup>27</sup> Most probably, Khoury is talking about the same group when he writes that Maktab 'Anbar "contained a circle of young teachers and students who had begun to promote the idea of Arabism in and out of the classroom before the coup of 1908."<sup>28</sup>

The main goals of the Shaykh's circles were three-fold: (1) Reviving the Arab-Islamic heritage of the early ancestors (*salaf*). (2) Adopting Western technology without which al-Jazā'iri believed no nation could be strong at present. (3) Petitioning for representative government.<sup>29</sup> These goals clearly reflect the issues which were in the minds of many educated Syrian Arabs, especially the salafi group, during the Hamidian regime: meeting the Western challenge by Islamic reform, by discriminate adaptation of Western values, and by political reform.

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These were the influences which formed the Salafi-Arabist frame of mind of Khatib. The influence of al-Jazā'iri's circle is seen in Khatib's entire life. Khatib's life can be roughly divided into two phases: In the first phase (from his youth until the establishment of the Syrian Arab Government in 1920) he worked for political reform in the Ottoman empire in general and the Arab lands in particular. It is important to emphasize

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27 Khatib, "al-Shahid Sālih Qanbāz," *al-Zahrā'*, vol. II (1925).

28 Khoury, *Urban Notables*, p. 71.

29 Khatib "Rafiq Beg al-'Azm," *al-Zahrā'*, vol. II, pp. 226-227.

that Khatib considered political reform in the Arab lands not as an end in itself, but as a means of reviving the Arab spirit which, in turn, he hoped would revive Islamic civilization. In the second phase (in Egypt from 1920 to his death in 1969), he worked for Islamic reform as manifested in the salafiyah movement. His basic goal in the second phase remained the same, but his approach to the issue of Islamic revival changed: Khatib came to believe that political reform could be fruitful only after a cultural and religious reform. This was his analysis of the events surrounding the political reform attempted through the Arab Revolt and the Syrian Arab government.

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## CHAPTER TWO

## AN ACTIVIST FOR POLITICAL REFORMS

## PRE WORLD WAR ONE ERA

**Istanbul 1905-1907 (STUDENT AND POLITICAL ACTIVIST):** In the Fall of 1905, Khatib travelled by sea to Istanbul to join the College of Arts and Law,<sup>1</sup> probably because a Law degree served as a stepping stone into government service. Already a politicized young man and proud of his Arab-Islamic heritage, Khatib could not ignore the effects of Turkification on his fellow Arab students. He was particularly appalled by the ignorance of the Arab students of their own language and history. Together with Amir 'Arif al-Shahābī, he formed two groups for promoting Arabic language and literature. It was among the youths of these two literary groups that Khatib and Shahābī formed a secret society known as the Jam'iyyah al-Nihzah al-'Arabiyyah (the Arab Renaissance Society) in Istanbul on December 24, 1906 (1324), and they also asked their friends to form a branch in Damascus.<sup>2</sup>

Jam'iyyah al-Nihzah al-'Arabiyyah consisted entirely of a small group of young educated Damascenes and interested itself "in spreading knowledge of Arab history and Arabic literature and in providing a forum for discussing such political issues

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1 Khatib, "Rafīq Beg al-'Azm," *al-Zahrā'*, vol. II, pp. 226-227; also see Rimāwī, *Awrāq*, pp. 105-106.

2 Kahhālah, *al-Mustadrak*, p. 576; Rimāwī puts the date as July 13, 1907; see, *Awrāq*, p. 106; Khoury, *Urban Notables*, p. 59, 64, 124; also see Commins, *Islamic Reform*, p. 96.



as it was safe to raise publicly."<sup>3</sup> The Jam'iyyah started to hold private meetings in houses of the Arab inhabitants of Istanbul. In the first such meetings, Khatib gave a talk on "Our Duties," and 'Arif al-Shahābī read a poem entitled "We and the Others" (*nahnu wa al-aghyār*).<sup>4</sup> The "others" in this context are the Turks.

Such activities in Istanbul could not have passed unnoticed by the Ottoman authorities. It soon became known to Khatib that he was under surveillance, and his room was also searched. Therefore, on advice of his friends, he decided to leave Istanbul in October 1907.<sup>5</sup>

Forced to leave his college education incomplete, Khatib now decided to devote full time to fighting for Arab rights within the Ottoman system. Back in Damascus, Khatib joined his old *halaqah Dimishq* and was committed to guide the Jam'iyyah al-Nihzah al-'Arabiyyah's branch in his homeland. The usual place of meeting his friends was cafe Muhammad Agha.<sup>6</sup> However, his friends feared that the Ottoman authorities might arrest him even in Damascus and advised him to accept the post of translator with the British consulate in Hudayda, Yemen. This job was offered to him by his friend Salim al-Jazā'iri, the nephew of Shaykh Tāhir.

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3 *EI*<sup>2</sup>, see under "Hizb" p. 519.

4 Al-Hāfiz, *Ta'rikh 'Ulamā' Dimisq*, vol. 2, p. 851.

5 *Ibid*; Kahhālah, *op. cit.*, p. 576.

6 al-Jundi, *Mufakkirûn wa Udabâ'*, p. 202.

**Yemen 1907-1908 (TRANSLATOR AND POLITICAL ACTIVIST):** Khatib accepted the job offer and left Damascus on October 15, 1907 (1325). First he went to Beirut and from there to Cairo before reaching Yemen on November 27th.<sup>7</sup>

His stopover in Cairo was very significant. He stayed with his friend Rafiq al-'Azm and also met his mentor Shaykh Tāhir al-Jazā'iri. Rafiq al-'Azm introduced him to members of Jam'iyyah al-Shura al-'Uthmāniyyah (the Ottoman Constitutional Society) which had been formed sometime after 1897 in Cairo. This Jam'iyyah had been formed by Shaykh Rashīd Ridā, Rafiq al-'Azm, Haqqi al-'Azm, Ahmad Sā'ib Beg, and Dr. 'Abdullāh Jawdat to oppose 'Abdul Hamid's tyranny and to fight for a representative parliamentary system. Khatib was made a member of the Jam'iyyah and commissioned to form its branch in Yemen.<sup>8</sup>

Besides working as a translator (from Turkish to Arabic) for the British consulate, Khatib was also active in the political life of Yemen. He formed the fourteenth branch of Jam'iyyah al-Shura al-'Uthmāniyyah with the help of the governor of Hudayda, Shawqi Beg al-Mu'ayyad al-'Azm, a cousin of Rafiq al-'Azm. Shawqi Beg also introduced him to many army officers who had been exiled to Yemen for their opposition to absolute rule and their desire for a parliamentary system.

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7 Rimāwī, *Awrāq*, p. 106; Kahhālah, *al-Mustadrak*, p. 576.

8 Khatib, "Rafiq al-'Azm," *al-Zahrā'*, vol. II, p. 230; Rimāwī, *Awrāq*, p. 106; Zeine N. Zeine, *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966) p. 58.

**Damascus 1908-1909:** After the proclamation of the constitution, there was no longer any reason for Khatib to remain in Yemen. He therefore returned to Damascus.

In Damascus, Khatib continued his struggle for Arab rights within the context of the Ottoman system. Khatib's first society, the Jam'iyyah al-Nihzah al-'Arabiyyah, applied for permission to function openly. But the Young Turk government refused to register the society because they looked at the term 'al-'Arabiyyah' with suspicion. Finally, the Jam'iyyah was allowed to function under the name of "Jam'iyyah al-Nihzah al-Suriyyah" (the Syrian Renaissance Society).<sup>9</sup> It did not take long for Khatib to realize that the situation had not changed much for the Arabs. Even after the Young Turk revolution, the government was still composed primarily of the Turkish element; "it pursued the policy of dissolving in its own matrix the Arab element. As a result of this policy, the Committee of Union and Progress insisted that Turkish should be the official and the only language of the Empire. This 'Turkification' process became another great cause of Arab dissatisfaction with the Young Turks."<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the Ottoman authorities constantly kept a watch on Khatib's activities. Some members of the Syrian Renaissance Society were even arrested.<sup>11</sup> This forced him to leave Damascus for the second time.

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9 Musa, *Wujûh*, p. 137; Commins, *Islamic Reform*, p. 132..

10 Zeine, *The Emergence*, p. 98.

11 Musa, *Wujûh*, p. 138; al-Jundi, *Mufakkirûn*, p. 201; Commins, *Islamic Reform*, p. 136.

**Cairo 1909-1916 (A MUSLIM JOURNALIST AND POLITICAL ACTIVIST):**

Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib first went to Beirut, then Istanbul before finally settling down in Cairo. Under the British occupation, Cairo had become a refuge for the Arabs who opposed the Hamidian regime. It had also become the center of Arab journalism.

Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib joined the staff of *al-Mu'ayyad*, a newspaper published by Shaykh 'Ali Yusuf. Khatib's decision, besides being a practical measure to earn a living, also reflects his ideological inclination. *Al-Mu'ayyad* represented the conservative Muslim point of view in Egypt. During the 1890-1914 period, Shaykh 'Ali Yusuf was the most prominent Egyptian in agitating "for political action against the status quo, and sought to arouse public opposition to existing rule."<sup>12</sup> *Al-Mu'ayyad* was one of the newspapers that "helped develop the famous *maqal*, or feature article, and an editorial style in modern Arabic. It was a new political style of writing, free of the encumbrances of the old rhymed prose (*saj*), aimed at enlightening and teaching its reader."<sup>13</sup>

Khatib received his entire training in journalism from Shaykh 'Ali Yusuf. He writes, "I joined *al-Mu'ayyad* in September 1909 and found him [Yusuf] a very kind and encouraging person. I continued to work for that Islamic paper which was called 'Times of Egypt' till after the death of its founder. I have benefitted from his journalistic style and his

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12 Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Egypt* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) p. 203.

13 *Ibid*, p. 466.

Islamic policy. I am indebted to him as long as I live. In *al-Mu'ayyad*, I also worked with al-Manfaluti and came to know Hāfiz Ibrāhīm; and during those days, I met through *al-Mu'ayyad* all the important personalities of Egypt and this helped me in understanding the realities of life."<sup>14</sup> Khatib continued to work for *al-Mu'ayyad* from September 1909 to October 1914.

During this period, Khatib was also actively involved in various political parties and societies aiming for reform in the Ottoman political system which would guarantee the survival of the Empire as well as the rights of its citizens, especially the Arabs. He was more active in 1912 and after. Before proceeding further, a brief introduction to two societies is necessary.

The first is Hizb al-LāMarkaziyyah al-Idāriyyah al-'Uthmāniyyah (The Ottoman Party of Administrative Decentralization). It was formed in December 1912 by Rashīd Ridā, Rafiq al-'Azm, Fu'ād al-Khatib and other Syrians living in Cairo. Although the name of Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib does not appear among the founders in *The Arab Awakening* of Antonius or *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism* of Zeine, other sources inform us that Khatib participated in the forming of the Hizb and was elected the secretary of its executive committee on January 12, 1913.<sup>15</sup>

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14 al-Jundi, *A'lām*, p. 384.

15 Antonious, *The Arab Awakening*, p. 109; Zeine, *The Emergence*, p. 97. The other sources are Kahhālah, *al-Mustadrak*, p. 576; *EI*<sup>2</sup>, p. 520; Rimāwī, "*al-LāMarkaziyyah*", p. 153.

The Hizb's main goal was to impress upon the Ottoman government that the survival of the multi-national and multi-racial Empire depended on decentralizing its administration like that of Switzerland.<sup>16</sup>

The second society is Jam'iyyah al-'Arabiyyah al-Fat'at. On November 14, 1909, seven Arab students in Paris formed a society known as Jam'iyyah al-Nātiqin bi al-Dād which was changed to Jam'iyyah al-'Arabiyyah al-Fat'at in 1911. Its aim was "to obtain Arab independence within the framework of a bi-racial Ottoman Empire, Arab and Turk, on lines similar to the Austro-Hungarian Empire."<sup>17</sup>

The Jam'iyyah was a secret society; membership was made subject to a long period of probation. Members were not allowed to sign their names in their letters or communications, instead they were required to write their membership number. 'Abd al-Ghani al-'Uraysi, one of the founders of al-Fatat, introduced Khatib to the society in 1913 and he was accepted as the twenty-eighth member. Khatib was asked to select the colours (black, white, and green) for the flag of al-Fatat.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of these two societies will become clear from the following: After feeling betrayed by the Young Turk revolution, the Arabs continued their demand for reforms within the Ottoman framework. But it seems that the loss of Libya to Italy in 1911 and the Balkan War of October 1912 to May 1913

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16 Rimāwī, *al-LāMarkaziyyah*, p. 158.

17 Zeine, *The Emergence*, p. 95; Antonious, *The Arab Awakening*, p. 111.

18 Musa, *Wujūh*, p. 138; Rimāwī, *Awrâq*, pp. 112-3.

increased the concerns of the Arab opposition. During the last months of 1912, the Arabs in Beirut intensified their demand for reforms. By early 1913, a Committee of Reform was formed. In February 1913, the Committee publicized its reform proposal and was also supported in Syria and Iraq. But the government considered the proposal unconstitutional and the Governor issued an order declaring the Beirut Reform Society illegal. There was great agitation in Beirut against the banning order; Hizb al-LāMarkaziyyah al-Idāriyyah al-'Uthmāniyyah also sent two strongly-worded telegrams to protest the closure of the Beirut Reform Society.<sup>19</sup>

The Committee of Reform was subdued in Beirut, but its waves carried the Arab agitation further. In June 1913, an important Arab Congress was organized in Paris by the "Arab Community" (*al-Jāliyyah al-'Arabiyyah*) with the support of the Hizb al-LāMarkaziyyah.<sup>20</sup> The Congress was actually organized by the *Jam'iyyah al-'Arabiyyah al-Fatat*, but since it was a secret society, all papers were issued in the name of the "Arab Community." The members who were affiliated to other societies or parties were asked to participate in the name of their other societies and not the *Jam'iyyah al-Fatat*. 'Abd al-Ghani al-'Uraysi, one of the founders of *al-Fatat*, wrote to Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib that "I told you that it is our *Jam'iyyah* that is organizing the Congress without any of the participants

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19 Zeine, *The Emergence*, pp. 102-103; Antonious, *The Arab Awakening*, pp. 112-113; Amin Sa'id, *Asrār al-Thawra al-'Arabiyyah al-Kubra*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabi, 1935) pp. 123-124; *EI*<sup>2</sup>, p. 520.

20 Zeine, *op. cit.*, p. 104; Sa'id, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-134.

realizing it...And we will direct the Congress according to whatever [course of action] we decide in our meetings."<sup>21</sup>

Khatib participated in this Congress and was involved in writing the report of the Congress that was published in Cairo by Hizb al-LāMarkaziyyah in 1913 as "*Kitâb al-Mu'tamar al-'Arabi al-Awwal fi Pâris 1913.*" The letter of al-'Uraysi shows that Khatib was actively involved in the struggle of Arabs for their rights in the Ottoman Empire.

Having failed in its attempt to prevent the Congress, the CUP government sent a representative to negotiate with the members of the Arab Congress. By mid July 1913 an agreement on reforms in the Arab provinces had been worked out. But soon a dispute (which some think was engineered by the CUP) broke out among the Arab leaders. Finally, an imperial decree was issued on August 18 purporting to enact the provision of the Paris agreement. The concessions initially given to the Arabs in the agreement had been scaled down considerably in the imperial decree. The Arabs again felt betrayed by the Young Turks.<sup>22</sup>

#### **EVE OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

The Arabs had not yet recovered from the bitterness of the Young Turks' second betrayal when the First World War broke out in August 1914. The Syrian Arabs became more concerned about the consequences of war and focused their attention on the most urgent issue of the time: "If the Ottoman government decides to

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<sup>21</sup> Rimâwî, *Awrâq*, p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> Zeine, *The Emergence*, pp. 106-110; Antonious, *The Arab Awakening*, pp. 115-117.



enter the War (obviously on the side of the Central Powers), should the Arabs side with the Allied forces or with the Turks?" The Jam'iyyah al-'Arabiyyah al-Fatat in Syria sent Kāmil al-Qassāb to Egypt to consult with the Hizb al-LāMarkaziyyah.

The Hizb al-LāMarkaziyyah decided to send its representatives to Arab leaders, namely Amir 'Abdul 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud (Najd), Imām Yahya (Yemen), Sayyid Idrisi ('Asir), Sayyid Tālib an-Naqīb (Iraq) and others in Syria and Palestine to learn their views so the Arabs could take a common stand *vis-a-vis* the War. Rashīd Ridā selected three young activists for this assignment: Shaykh Muhammad al-Qalqili for Syria, Shaykh 'Asim Ridā for Yemen, and Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib for Najd and Iraq.

Khatib left Egypt on October 26, 1914 accompanied by 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Atiqī. They travelled by ship stopping in Aden, then Bombay and finally arriving in the Persian Gulf. By the time they reached the port of Busher in Persia, the Ottoman Empire had already entered the war on November 5. At the port of Busher, British officers boarded the ship and questioned Khatib and his friend 'Atiqī about the purpose of their journey. On not being satisfied with the answers, the British authorities arrested Khatib and his companion. As documents cited below will show, the British authorities in Busher were completely unaware of the support given by the British authorities in Egypt for Khatib's journey. He was then sent to Basra (which had been occupied by the Anglo-Indian forces in

November 1914) and put in prison for seven months. He was finally released on June 27, 1915 and returned to Cairo in July.<sup>23</sup> Although Khatib was not successful in his assignment, his selection for such an important mission must have been a matter of great pride for him.

However, this incident has also created a controversy about Khatib: Was he a British agent? The controversy is based on the nature of contacts between the British and the Hizb al-LāMarkaziyyah and concerns the questions of whether or not the Hizb was working for the British. According to Amin Sa'īd, the British, just before the First World War, "contacted Sayyid Rashīd Ridā...and asked him to send representatives to the [Arab] leaders, 'Abdul 'Aziz in Najd, Imām Yahya in Yemen, Sayyid Idrisi in 'Asir and others in Syria to ask them about the course they will adopt in case of the war breaking out." Rashīd Ridā agreed to this proposal, and the British had even placed a thousand pounds at his disposal to cover the expenses of this scheme.<sup>24</sup> Amin Sa'īd even informs us that Kāmil al-Qassāb (the al-Fatat representative) was sent to consult the Hizb only after al-Fatat came to know that the Hizb was in contact with the British.<sup>25</sup>

It is in this background that Elie Kedourie, in *England and the Middle East*, accuses Khatib of being an agent of the British. He writes "At the outbreak of war in Europe, some of its [Hizb's] members were in relations with Storrs [the British

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23 Sa'īd, *Asrār*, p. 37; Musa, *Wujūh*, p. 148.

24 Sa'īd, *Asrār*, p. 37; Musa, *Wujūh*, p. 147.

25 Sa'īd, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

agent] in Cairo and seemed to have agreed to send agents from among them to gather intelligence for him in Syria and Mesopotamia."<sup>26</sup> In the footnote, he says, "The agents were Muhib al-Din al-Khatib who went to Basra and Shaykh Muhammad al-Qalqili who went to Syria."

Sulaymān Musa, on the other hand, defends his hero of Arab nationalism and rejects such allegations against Khatib. In an interview with Musa, Khatib himself has denied carrying any message from the Arab Office, and also denied knowing of any arrangement between the British and the Hizb about the expenses of his journey.<sup>27</sup> Musa quotes the telegrams that were exchanged between McMahon and the British authorities in Basra and India for the release of Khatib to prove that he was not an agent of the English.<sup>28</sup> These telegrams only prove the mis-communication between the British authorities in Egypt and India.

The documents quoted by Kedourie give the appearance of Khatib being a British agent. For example, a telegram by Cheetham, dated October 28, says:

The agents destined for the Persian Gulf sailed on the 26th October in an Italian steamer from Suez for Bombay; from there they intend to go to Koweit. I think the Indian Government should be warned of the coming of these men, whose names are Moheb-ed-Din-el-Khatib and Abd-ul-Aziz-el-Atiki. They could then instruct the authorities at Bombay and Koweit to give them all assistance. At *Koweit they*

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26 Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1956) p. 62. D.B. MacDonald follows Kedourie in his article on "Hizb" in *EI*<sup>2</sup> (p. 520).

27 Musa, *Wujûh*, p. 148.

28 *Ibid*, pp. 149-154.

*will go to see our Resident, and they will then be able to arrange to work in unison with him as regards any instructions he may have received in this connection (italics mine).*<sup>29</sup>

These communications prove that surely there were close contacts and also an exchange of money between the British and the Hizb on the eve of the First World War. In the light of this, especially the italicized sentence above, it is hard to believe that Khatib, the Secretary of the Hizb, had no knowledge of the money placed at the Hizb's disposal and the contacts between the Hizb and the British. On the other hand, this type of contact and financial help does not necessarily make Rashīd Ridā or Khatib "an agent" of the British. At most, it can be interpreted as the coming together of two parties in a common cause: one providing the manpower, the other providing the money. Both the parties used each other: the Hizb wanted the Arabs to have a united stand *vis-a-vis* the war, and the British wanted to assure the Arabs that they would not attack Arab lands if the Arabs did not join the Turks. I can understand why in his interview with Sulaymān Musa, Khatib would deny having any knowledge of the contacts or the money: in the post-World War I Middle Eastern psychology, such connections with a Western power (combined with Khatib's previous employment at the British Consulate in Yemen) were more than enough to brand him as a 'spy,' an 'agent' or, at the least, a collaborator of the British.

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Elie Kedourie, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 16.

**Sharif Husayn and the Arab Revolt:** The British were not in contact only with the Hizb al-LāMarkaziyyah or Rashīd Ridā; by October 1914, they were already in close contact with al-Husayn bin 'Ali who was made the Sharif of Mecca 1908.

From the very beginning, Husayn and the CUP government were on the path of collision: the former intending to continue the traditional autonomous amirate of Hijaz and the latter attempting to enforce the control of the central government over the province.<sup>30</sup>

The most serious point of conflict between the CUP government and Sharif Husayn was the Hijaz railroad: the government insisted on implementing their plan to extend the railroad from Medina to Jeddah via Mecca, whereas Husayn strongly opposed it. The CUP government looked at the railroad as a means of extending its direct rule over the province of Hijaz. Sharif Husayn, on the other hand, looked at the railroad as a threat to his power.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, the British authorities in Cairo were carefully following the conflict between the Turkish government and the Sharif of Mecca. As early as 1912, Lord Kitchner believed that the Ottoman Empire could no longer be saved and that the Arabs of the Empire certainly would seek independence.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is no surprise that the British would have been in contact with the Arab leaders directly or through the Hizb al-LāMarkaziyya on the eve of the First World War. The British

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30 Sa'īd, *Asrār*, pp. 45-46; Dawn, *From Ottomanism*, pp. 5-6.

31 Sa'īd, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-48; Dawn, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

32 Dawn, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

were indeed worried about the impact upon their Muslim subjects, especially in India, of a war against a country whose Sultan was also the caliph of the Muslims. They knew that the Sultan, in his capacity as the caliph, would surely use the *jihād* card against the Allied forces. Al-Husayn bin 'Ali, being a Qurayshi sharif as well as the amir of the holiest city in Islam, was the best choice to counter the *jihād* order of a non-Arab, non-Qurayshi sultan of Turkey.

Britain entered the war on August 4, 1914. On October 17, 1914, 'Abdullah received a letter from Ronald Storrs inquiring about Husayn's position if Turkey entered the war on the side of Germany.<sup>33</sup>

While talks were still going on between Britain and the Sharif, the al-'Ahd and al-Fatat parties approached the latter in January 1915 to lead the Arab revolt against the Turks. Like the British, al-'Ahd and al-Fatat knew that the Sharif of Mecca was the only person who could stand against the Turks and still be able to justify his action on religious grounds. They were also aware of British interest in Sharif Husayn.

When Husayn was finally convinced that his hereditary autonomous amirate over Hijaz would not materialize under the Young Turk government, he decided to lead the Arab revolt with the support of Arab nationalists and Great Britain. And so the Arab Revolt began on June 10, 1916 (Sha'ban 9, 1334).

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33 On the letters exchanged between McMahon and Husayn, and their interpretations, see Antonious' *The Arab Awakening* (1938), Kedourie's *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth* (1976), and Albert Hourani's "The Arab Awakening Forty Years After" in his *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (London: MacMillan Press, 1981) pp. 208-212.

**Khatib as the Propagandist of the Arab Revolt:** Sharif Husayn realized the importance of justifying his revolt on religious grounds. After all, he was leading a revolt by Muslims supported by non-Muslims against a Muslim caliph; a revolt which many would equate to treason against Islam. Sharif Husayn invited Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib and Fu'ād al-Khatib\* to publish a newspaper which would speak for the Arab Revolt.

The selection of Muhibb al-Khatib must have been influenced by his experience with *al-Mu'ayyad*, the Islamic paper of Egypt. Muhibb al-Khatib, on the other hand, seems to have joined Sharif Husayn because he hoped that the latter would be able to bring about the revival of Islam through the revival of the Arab nation.

The two Khatibs arrived in Jeddah in late July, 1916. However, as Fu'ād al-Khatib was good in the English language, the Sharif appointed him as the deputy foreign minister.<sup>34</sup> Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib was made the editor of *al-Qiblah*, the official organ of the Sharif and the Arab Revolt. Fu'ād wrote many guest editorials for *al-Qiblah*. Another person who joined this group of Arab activists around Sharif Husayn was Kāmil al-Qassāb. According to Sulaymān Musa, Sharif Husayn used to consult both Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib and Kāmil al-Qassāb on a daily basis on issues related to the Arab movement because "they were members of al-Fatat and trusted by other Arab

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\* A Muslim from Lebanon; no relation to Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib. (See Antonius, *The Awakening*, p. 109.)

<sup>34</sup> *Al-Qiblah*, No. 33 (Safar 11, 1335 / Dec 1916) p. 2 where he is described as "nâ'ib wakīl al-khârijiyyah".

parties."<sup>35</sup> However, by looking at Husayn's decision-making methods, it would be better to say that these two gentlemen gave "unsolicited advice" on a regular basis. For his support of the Arab Revolt, Khatib was sentenced to death in absentia by the Ottoman authorities in Syria.<sup>36</sup>

I have not been able to find the circulation figures for *al-Qiblah*, but by looking at the letters and articles therein, it seems to have been read by Arab journalists and politicians in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan and the Maghrib as well as among the Arab communities in North and South America. It was also circulating, although not in large numbers, among the Muslims in Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, and Singapore. Under the title "*al-Qiblah*," the paper states its aim as "service for Islam and the Arabs." *Al-Qiblah's* first editorial by Fu'ād al-Khatib elaborates this aim as follows:

...And we will explain to the whole world the Arab Movement and the facts about the CUP so that those who are near and far may know that our master and leader, a descendent of the family of the Prophet, a branch of the Hashimite tree, and a pride of the Islamic ummah, a genius of his era, a miracle of the time, His Majesty Sharif al-Husayn bin 'Ali (may Allah help him and grant him victory) has stood up for his religion which the Unionists have violated, and for the sake of his nation which has been treated with contempt by the tyrants. [By his stand,] the Sharif has purified Islam from the impurity of these (*zindiqs*) atheists, he reunited [the nation] that they had divided, and he restored the honour of the *sharī'ah* which

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35 Musa, *Wujūh*, p. 140.

36 Khayr al-Dīn al-Zirikli, *al-A'lām*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malā'iyn, 1980) p. 272.



they had despised. So peace be upon him on the day he rose [against the CUP], the day he shall rule, and the day he shall restore to Islam its glory through the blessings of his ancestor, our Prophet al-Mustafa...Therefore, every Muslim and every Arab who does not come under his flag and does not rally around him...is a traitor to the Arab [nation] and is torn away from the religion [of Islam].<sup>37</sup>

This first editorial left an impression that serving the cause of Islam and the Arab nation was tantamount to serving Sharif Husayn. As if to water down this image of the paper, Fu'ād al-Khatib wrote another guest editorial in *al-Qiblah's* sixth issue as follows:-

...And here we declare clearly, in view of the witnesses and with complete freedom, that we are not serving any particular person or a particular family; rather we are Arabs serving the Arabs, we are Muslims striving for the Muslims...Our ultimate hope is that the glory of the Arabs may return to the Arabs, and that the safety of the religion may return to the Muslims...This blessed revolt around which we have rallied and whose call we have answered is not related to one person without the other or to one group without the other, rather it is solely an Islamic duty...<sup>38</sup>

As a newspaper which was published twice weekly, *al-Qiblah* had a full page of news items mostly from Reuters. Its editorials were mostly on issues related to the justification of the Arab Revolt for the Arabs as well as non-Arab Muslim readers; criticism of the policies of the Unionist government; the relationship of Arabs among themselves, and *vis-a-vis* the non-Arab Muslims; proclamations of Sharif Husayn; and issues

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37 *Al-Qiblah*, no. 1 (Shawwāl 15, 1334 / August 18, 1916).

38 *Ibid*, no. 6 (Dhû al-Qa'dah 3, 1334 ).

related to the First World War. Some editorials by Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib compared the Allied forces with the Central Powers and emphasized that the Germans had evil designs for dominating the Muslim lands whereas the British were just interested in securing the independence of the Arab people.<sup>39</sup> The passage of time proved that Khatib was mistaken in his judgement about the British.

Khatib worked as the editor of *al-Qiblah* for almost three years from mid August 1916 to early March 1919. However, *al-Qiblah* bore his name as the editor until its last issue in 1924. During this period, Khatib left Mecca only once for a trip to Cairo where he got married in the spring of 1918, most probably in February.<sup>40</sup> During this visit to Cairo, Khatib also participated in private meetings organized by his friends to discuss the political future of the Arab world. One of the issues discussed in such meeting was the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

The Arabs came to know about the Sykes-Picot Agreement after the Russian Revolution of November 1917. When this issue was raised by the Egyptian papers, Khatib informed Sharif Husayn about it. According to Khatib, Husayn had no knowledge of such an agreement because when he took the Egyptian papers to Husayn, "I found him absolutely absent-minded" on this issue.<sup>41</sup> (Interestingly, *al-Qiblah* was completely silent on the Sykes-

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, issues nos. 17, 38, and 179.

<sup>40</sup> Khatib spent most of the spring of 1918 in Cairo. See Musa, *Wujûh*, p. 142. The date for his marriage is a rough calculation based on the news item in *al-Qiblah* (No. 159 dated 17 Jumadi I 1336 / 2 March 1918) about its editor's marriage.

<sup>41</sup> Musa, *Wujûh*, p. 142.

Picot Agreement. The only item about Palestine in *al-Qiblah* during Khatib's editorship is a news item published in November 1916 [issue no. 26] in which the American ambassador in Istanbul refuted the rumours that the Jews intended to buy Palestine from the Allies.)

However, the appearance of the Balfour Declaration and the disclosure of the Sykes-Picot Agreement had created an uneasy feeling among the Arabs. Many Arabs started rethinking the Anglo-Arab alliance; many started voicing their concern about what they feared to be the future absolute rule of the Sharifian family over all Arab countries. In the spring of 1918, seven Syrians residents of Cairo (some of whom were part of Shaykh al-Jaza'iri's circle and some were members of al-Fatat) got together and wrote a memorandum for the British government. They handed over the letter to the Arab Bureau in Cairo and asked that their identity be concealed until the appropriate time in future. The letter came to be known as "*risâlah al-Suriyyin al-sab'ah*" (the letter of seven Syrians). The British Foreign Office sent a reply which came to be known as "the Declaration to the Seven." According to Antonius, "Its significance lies in this, that it confirms England's previous pledges to the Arabs in plainer language than in any former public utterance, and, more valuable still, provides an authoritative enunciation of the principles on which those pledges rested."<sup>42</sup>

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42 Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, pp. 271-272; and also see Appendix D for the translation of the Arabic version of "the Declaration to the Seven".

Antonius has given the names of the seven Syrians as follows: Rafiq al-'Azm, Kāmil al-Qassāb, Mukhtār al-Sulh, 'Abd al-Rahmān Shāhbandar, Khālid al-Hakim, Fawzi al-Bakri and Hasan Himādeh. The name of Khatib does not appear in this list; but according to Sulaymān Musa, Khatib claimed to have participated in the writing of that letter and to have been one of the signatories to it. Khatib further says that the person who initiated this idea was Kāmil al-Qassāb, who accompanied him in his journey from Mecca to Cairo, "after we lost hope in the possibilities of democratic nature of Husayn's government."<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Amīn Sa'id, in his *Asrār al-Thawrah al-'Arabiyyah al-Kubra* (published three years before *The Arab Awakening*) gives the name of "Muhiyy (sic) al-Din al-Khatib" instead of Khālid al-Hakim.<sup>44</sup>

In the light of this conflicting narration and in the absence of any evidence from the seven persons who have been mentioned as the signatories of the letter, it is difficult to ascertain the truth about Khatib's claim. His presence in Cairo during that time is certain as is the fact that three of the seven persons mentioned by Antonius were friends of Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib. It is quite possible that he was part of the group when they were meeting to draft the letter, but when the final version was prepared he was already on his way back to Hijaz.

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<sup>43</sup> Musa, *Wujūh*, p. 142.

<sup>44</sup> Sa'id, *Asrār*, p. 246. The first name of Khatib has been misprinted as "Muhiyy" instead of "Muhibb". In Arabic script, it is easy to misread "ya" for "ba".

**Sharif Husayn in the eyes of Khatib:** Even if his involvement in the *risâlah al-Suriyyin al-Sab'ah* is true, Khatib never expressed whatever doubts he might have had about the motives of Sharif Husayn as long as the latter was in power.

In his *al-Qiblah* articles, Khatib very highly praised the Sharif and his Revolt. He describes the Arab Revolt as "the blessed movement of Hijaz and the Revolt of the Ahl al-Bayt (the family) of the Prophet in defence of this religion and in its desire for the good of the Muslims."<sup>45</sup>

In another article, Khatib discusses the role of the Arab nation in the revival of Islam and says

We are writing on this issue in light of the glowing lamp of our movement, His Majesty, the Hashimite King, the descendent of the spring of the holy light and the source of the magnificent guidance [that is, the Prophet of Islam]...<sup>46</sup>

In an article entitled "The Saviour King: His Majesty al-Husayn bin 'Ali," Khatib describes him as follows:

Yes, indeed, His Majesty, our Great Hashimite King, started the blessed movement for the above-mentioned motives; he was forced to this action because of his religious beliefs and national pride. He gathered the Arabs on a good and very critical issue upon which they had never been united before except once [during the Prophet's time], and this is the second time [that such a unity is taking place among the Arabs]. If this movement

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45 Khatib, "Inti'âsh al-'Alam al-Islâmi bi al-Nihdah al-Hijâziyyah al-Mubâarakah" (Revival of the Muslim World by the Blessed Revolt of Hijaz), *Al-Qiblah*, no. 8 (Dhû Qa'dah 10, 1334)

46 Khatib, "al-Islâm wa al-Jâmi'ah al-'Arabiyyah," *al-Qiblah*, no. 52 (Rabi' al-Thâni 19, 1335)

had no other benefit except this unity, then it would be a sufficient cause for pride and honour...

Every Arab and every Muslim who does not thank Allah for this [blessing] is lacking in his faith, and is ungrateful..."<sup>47</sup>

It was only after Husayn was forced by the Saudis to flee from Mecca in 1924 that Khatib wrote a critical article about his former employer entitled "al-Husayn bin 'Ali: as I saw him during three years." This article definitely raises questions about Khatib's probity in regard to his previous praises for Husayn in *al-Qiblah*. Being in the pay of the Sharif must have prevented Khatib from writing anything critical of his employer; after all, in Khatib's own words, "pay [of a government] is handcuffs."<sup>48</sup> But this does not explain the timing of the critical article: it was written five years after Khatib was free from the 'handcuffs'. The timing, most probably, served two purposes: Firstly, Khatib wanted to disassociate himself from the now no longer respected Sharif of Mecca. Secondly, Khatib was strongly attracted to the Wahhabi-Hanbali movement; by writing this article, he probably hoped to gain support of the Saudis.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, the critical review of Husayn by a person who worked so closely with him for three years deserves some consideration.

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47 "Al-Malik al-Munqadh," *al-Qiblah*, no. 87 (Sha'ban 24, 1335 / June 22, 1917). The article has been signed as "Abu Qusayy". This was Khatib's agnomen (*kunniyyah*); later on, he actually named his first son as "Qusayy".

48 Khatib, "Shaykh Muhammad Sulaymān," *al-Fath*, No. 530 (Shawwāl 24, 1355) p. 3.

49 On Khatib's support for the Wahhabis, see his "al-Wahhābiyyah," *al-Zahrā'* vol. 3 (1926) pp. 81-99.

Khatib connects the Arab Revolt to the conflict between the Unionists and the Sharif. He writes that when Husayn Pasha was convinced that the Turks would implement the Vilayet Law in any case, then "he decided to outstrip them by surprise and declared his revolt against them in the name of the Arabs, but in reality for his own throne."<sup>50</sup> This statement supports the views of Dawn that "Husayn rose against his government only when that government refused, in the spring of 1916, to guarantee his Amirate in the Hijaz."<sup>51</sup>

Khatib feels that Husayn not only outstripped the Turks but also hijacked the Arab nationalist movement. He writes, "It is the bad luck of Arab nationalism that unexpected events overtook the wise plans in which the men of the Arab movement were engaged. While they were working to raise the level of their masses through knowledge and civilization, and were trying to make them aware of their rights and obligations, they were suddenly overtaken by the World War...and then were faced with a *fait accompli* in form of the Hijazi Revolt which took place in the name of independence for the Arabs..."<sup>52</sup> Khatib's final judgement about al-Husayn bin 'Ali is in absolute contrast to what he wrote about him in *al-Qiblah*. He says:

The goal for which King Husayn revolted was to preserve the throne (*al-kursi*) which was threatened by the Unionists. He did not understand the great motto towards

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50 Khatib, "al-Husayn bin 'Ali," *al-Zahrâ'*, vol. 1 (1924) p. 193. Interestingly, the "Majesty," "the Saviour King," "the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet" of the war period becomes just an ordinary "Pasha" in 1924!

51 See *From Ottomanism*, p. 40ff.

52 *Al-Zahrâ'*, vol. 1, pp. 193-194.

which the history of Arab nationalism and the Islamic civilization was calling al-Husayn bin 'Ali."<sup>53</sup>

The article ends with the hopes and expectations Khatib had for Sharif Husayn. He writes that if Husayn had ruled as a constitutional monarch, followed advice of the experts and handled the public wealth wisely, "Muslims today would have had a mighty independent Arab government with power and strength, moving with giant steps towards revival of the Islamic civilization and furnishing it with the means of perfection."<sup>54</sup>

#### **THE SYRIAN ARAB GOVERNMENT**

The Arab capture of Damascus and the installation of the Syrian Arab government provided an excuse for Khatib to leave Husayn as well as a new hope for his ideals. Syria was, after all, his homeland. However, his decision to leave Husayn has generated speculation about the reason for his departure: was he fired, or did he leave by his own choice?<sup>55</sup> The first view is very unlikely. Instead, it seems that when Khatib realized that his hopes for the Arab nation and the Islamic civilization were not going to materialize under the leadership of Sharif Husayn, he decided to leave him.

He left Mecca on June 14, 1919 (Sha'ban 8, 1337). *Al-Qiblah* carried the news of its editor's departure.<sup>56</sup> Khatib stopped for a few days in Medina to visit the Prophet's mosque before moving on to Damascus.

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53 *Ibid.*

54 *Al-Zahrâ'*, vol. 1, p. 200.

55 Musa, *Wujûh*, p. 143.

56 "Safar Fādilayn Jalīlayn," *al-Qiblah*, no. 280 (Sha'ban 8, 1337), p. 2.



The sources available to me do not reveal much about Khatib's activity in the Syrian Arab government except that he worked on the central committee of al-Fatat party and was made editor of *al-'Āsimah* (The Capital), the official journal of the government.<sup>57</sup> However, by following the policies and role of al-Fatat during the Faysal era, we will, at the least, be able to grasp the circumstances in which Khatib worked in Syria.

From his first day in Damascus, Amir Faysal was surrounded by three groups: 1. Al-Fatat, composed mostly of Syrian Arab nationalists; 2. al-'Ahd, composed mostly of Iraqi military officers; and 3. the Arab Club, composed mostly of Palestinians. (There was one more important group in Syria which was initially ignored by Amir Faysal: the *wujuhâ'*, the conservative aristocrats.) However, al-Fatat was the most influential political organization during the short-lived Arab government in Damascus. In December 1918, al-Fatat created a frontal organization known as Hizb al-Istiqlâl al-'Arabi (the Party of Arab Independence).

Even though the conservative *wujuhâ'* won a resounding victory in the 1919 elections, al-Fatat was still able to dominate the Syrian Congress. The Congress continued to support Faysal in the hope that he would secure complete independence for the Arabs. Having failed in this goal, in early 1920, Faysal settled for the agreement with Clemenceau. But the Arab Congress, led by al-Fatat, strongly rejected the agreement.

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<sup>57</sup> Al-Jundi, *Mufakkirûn*, pp. 202-203; al-Kāzim, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, p. 857; 'Ali Sultān, *Ta'rikh Suriyyah*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Dār Talās, 1987) p. 261.

Faysal tried to win over the *wujuhâ'* but the nationalists reconvened the Syrian Congress in March 1920 and viciously attacked the Amir's agreement with Clemenceau. This attack was led by Kāmil al-Qassāb, an active member of al-Fatat and a close friend of Khatib. Faysal, now proclaimed as the King of Syria, was finally forced to adopt an uncompromising policy towards the French; he had virtually become a captive of his nationalist supporters.<sup>58</sup>

The French army occupied Damascus after a short fight with the Sharifian army on July 24, 1920 at Khan Maysalun. With the French occupation of Damascus, the Syrian Arab Government came to an end. The French military authorities immediately rounded up hundreds of nationalists. Some were thrown into prisons while others were summarily executed. About thirty-two nationalist leaders were condemned to death, though most had managed to escape to Palestine, Iraq or Egypt.<sup>59</sup>

It was under such circumstances that Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib felt that his life was in danger and therefore decided to go into hiding. For some months, he constantly moved from the house of one relative to that of another. Finally, disguised as a camel merchant, Khatib joined the caravan of Al al-Bassām which was taking camels to the Nile valley. Khatib travelled with the caravan from Syria into Palestine for three weeks until he reached Yafa where he applied for a travel permit in the name of "'Abdullāh Abu al-Fath." With the document in his

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58 Khoury, *Urban*, pp. 38-91; Kedourie, *England*, pp. 168-170.

59 Khoury, *Urban*, p. 92.

hand, he travelled by train to Cairo and settled in its more tolerant intellectual and political climate.<sup>60</sup>

This was the third time that Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib was forced to leave his homeland. More tiring than the mode of transportation used during this journey was the deep psychological strain due to the shattering of his dreams for the Arab nation in general and Syria in particular. The past decade proved to him that the path of political reform towards the revival of Islamic civilization had failed. How this influenced his future life becomes clear from the path he adopted for the revival of Islamic civilization: the path of religious reform enshrined in Hanbali fundamentalism.

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<sup>60</sup> Khatib, "Filastin Tantaqilu min Jihād ila Jihād," *al-Fath*, no. 520 (Sha'ban 6, 1355); al-Jundi, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203; al-Hāfiz, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 2, p. 858.

## CHAPTER THREE

## A SALAFI JOURNALIST AND WRITER

## KHATIB IN EGYPT

After the First World War, Egypt went through various intellectual and political phases: the struggle for independence (1919-1922); the experiment in constitutional government and the attack upon tradition (1923-1930); and the failure of liberalism and the reaction against Europe (1930-1950).

During the first phase of the post-First World War Egypt, Khatib was involved in the Arab movement and showed less interest in Egyptian affairs. But after the collapse of the Syrian Arab Government, Egypt became the center of Khatib's activities. Disillusioned by the clandestine societies in the first phase of his life, Khatib rarely participated in any political party of Egypt. He mostly worked as a journalist and a writer to promote the cause of religious reform by presenting and defending the puritanical view of Islam. From July 1920 to 1925, he worked for *al-Ahrâm*. In 1924, he started to publish *al-Zahrâ'*, a monthly journal which continued until 1930. He also started a weekly paper, *al-Fath*, which he published from 1926 to 1948. Khatib helped in editing and publishing of *Majallah al-Ikhwân al-Muslimîn*, the weekly journal of the

Muslim Brotherhood Society in 1933;<sup>1</sup> and edited *Nûr al-Islâm*, the journal of al-Azhar from 1952 to 1958.<sup>2</sup>

Khatib's non-journalistic activities were mostly conducted through *Jam'iyah al-Shubbân al-Muslimîn* (Young Muslim Men's Association).

Khatib's job at *al-Ahrâm* was more a matter of earning a living than anything else. It took him about four years to revive his own publishing house, and to start a monthly journal and then a weekly newspaper. The publishing house, the journal and the newspaper do not only properly fit into the goal which Khatib was trying to achieve but also reflect his reaction to the events of the time.

**Khatib as a Salafi Publisher:** *Dâr al-Matba'ah al-Salafiyyah* (Salafiyyah Press) was founded by Khatib in 1910 or 1911 when he worked for *al-Mu'ayyad*. However, the publishing house became active only in the 1920s.

*Al-Matba'ah al-Salafiyyah* was not just a business-oriented publishing house; as reflected in its name, the *Matba'ah* existed to serve the cause of the puritanical Muslim view. It also had the blessings of Khatib's mentor Shaykh Tâhir al-Jazâ'iri who actually suggested the name "Salafiyyah" for this press.<sup>3</sup> The *Matba'ah* served the salafiyyah view by publishing edited versions of classical Islamic literature on *hadîth* and

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1 Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) p. 185.

2 Al-Jundi, *Mufakkirûn*, p. 204.

3 Khatib mentions this in a footnote in "*al-Wahhâbiyyah*," *al-Zahrâ'*, vol. 2 (1926) p. 87.

*kalâm*, by publishing refutations of 'un-orthodox' sects of Islam, and by publishing critiques of works of the liberal intellectuals like Taha Husayn, Salâma Musa, Tawfiq al-Hakim and 'Ali 'Abd al-Râziq.<sup>4</sup>

**Khatib as a Salafi Journalist:** During the inter-war period, the Egyptian Press became more partisan as political parties started publishing their own newspapers and magazines.<sup>5</sup> This was also the time when the liberal intellectuals started their attack upon tradition beginning in 1925 with the publication of *al-Islâm wa Usûl al-Hukm* by Shaykh 'Ali 'Abd al-Râziq.

It was against this background that Khatib first started the monthly *al-Zahrâ'* and then the weekly *al-Fath*. The significance of Khatib's two papers become clear when we compare them to Rashid Ridâ's *al-Manâr* (1889-1937), a contemporary salafiyyah journal. While *al-Manâr* was Ridâ's personal mouthpiece, Khatib was able to gather a variety of writers inside and outside Egypt for *al-Zahrâ'* and *al-Fath*. Some of those who contributed to Khatib's journal and paper were Shakib Arslân (pan-Islamist from Geneva), Shibli al-Nu'mâni (a prominent Sunni scholar of India), 'Abd al-Rashid Ibrâhim (a disciple of Jamâl al-Din al-Afghâni), Shaykh Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn (who became the first

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4 Examples of al-Matba'ah al-Salafiyyah publications: (1) An important conservative response to 'Abd al-Râziq was *Haqîqah al-Islâm wa Usûl al-Hukm* [The Reality of 'Islam & the Bases of Authority'] (1926) by Shaykh Muhammad Bakhit al-Muti'i, a m.fti and a class-mate of 'Abduh. (2) Sayyid Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn al-Tunisi's critique on Taha Husayn's *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jâhili*. (3) Critique of Taha Husayn's *Fi al-Adab al-Jâhili* by Muhammad Ahmad al-Ghamrâwi entitled *al-Naqd al-Tahlîli li kitâb Fi Adab al-Jâhili* with an introduction by Shakib Arslân (1928).

5 Vatikiotis, *The History of Egypt*, p. 179.

editor of *Nûr al-Islâm*, the journal of al-Azhar)<sup>6</sup>, Muhammad 'Izzat Darwazah (a Palestinian historian), Muhammad Kurd 'Ali (a well-known Syrian historian), and Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Mâzini (a well-known Egyptian writer and pan-Arabist).<sup>7</sup>

Anwar al-Jundi considers *al-Zahrâ'* and *al-Fath* as successors to the Islamic journalist tradition started by Jamâl al-Din al-Afghâni and Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh in *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqa* (1884) and continued by 'Ali Yusuf in *al-Mu'ayyad* and Ridâ in *al-Manâr*.<sup>8</sup> In a general sense, this is true but one must bear in mind the difference between the salafiyyah concept of Muhammad 'Abduh and that of Khatib. We shall discuss this point in the next section.

***Al-Zahrâ'***: The first issue of this monthly journal appeared in August 1924 (Muharram 1343), and it continued to be published until 1930. *Al-Zahrâ'* was oriented more towards cultural and intellectual issues. Kampffmeyer has correctly described it as "a well directed magazine of more general contents, something like *al-Hilâl* and *al-Muqtataf*, but on an Islamic basis."<sup>9</sup> Its main goal was to preserve the historical traditions, the national ethnic character and the pure language

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6 On Khidr Husayn see W. Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) p. 122f.

7 On al-Mâzini's contribution to Egyptian pan-Arabism, see I. Gershoni, "The Emergence of Pan-Nationalism in Egypt," *Asian & African Studies*, vol. 16, pp. 82-88

8 Al-Jundi, *al-A'lâm*, p. 381.

9 G. Kampffmeyer, "Egypt and Western Asia," in Hamilton A.R. Gibb, *Whither Islam?* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1932) p. 105.

of the Arabs. How was the journal to pursue this goal? Its first editorial says that it will

[1] report on the facts concerning the science, culture and history of the Arabs, and the elements of Islamic civilization...

[2] monitor the present movement in Egypt, the Arab lands and the Islamic world at large...

[3] and devote special attention to the intellectual legacy of the early ancestors (*salaf*) and the men of Arab civilization...<sup>10</sup>

The issues discussed in *al-Zahrâ'* were wide ranging: critiques on liberal intellectuals and their works against the Eastern culture in general and Islam in particular; biographies of contemporary Arab personalities; traditionalism versus modernism; Egyptian national literature *vis-a-vis* Arabic literature; critical examination of Muslim society and institutions.

***Al-Fath*:** This weekly paper first appeared in early 1926 and continued until 1951 (1344-1371).<sup>11</sup> Beginning with 1947 it was changed from a weekly paper to that of a monthly periodical. The purpose of *al-Fath* was "to circulate the news and views of the Islamic world, to describe the good qualities of Islam and to refute the accusations levelled against Islam."<sup>12</sup>

The last purpose was in reaction to the attack of Egyptian liberal intellectuals upon Islam and Arab culture. *Al-Fath* took a firm stand against indiscriminate westernization and

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10 Khatib, *al-Zahrâ'*, vol. 1, No. 1.

11 Al-Jundi, *Mufakkirûn wa Udabâ'*, p. 194.

12 Khatib, *al-Zahrâ'*, vol. 3, p. 664.



secularism; as Anwar al-Jundi says (of course, with some exaggeration) that "it never let go a chance to refute even a single comment against Islam in the Egyptian or non-Egyptian Muslim press."<sup>13</sup> *Al-Fath* also fought against all attempts to forge an Egyptian identity distinct from the Arab world, and for the preservation of the classical (*al-fusha*) form of written Arabic as opposed to the colloquial (*al-'âmmiyyah*) form.

Unlike *al-Zahrâ'* which was more a cultural-intellectual journal published only once a month, the weekly *al-Fath* was more political and dealt with all important issues related to the entire Muslim world. As Kampffmeyer points out *al-Fath* was "much appreciated by Moslems, dealing with Islamic politics, ethics and religious matters."<sup>14</sup> The banner of *al-Fath* clearly stated that "*al-Fath* was for all followers of the *qiblah*; the Islamic world is one homeland." The paper carried regular letters and short reports from writers in England, Turkey, East Africa, India, Indonesia and China. However, *al-Fath* gave more attention to North Africa and Palestine.

The impact of *al-Fath* can be measured by the sensitivity of the British authorities in Egypt and the French in North Africa towards that paper as reflected in two episodes: (1) Khatib had written an article entitled "*al-Hurriyyah fi bilâd al-atfâl*" (Freedom in the Countries of Children) attacking Kamâl Atatürk of Turkey and Amânullâh Khan of Afghanistan for their secular

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13 Al-Jundi, *Mufakkirûn wa Udabâ'*, p. 196.

14 Kampffmeyer, p. 105.

policies. The Egyptian government tried Khatib for attacking leaders of friendly foreign countries and passed a suspended sentence of a month in prison against him.<sup>15</sup> (2) Before the Second World War, *al-Fath* circulated in North Africa without any hindrance; but during the War, besides the logistical problems of post and transportation, the paper was banned by the French authorities. However, a few copies still managed to enter North Africa disguised in a new cover like "al-Minhāj" or "al-Akhlāq."<sup>16</sup>

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#### **THE SALAFIYYAH MOVEMENT IN EGYPT**

"*Salafiyyah*" is a term used in the context of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to express the reaction of Muslim leaders to the military and political domination of Europe over the Muslim world at large. The most common reaction by the Muslims to Western domination has been the desire to regain the glory of Islam by reforming their own society. This reform movement was based on self-criticism: the Western world was able to dominate the Muslim world because the Muslims had corrupted their religion. To regain its past strength and glory, therefore, the Muslim world must return to the pure and uncorrupted Islam. This obviously is a nostalgic view of reform. Hence, the term *salafiyyah* which comes from *salaf* meaning "ancestors."

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15 Al-Jundi, *Mufakkirûn*, p. 203.

16 Al-Jundi, *Mufakkirûn*, p. 200.

However, "reform" or "returning to pure Islam" meant different things to different people. For Jamāl al-Din al-Afghani, Islamic reform was a political phenomenon intended "to renovate the solidarity of the Muslims and make them into a world power feared and respected." Whereas for Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh, Islamic reform was a cultural-intellectual phenomenon with the aim of returning "to a presumed rationalist Islam cleansed of superstitions and tyranny."<sup>17</sup>

The towering figure of Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh has shaped Islamic reformism for almost half a century since his death. He wanted to show that Islam and modernism were not incompatible; he had done so by propounding that the Islamic teachings were of two types: the essential and unchanging principles, and the changing and unessential social norms developed by the Muslims at different stages in their history. Making Islam compatible to modern times depended on distinguishing between the essential and the unessential parts of the Islamic system. This itself could not be done without reviving *ijtihād*--the intellectual process by which the '*ulamā*' would be able to guide the people in the changing circumstances of life.<sup>18</sup>

Shaykh 'Abduh did not succeed in convincing the conservative '*ulamā*' to formally allow the practice of *ijtihād*. This made it even more difficult for his disciples to preserve the tension created by him between the essential and unessential parts of

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17 Sylvia G. Haim, *Arab Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962) p. 20.

18 Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, see chapters 6 and 7 in particular p. 147, 163. Also see, Vatikiotis, *The History of Egypt*, pp. 194-196.

Islam. One group of his disciples "developed his emphasis on the legitimacy of social change into a *de facto* division between the two realms, that of religion and that of society, each with its own norms."<sup>19</sup> People like Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, Qāsim Amin, 'Ali 'Abd al-Rāziq, and Sa'd Zaghiul belong to this group. Another group of 'Abduh's followers "carried his insistence of the unchanging nature...of the essential Islam in the direction of a Hanbali fundamentalism."<sup>20</sup> To this group belong people like Tāhir al-Jazā'iri, Rashīd Ridā and Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib.

It was this group which is considered as the heir of the reformist or salafiyyah movement of 'Abduh. However, there is an important difference between the salafiyyah concept of Shaykh 'Abduh and his disciple Rashīd Ridā. Albert Hourani explains 'Abduh's concept of *salaf* as follows:

...he does not use the term in a technical sense to mean the first generation of friends and disciples of the Prophet; he uses it more generally to refer to the central tradition of Sunni Islam in its period of development: the great theologians of the third and fourth Islamic centuries, Ash'ari, Baqillani, Maturidi, are also salaf.<sup>21</sup>

Hourani further explains,

When 'Abduh talked of the *salaf*, he meant in a general way the creators of the central tradition of Muslim thought and devotion, from the Prophet to al-Ghazali.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 163.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 163; also see Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>21</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 230.

Rashīd Ridā's more narrow definition of *salaf* has been given by Professor Hourani as follows:

...the true Islam is that which was taught by the Prophet and the 'Elders' (*salaf*)...the Islam of the 'Elders' is that of the first generation who had known Muhammad.<sup>23</sup>

Another very significant difference between the salafism of 'Abduh and Ridā is on the position of Arabs in Islam: while the partiality for Arabs is almost absent in the salafism of 'Abduh, it is strongly detected in that of Rashīd Ridā. On this issue, Rashīd Ridā is closer to 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Kawākibi than 'Abduh.<sup>24</sup>

Rashīd Ridā was the first person to use the word "*ummah*" for the Arabs exclusively. As Sylvia Haim writes, "Traditionally, the word [*umma*] meant the body of all the Muslims, and made no distinction based on race, language, or habitation. But Rashid Rida seems here to say that the Turks, Muslims as they were, were not really part of the *umma*, that the *umma* consisted only of Arab Muslims."<sup>25</sup> However, it must be stated that this partiality towards the Arabs was, in Ridā's view, for the sake of Islam. He believed that Islamic revival could take place only at the hands of the Arabs and that non-Arabs had altered the true nature of the caliphate and the *umma*. In Ridā's view, tribal solidarity of other Muslim people was in conflict with

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23 *Ibid*, p. 230.

24 On the difference between 'Abduh and Rida on this issue, see Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, pp. 22-23; on Kawākibi's views, see Khaldun S. al-Husry, *Three Reformers* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966) pp. 78-94.

25 Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, p. 22.

the interests of the *ummah*, but that of the Arabs was in harmony with them!<sup>26</sup>

We can say, in conclusion, that while Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh was a salafi in the general sense of the word, Rashîd Ridā was a salafi-Arabist with a strong Hanbali inclination. Our subject, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib also fits into the salafi-Arabist group of Rashîd Ridā. It was this group, also known as the al-Manār group, that provided the major opposition to secularism and liberalism in the 1920s and 1930s in Egypt.

**SALAFISM OF AL-KHATIB:**

**Islam and Arabism** are so well synchronized in Khatib's thoughts and writings that scholars had difficulty in classifying him as an Islamic activist or an Arab nationalist.<sup>27</sup> Professor Hourani's comment about Ridā and Arslān that "when they talk of the problem of Islam they are thinking first of all about Arab Islam, and regard other Muslims, in Arslan's own phrase, as 'the pupils of the Arabs',"<sup>28</sup> is equally applicable to Khatib. If I was to put Khatib on the scale of 1 to 100 (with Islam at 1 and secular Arabism at 100), I would place him at the very center. On the one hand, we have those who promote pan-Islamic nationalism without any partiality to the Arabs (for example, al-Afghāni and 'Abduh); and on the other hand, we have those who promote

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26 Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 300-301.

27 See the debate in Cleveland, "The Role of Islam as Political Ideology in the First World War," p. 87.

28 Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 299.

pan-Arabism without any allegiance to Islam (for example, Michel Aflaq and Sāti' al-Husri).

On the relation of Islam and the Arabs, Khatib echoes the views of al-Kawākibi. He believes that "the Islam whose leaders and defenders are not Arabs is something else but not the Islam [of the first generation of Muslims]. Reviving Arabism (*al-'urûbah*) from its slumber is actually the revival of Islam."<sup>29</sup> The Arab nation and the religion of Islam are dead without each other. He writes, "The Arab homeland is the fortress of Islam in which it seeks protection, and its refuge in which it is entrenched...Islam renews its strength in Arab lands...[On the other hand,] the Arab nation knows that it has no life except through Islam."<sup>30</sup> Islam and Arabism, in Khatib's view, need each other. "If a barrier is erected between Islam and Arabism, Arabism will become a body without soul and Islam will become a soul without body."<sup>31</sup> As for the famous statement made by many Arab nationalists that "we were Arabs before we were Muslims," Khatib says: "This is no doubt true. But we were nothing before Islam!"<sup>32</sup>

These views obviously place Khatib in the category of the salafi-Arabist camp, against the conservatives as well as against the secular Arab nationalists. It is interesting, at this point, to briefly compare the views of Khatib with those

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29 Khatib, "Al-Masābih al-lati istayqazat al-'Urûbah 'ala Dawuha," *al-Fath*, No. 513 (17 Jamādi II, 1355) p. 295.

30 Khatib, "Al-Islām wa al-Watan al-'Arabi," *al-Fath*, No. 531 (24 Shawwāl 1355). Also see, Gershoni, "Arabization," p. 32.

31 Al-Jundi, *al-Mufakkirûn*, p. 197.

of Michel Aflaq on Islam and Arabism. Aflaq believed that Arabism has its own independent life in which Islam was just one phase in its movement. And that Arab nationalism must now continue without Islam.<sup>33</sup> Khatib, on the other hand, believed that Islam is the eternal soul of Arab nationalism. Arabs became one nation by the blessing of Islam; without it Arab nationalism is a body without its soul.

Khatib also viewed the history of Muslims from a salafi-Arabist angle. In the traditional classification of history, the first four caliphs are known as "*al-khulafâ' al-râshidûn*" (the rightly-guided caliphs), thus implying that the Umayyad and 'Abbasid dynasties were not necessarily "rightly-guided". The ideal Golden Age was restricted to the Prophet and the *khulafâ' râshidûn*. But the Salafis of Egypt, including Khatib, Arabized Islamic history by extending the Golden Age to include all the Arab rulers from the *râshidûn* to the last 'Abbasid caliph. For example, in an article on modernization and reform, Khatib writes that we must equip ourselves with strength "so that it may fill in the cracks that have occurred in walls of our fortress which has started to deteriorate since seven hundred years [that is, after the collapse of 'Abbasid

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32 Ibid, p. 198; also see Haim, p. 35.

33 Michael W. Suleiman, *Political Parties in Lebanon* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967) pp. 139-140. I prefer Suleiman's view that "For Aflaq, then, Islam was Arab nationalism," to that of Sylvia Haim that "for Aflaq, Islam is Arab nationalism." See Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, pp. 63-64. What Haim attributes to Aflaq in this phrase would apply more to Muhibb al-Khatib.



caliphate]."<sup>34</sup> The last seven centuries of the non-Arab period were described by the salafiyyah writers as the dark ages of the Muslim *ummah*.<sup>35</sup>

Khatib believes that the traditional history of Arabs and Islam is unfair to the Arabs in general and the *salaf* in particular because it "was written after the demise of Arab rule and the transfer of their rule to non-Arabs..." He strongly believes that the Arab scholars have a duty to purify Arab history from "the lies and accusations leveled against the noble companions [of the Prophet] and the great men [of Arab history]."<sup>36</sup> Khatib's call for the review of Arab history is also shared by Sāti' al-Husri, the well-known spokesman of Arab nationalism. However, both call for the review of Arab history for completely different reasons. Khatib wanted the review for the sake of Arabs as well as for the sake of salafi Islam; whereas al-Husri wanted the review for the sake of separating Arab history from Islamic history.<sup>37</sup>

Although Khatib would surely disagree with al-Husri in separating the history of Arabs from that of Islam, both are in agreement in defining the Arab nation. In his definition of the Arab nation, Khatib is closer to al-Husri than to al-Kawākibi. While for the latter, the Arab nation is defined more in

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34 Khatib, "Hamlah al-Tajdid wa al-Islāh," *al-Zahrā'*, vol. 4 (1927) p. 4.

35 Sylvia Haim traces this "periodization" of Islamic history by contemporary Arab historians to European orientalists. See, *Arab Nationalism*, pp. 21-22.

36 Al-Jundi, *A'lām*, p. 395.

37 Cleveland, *The Making*, p. 121ff.

geographical and racial terms,<sup>38</sup> Khatib and al-Husri define the Arab nation on linguistic terms: all those who speak Arabic are Arabs. "*Al-nâtiqûn bi al-dâd*" is a recurring theme in the writings of both of them. The Arabic language was the only genuine link, in Khatib's view, between the various Semitic peoples. He writes, "At some point in history, the Arabic language spread as far as Central Asia and Southern Europe...but it did not take root except in those places where it found the legacy of its mother, the Semite language. Therefore, the present Arab homeland (*al-watan al-'arabi*) is based on the sound foundation of nationalism."<sup>39</sup> By "the sound foundation of nationalism" Khatib meant the common language.

Khatib and al-Husri were allies in opposing the Egyptian intellectuals in their attempt to forge a new identity for Egypt. However, their motives were only partially identical: al-Husri wanted to preserve the Arab identity of Egypt, whereas Khatib wanted to preserve the Arab as well as the Islamic identity of that country. Both emphasized the Arabic language as the most important link of Egypt to the Arab world.<sup>40</sup>

#### **KHATIB AND THE LIBERAL INTELLECTUALS**

With such a partiality for the Arabs, the salafi Khatib was naturally opposed to the liberal/secular intellectuals of

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38 Al-Husry, *Three Reformers*, p. 85; also see Israel Gershoni, "Arabization of Islam," *Asian & African Studies*, vol. XIII (March 1979) p. 42.

39 Khatib, "Sultân al-Lugha al-'Arabiyyah," *al-Zahrâ'*, vol. 2 (1925) p. 248.

40 Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, p. 50.

Egypt. These intellectuals had started the process of redefining the identity of Egypt and Egyptians in the twenties. Culturally, they were becoming zealous westernizers and were moving away from Arab-Islamic values. Politically, they were attempting to develop a specifically Egyptian sense of nationalism which would separate it from the Arab world as well as from Africa. Intellectually, some of them sought to create a Pharaonic identity for Egypt.

This was being done mostly on the elite level and away from the masses who all along continued to identify themselves with Islam, to speak Arabic and to think of themselves as Egyptian Arabs. This was one of the important factors in the success of the conservative and salafi forces who intensified their attack upon the liberal intellectuals and the westernizing politicians during the 1930s.

Khatib mostly used the forum of his monthly and weekly publications to attack the liberal/secular intellectuals. In the following pages, we will survey the ideas and thoughts of Khatib on major issues of contention between the forces of tradition and the forces of modernization in Egypt.

**RELIGION AND POLITICS:** Before the First World War, the Arab Middle East was an empire as well a caliphate. The Ottoman Sultan was not only the king but also the religious leader of his domain. (Khatib, as the editor of the Sharifian organ, *al-Qiblah*, openly attacked the Ottoman government but refrained from criticizing the Sultan.) However, the abolition of caliphate in 1924 by Kamal Ataturk occasioned general

discussion among the Muslims about the caliphate: Was it a necessary institution? Could it be separated from political authority?

The issue of the caliphate generated great interest among the Muslims in Egypt. The 'ulamā' of al-Azhar and the salafiyyah group led by Ridā were very much inclined to see the institution of caliphate continue with the appointment of a new caliph. Although Khatib does not seem to have written anything significant on this issue, I believe he must have welcomed the abolition of the Turkish caliphate as a chance of installing an Arab on the seat of the caliphate. An Arab caliph was at the heart of Khatib's version of salafism and Islamic revival.

Khatib viewed the caliphate as a necessary institution for the Muslims. This can be seen in the review he wrote on 'Ali 'Abd al-Rāziq's *al-Islam wa Usûl al-Hukm* (1925). This book was also a result of the interest generated in the institution of the caliphate after its abolition in 1924. 'Ali Abd al-Rāziq's main theme was that there is no religious ground for the institution of the caliphate and that historically the caliphate had been imposed upon the Muslims by force. 'Abd al-Rāziq proposed the complete separation of religion and state in Islam. Muslims need not look backward for their political system; they should instead look towards the modern Western system.<sup>41</sup>

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41 On 'Abd al-Rāziq's book and Muhammad al-Bakhit's response to it, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 184-192; on Rashid Rida's response to 'Abd al-Rāziq, see Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, pp. 179-185. Also see Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1933) pp. 254-268;

Khatib wrote a critical but polite review --probably because 'Abd al-Rāziq was a shaykh-- to *al-Islām wa Usūl al-Hukm*. After admitting that persons like Rashīd Ridā are more qualified than himself to review the book, he criticizes 'Abd al-Rāziq in two ways: Khatib's main objection is that 'Abd al-Rāziq's concept of the caliphate is contrary to that of the early Muslims (*salaf*) and therefore not valid.

Then he moves to a rhetorical argument and says that a caliph's responsibility revolves around three things: implementation of the *sharī'ah*, leading the *ummah* in religious matters, and presiding over the political body of Islam. Therefore, Khatib concludes, the caliphate is a necessity at all times even if no clear religious texts are found for it.<sup>42</sup> In this line of argument, Khatib does not realize that rather than rejecting he is actually supporting the conclusion of 'Ali 'Abd al-Rāziq that Muslims should be able to choose their political system based on their own reasoning without going back to the religious texts.

**TRADITION VERSUS MODERNIZATION:** During the twenties, the liberal intellectuals embarked on attacking the Arab-Islamic tradition of Egypt and on promoting a Western orientation for their society.

Khatib was indeed part of the traditional camp, but that does not necessarily mean that he was totally against modernization. He was against the indiscriminate adoption of

Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*, pp. 60-63.

<sup>42</sup> Khatib, *al-Zahrā'*, vol. 1 (Shawwal 1343) pp. 657-661.

the Western values and systems as proposed by liberal writers like Taha Husayn and Tawfiq al-Hakim.

Taha Husayn, who has been described as the most systematic thinker and the most daring of all the liberal intellectuals, repeatedly challenged the traditional view and pleaded for an unequivocal orientation of Egypt towards the West. He writes, "We must follow the path of the Europeans so as to be equals and partners in civilization, in its good and evil, its sweetness and bitterness, what can be loved or hated, what can be praised or blamed."<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps being the most daring critic of the traditional view, Taha Husayn became the target of Khatib's harshest remarks. *Al-Zahrâ'* and the Salafiyyah Press published many reviews and books criticizing Taha Husayn's *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jâhili* (1926). Khatib himself wrote an article entitled "*Ma a'rifuhu 'an Taha Husayn*" (What I know about Taha Husayn).<sup>44</sup> The major part of this article is a personal attack on Husayn and an attempt to discredit his academic standing. In response to Husayn's claim in *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jâhili* that the stories of Abraham and Ishmael might have been a kind of fiction inserted in the Qur'ân to create a link between Islam, Christianity and Judaism,<sup>45</sup> Khatib writes, "We request him to inform us how he

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43 Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 330; Nadav Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1961) p. 175. On Husayn and his ideas, besides these two sources, also see Charles D. Smith, "The 'Crisis of Orientation': The Shift of Egyptian Intellectuals to Islamic Subjects in the 1930s," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 4 (1973) pp. 382-410.

44 *Al-Zahrâ'*, vol.3, pp. 268-276.

45 See C.D. Smith, "The 'Crisis'," pp. 393-395.

reached this conclusion. Did he reach this doubt about Abraham and Ishmael from new archeological discoveries which only he might have discovered or seen(!) during his last visit to Syria?"<sup>46</sup> Khatib's dislike of Husayn never decreased. Ten years after writing this disparaging article against Taha Husayn, he reaffirmed its contents in *al-Fath*.<sup>47</sup>

Another liberal intellectual who strongly advocated total westernization was Tawfiq al-Hakim, a novelist and play writer. In response to Hakim's article in *al-Ahrâm* entitled "*Hal yûjad al-Yawm Sharq?*" [Is there an East today?], Khatib answered in the affirmative. He then went on to explain that he was not against adopting Western civilization; rather he believed that Western civilization was not an indivisible entity: it was composed of material, cultural and spiritual components. And the East did not need the Western culture or its spiritual teachings; it only needed to adopt the technology of the West.

Indiscriminate or total westernization is tantamount, in Khatib's view, to betrayal of Islam. He writes, "Those who ask 'Is there an East today?' actually mean to say, 'Is Islam relevant today?!'"<sup>48</sup> Among the liberal intellectuals, some were daring and openly attacked Islam while others were cautious and

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46 Khatib and his friend Shakib Arslân did not shy from attacking the blindness of Husayn. Arslân, for example, in an article in *al-Zahrâ'*, writes: "Praise be to Him who combined the blindness of mental vision with the blindness of eye-vision!" See vol. 3 (1926) p. 291. Also see a humorous article on Husayn by Ibrâhim al-Mâzini "*Taha Husayn fi Mizân al-Tashkîk*" [Taha Husayn on the Scale of Skepticism] where he describes three 'dimensions' of Husayn as a "Shaykh," an "Afandi," and a "Dr." See vol. 2, p. 612.

47 *Al-Fath*, No. 510 (25 Jumadi I, 1355) p. 235.

48 *Al-Jundi*, *al-Musâjilât*, p. 283.

used terms like 'the Arab culture' or 'the Eastern culture'. Khatib believed that the attack on the Arab culture of Egypt or the Eastern culture in general was actually a disguise for attacking Islam.

**ARABIC LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE:** One of the areas in which the liberal intellectuals were attempting to orient Egypt towards the West was language and literature. The most famous figures in this field were Salāma Musa and Tawfiq al-Hakim.

Salāma Musa was the most famous as well as the most daring proponent of the idea that Egypt was part of the West rather than the East. He said, "I am a disbeliever (*kâfir*) in the East, a believer (*mu'min*) in the West." In his attempt to separate Egypt from the East, he harshly criticized Arabic literature and also those Egyptian writers who followed the style and subject matter of *jâhili* poetry. For Musa, "Arabic *adab* prevents literature from renewing itself. It causes the writer to look backward, seeking inspiration in the past, rather than looking hopefully to the future or confidently to himself."

This attack upon Arab-inspired literature and Arab-oriented writers culminated in 1929-1931 in vitriolic attacks of Salāma Musa and his friends associated with *al-Majalla al-Jadidah* (The New Journal). Salāma Musa, in an article entitled "*Awkâr al-Raj'iyah*" (Webs of Reactionism) aggressively attacked Egyptian-based Syrian and Lebanese writers who promoted an Arab-Islamic orientation in Egypt. Those singled out as reactionary writers were Rashîd Ridā, Mustafa Sādqi al-Rāfi'i



and Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib.<sup>49</sup> This shows that Khatib's campaign against disassociating Egypt from Islam and the Arab world had some impact on the Muslims of that country otherwise Musa would not even have bothered to attack him by name.

Khatib responded by attacking the motives of Salāma Musa. He believed that Musa was using the idea of total westernization to put an end to Islam in Egypt, and that he did not aim for social reform but for the total destruction of the Egyptian Muslim society. The industrial civilization to which Musa was calling the Egyptians was not, in Khatib's view, entirely "industrial," instead it had many other elements including the religion of Christianity. So in the view of Khatib, Salāma Musa was actually promoting the cause of the Christian missionaries in the guise of modernization and westernization. Khatib considered Musa as an intellectual follower of Samuel Zwemer, a prominent Christian missionary and author of books on Islam.<sup>50</sup> Writing for a Muslim audience, Khatib found it appealing to take advantage of Salāma Musa's Coptic background, and attempted to discredit him as a missionary in disguise.

Musa's friend, Tawfiq al-Hakim strongly believed in the reawakening of Egypt, that is, the re-orientation of Egypt away from Arab-Islamic culture and towards the ancient Pharaonic

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49 On Salāma Musa and the quotations given above, see Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*, pp. 115, 119, 126-129.

50 For Khatib's response, see al-Jundi, *al-Musâjilât wa al-Ma'ârik al-Adabiyah* [Literary Contests and Debates] (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1975) pp. 347-349. Also see, Khatib, "Misr al-'Arabiyyah," *al-Fath*, No. 242 (22 Shawwāl, 1349).

civilization.<sup>51</sup> In order to Egyptianize his novels, Hakim used colloquial (*'âmmiyyah*) Egyptian dialect instead of classical (*fusha*) Arabic.

Khatib strongly defended the use of *fusha* Arabic not just from a linguistic point of view but as an essential link between Egypt and other Arab nations. According to Khatib, "the real difference between *'âmmiyyah* and *fusha* among the Arabs is that geographically the *fusha* extends over all the Arab lands binding them (at least culturally and literarily) into a single homeland (*watan*). If we decide to replace the *fusha* with *'âmmiyyah*...we will be cutting off the strongest link which binds Egypt to other [Arab] countries." As mentioned earlier, Khatib defined the Arab nation in linguistic terms: all those who speak Arabic are Arabs. Obviously, the Arabic which binds the Arabs of different lands together is the *fusha* Arabic. Most probably, Khatib thought that if the *'âmmiyyah* becomes acceptable in the literary circles, then it would not take long before the liberals propose the replacement of Arabic alphabets with Latin. (The example of Turkey was very fresh in the minds of both parties in this intellectual dispute.)<sup>52</sup> Such a decision would completely alienate the next generation of Egyptians not only from their Arab ancestors and neighbours but also from their Islamic heritage. The *fusha* was the link of Egypt not only to the Arab world but also to Islam. Therefore,

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51 Vatikiotis, *The History of Egypt*, p. 311.

52 For Khatib's opposition to 'Abd al-'Aziz Fahmi's proposal to replace Arabic script by Latin, see al-Jundi, *al-Musâjilât*, p. 41.

any attempt to undermine the *fusha* Arabic in Egypt was opposed by the salafi-Arabist Khatib.

Furthermore, in Khatib's view, the *fusha* Arabic is important also for the sake of Islamic unity. He writes, "Moreover, the geographical extension of the *fusha* Arabic goes beyond the Arab world because the language of the Qur'ān is common among five hundred million Muslims whose hearts are turned towards us."<sup>53</sup> Replacing *fusha* with *'āmmiyyah* would, Khatib feared, turn the hearts of non-Arab Muslims away from the Arabs.

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Khatib was indeed in the fore-front of the salafi writers who stood against the attack of the Egyptian liberal intellectuals upon Islam and Arab culture in the twenties and thirties. Khatib not only fought to preserve Egypt's link to the Arab-Islamic world, he also worked to involve the Egyptians in pan-Arab activities as manifested in the Palestinian issue to which we now turn.

#### **KHATIB AND THE PALESTINE ISSUE**

**Egypt and the Palestinian Problem:** The involvement of the Egyptian government in the Palestinian problem was slow because the Egyptian politicians were busy either with their domestic political struggle or with their efforts to end the British presence. Even the Wailing Wall disturbances of 1929 attracted little attention from the Egyptian government. It took a more

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<sup>53</sup> Al-Jundi, *al-Musâjilât*, p. 87.

active role in the Palestine problem only after the Arab Revolt of 1936.<sup>54</sup>

The involvement of the Egyptian government in the Palestine problem was in response to the popular protests in the thirties. The people of Egypt were made aware of the Palestinian problem through the activities of various Muslim organizations like the Society of Muslim Brothers and the Young Men's Muslim Association (Y.M.M.A). The Y.M.M.A. was the most active organization in publicizing the Palestinian problem. Cohen writes that in Egypt "the only element that seemed to be consistent in its sincere interest in the development in Palestine was al-Shubbān al-Muslimin [Y.M.M.A.]...In the wake of the October 1933 disturbances there, the Y.M.M.A. took the lead in attempting to bring about some degrees of Egyptian response."<sup>55</sup>

**Khatib and the Y.M.M.A.:** Jam'iyyah al-Shubbān al-Muslimin (Young Men's Muslim Association) was formed in 1927 by Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, Ahmad Taymur Pasha, Shaykh Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz Shawish and twelve youths.<sup>56</sup> This association was formed in response to "the excessiveness of

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54 For more details, see James Jankowski, "Egyptian Responses to the Palestine Problem in the Interwar Period," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 12 (1980) pp. 1-38.

55 Amnon Cohen, "The Beginnings of Egypt's Involvement in the Palestine Question: Some European Perspectives." *Asian and African Studies*, vol. 16 (1982) No. 1, p. 141

56 J. Heyworth-Dunne, *Religious and Political Trends in Modern Egypt* (Washington: by author, 1950) p. 11.

missionary activities and the activities of secular circles disguised as modernism."<sup>57</sup>

Although the constitution of Y.M.M.A. stated that it would not interfere in politics<sup>58</sup> the background of its first board of directors and the political events of the Middle East made it very difficult for the association to stay away from politics.

Its first president, Dr. 'Abd al-Hamid Sa'id was a deputy, a member of Hizb al-Watani (the Nationalist Party) and ardently hostile to the British. Its vice-president, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz Shawish was an original member of the Nationalist Party under Mustafa Kāmil and editor of its organ, al-Liwā; and he was also a student of 'Abduh. Heyworth-Dunne writes that Shawish was "looked upon as one of the outstanding political agitators of the time." Its secretary general, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib was a veteran of pre-World War I politics. Its treasurer was Ahmad Taymur Pasha, a member of senate.<sup>59</sup>

Political events of the time forced a response from the Y.M.M.A. The attack on Islam in Egypt, especially by the Christian missionaries; the Wailing Wail incident of Palestine in 1929; the French policy regarding the Berbers in Morocco in

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57 Khatib as quoted by al-Jundi, *Mufakkirûn*, p. 203.

58 On the constitution of Y.M.M.A. see G. Kampffmeyer, "Egypt and Western Asia," pp. 103-104.

59 J. Heyworth-Dunne, p. 12. On Dr. 'Abd al-Hamid Sa'id, see Kempffmeyer, p. 106; On Shawish, who was also a former lecturer of Arabic in Oxford University, see Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 184, 210. For the report of the election of Y.M.M.A.'s first board of directors, see *al-Zahrâ'*, vol. 4 (1927) p. 253.

the thirties; and the colonial measures of Italy in Tripoli-- all these events stirred up the sentiments of the men of Y.M.M.A.<sup>60</sup> These events also prompted the Association to set up branches in many countries including Palestine, Syria, Iraq (Basra), India (Bombay) and Zanzibar.<sup>61</sup> All the foreign branches were run independently. However, the Egyptian association was looked upon as the model and guide for most activities.

These elements forced the Y.M.M.A. into politics from time to time. For example, in September 1947, the Y.M.M.A. joined fifteen other extreme groups (including the Ikhwān al-Muslimīn) to form a bloc to organize resistance to the British and to prevent any Egyptian from negotiating with them.<sup>62</sup>

The Y.M.M.A. was at the fore-front in galvanizing public support for the Palestinian cause. Its support for Palestine was expressed in three forms: 1. sending letters of protest to the Egyptian and British governments, the League of Nations and the commissions set up for investigating the 1929 incident; 2. organizing public meetings and raising funds for the Palestinian cause; and 3. recruiting volunteers to serve in Palestine under an Egyptian officer.<sup>63</sup>

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60 Kampffmeyer, pp. 120-126.

61 Kampffmeyer, pp. 109-112, Heyworth-Dunne, p. 13. *Al-Fath* published regular reports from branches of Y.M.M.A. in other countries; see No. 506, p. 147; No. 508, p. 179.

62 Heyworth-Dunne, p. 46.

The Y.M.M.A. was not a fringe organization; its aims and programs reflected the Islamic dimension of Egypt, a dimension which had been largely ignored by the Western historians of the Middle East in preference for the glimmerings of secularism and liberalism in that part of the Muslim world. Professor Kempffmeyer, who had first-hand information on the Y.M.M.A., correctly stated in 1932 that the Association "is a better illustration than anything else of the present state of mind not only in Egypt but in a large part of the Arabic speaking world as well." He further writes, "I dare to say that the Y.M.M.A. is the one great movement of the Arabic-speaking world of today, and that its importance and influence, at the present time and in future, can hardly be overestimated."<sup>64</sup>

The Y.M.M.A. was considered by Hajj Amin, the Mufti of Jerusalem, as the most supportive organization of Palestinian cause. Among the guests at the inauguration of the repairs to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on August 29, 1928 were the President of Y.M.M.A. Dr. 'Abd al-Hamid Sa'id and its Secretary General Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib.<sup>65</sup> The Mufti called a General Muslim Congress in 1931 at Jerusalem. This Congress --which was "probably the most important Pan-Islamic manifestation in Palestine during the period of Mandate"-- adopted a

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63 Heyworth-Dunne, p. 14, 48; A. Cohen, p. 141; Kempffmeyer, p. 123; al-Rimāwi, "Awraq," pp. 105-107; al-Jundi, *A'lām*, p. 381.

64 Kempffmeyer, pp. 102-103; 108.

65 U.M. Kupferschmidt, "The General Muslim Congress of 1931 in Jerusalem," *Asian & African Studies*, vol. 12 (March 1978) No. 1, p. 124; Khatib describes his journey in *al-Fath*, No. 520.

recommendation to establish new branches of the Y.M.M.A. throughout the Muslim world and pointed out the necessity of unifying all existing branches into a 'cultural army'.<sup>66</sup> In appreciation of the Y.M.M.A.'s role in promoting the Palestinian cause, a street in Gaza was named after Dr. 'Abd al-Hamid Sa'id.<sup>67</sup>

It was in the Y.M.M.A. that Khatib "found more fertile ground for building up a virile force on the teachings of Islam, which helped him to carry reforms much further, and amongst a much larger group."<sup>68</sup> The approach of the Y.M.M.A. to the Palestinian question bears the mark of Khatib's influence in presenting the Palestinian problem in an Islamic context. To make the Muslims aware of the historical link between al-Aqsa mosque and the Prophet of Islam, the Y.M.M.A. proposed that the 27th of Rajab\* be declared as "Palestine Day" in the Muslim world.<sup>69</sup> Another example of how the Palestine issue was given an Islamic context can be seen in the Y.M.M.A.'s letter to the League of Nations:

Every Moslem in whatever part of the earth regards himself as a warrior who stands up together with the Moslems of Palestine to defend a pledge put into their hands. Moslems never will allow Zionists to make a site sacred to them a center of their national propaganda, as long as there is

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66 Kupferschmidt, "The General Muslim Congress," p. 123, 148.

67 Khatib, "Filastin Tantaqil," *al-Fath*, No. 520, p. 477.

68 Heyworth-Dunne, p. 12.

\* The 27th of Rajab is the day of the Prophet of Islam's ascension (*mi'râj*) to the heavens which took place from al-Aqsa mosque.

69 *Al-Fath*, No. 517, p. 402.



left on the surface of the earth one Moslem, and as long as there is living blood pulsing in the veins of that Moslem.<sup>70</sup>

Khatib had all along presented the Palestine issue as an Islamic issue. He writes, "The sacrilege of the holy places will unleash the anger of Muslims not [only] in the small city of Jerusalem, not [only] in Palestine with its limited boundaries, but in all parts of the world because we consider this action as a challenge to our Islamic consciousness. And let those who need to know be aware that a Muslim might tolerate certain aggression for a time, but he will never allow anyone --weak or strong-- to attack his holy places or the sanctity of his religion." Khatib continues that "If this *fitna* is revived, then every Muslim in the world will consider it as an attack on his person before an attack on his Palestinian Muslim brother."<sup>71</sup>

Khatib reminds the Jewish people of "a reality that every span of the land of Palestine is a holy Islamic site in the eyes of all Muslims of the world for many reasons." The third reason is interesting: "The protection of al-Aqsa mosque will end if the Jewish population in Palestine increases over that of the Muslims. Therefore, the Jewish migration which began after the Great War is an attack upon the Muslims; I mean not only the Muslims of Palestine, but it is also an attack on me and on every Muslim found in any longitude or latitude of the planet earth. If the Palestinian Muslims today cannot prevent

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<sup>70</sup> Kempffmeyer, p. 123.

<sup>71</sup> Khatib, "al-Yahûd ya'tadûn 'ala al-Muslimîn," *al-Fath*, No. 116 (October 1928) p. 242.

the Jewish migration --may God not let that happen-- then it is an obligation on all neighbouring Arabs in Asia and Africa to prevent it with all possible means...If the Arabs are unable to prevent the Jewish migration, then it is the religious obligation of the Muslim world to do so..."<sup>72</sup>

Khatib ascribes very lofty motives to the Arabs who conquered Palestine in the early period of the caliphate, and he also tries to localize the issue for Egyptians. He writes, "Palestine indeed is [for Egypt] the gateway to Hijaz, the gateway to the Ka'bah. It is the first country that Islam liberated from Roman occupation so that its guidance may spread to all regions of the world. Therefore, every action aimed at the Judaization of Palestine --by keeping the door of immigration open until majority status is obtained by this scum of the homeless of nations-- is considered by every Muslim in the world as an act of aggression against his person, his Ka'bah, and his faith; and he thinks it a religious duty to resist it and help in preventing it."<sup>73</sup> In Khatib's view, the creation of a Jewish homeland or state in Palestine is "the cancer of Zionism in the throat of Arab homeland."<sup>74</sup>

Khatib wrote a strongly worded article entitled "The Voice of Blood" on the criteria of gaining Palestinian citizenship and on the sell of land to the Jewish immigrants. He says, "And

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72 Khatib, "al-Yahūd yukhātibūna al-'Alam al-Islāmi," *al-Fath*, No. 506 (Rabi II 28 1355).

73 Khatib, "Awwal Marrah," *al-Fath*, No. 514 (Jumādi I 24, 1355)

74 Khatib, "Min Mawātin al-'Ibrah," *al-Fath*, No. 511, p. 247. The description of Zionism as 'the cancer' in the throat or heart of the Arab world can still be heard in the speeches and proclamations of Muslim fundamentalists in the eighties.

the perpetual and obligatory *jihâd* upon every Arab and every Muslim in Palestine is to prevent the enemy from the Judaization of any span of the Islamic land...The most binding obligation on every Arab and every Muslim in Palestine is to pressure the authorities to enact a law prohibiting the immigration definitely, and to enact another law barring Palestinian citizenship from any one born of a non-Palestinian father. As for the selling of land to the Jews, it is high treason which forfeits the right of the perpetrator from living in Palestine."<sup>75</sup>

Khatib also wrote articles filled with emotional appeals for financial help for the Palestinian cause. Many readers responded to his plea; financial contributions came from Algeria, Karachi, Hyderabad (India), and also from a fund-raising campaign in north India.<sup>76</sup> In the late thirties, Khatib was publishing a regular feature in *al-Fath* devoted to the news of the *jihâd* in Palestine. In the issues of *al-Fath* that I have been able to study (years 11th and 12th), almost one third of the paper is devoted to the news, views and articles related to Palestine.

The contribution of Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib to the Palestinian cause was his insistence in presenting Palestine as a part of the larger Arab and Islamic world. This approach opened the doors for arousing the sympathy of Arab Muslims for Palestine and for making the non-Arab Muslims feel as though

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<sup>75</sup> Khatib, "Sawt al-Dam," *al-Fath*, No. 519.

<sup>76</sup> See *al-Fath*, Nos. 507, 515, 520.

the violation of Palestinian rights was directed at them personally. Khatib and those who presented the Palestinian problem in Islamic terms, indeed, succeeded in their endeavours as can be seen in the religious sentiments of Muslims almost all over the world. The leaders and supporters of the Hamas movement in the *intifadah* would indeed find a very familiar tone in the writings of Khatib.

#### **KHATIB AND THE CONSERVATIVE 'ULAMA'**

Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib was not only against the liberal intellectuals of Egypt, he was also opposed to the conservative 'ulamâ' and al-Azhar.

Khatib did not consider the conservative 'ulamâ' as worthy leaders of Egyptian society. The educational system of al-Azhar was not equipped, in Khatib's view, to produce 'ulamâ' who could guide the Muslims in modern times. He believed, and rightly so, that new text books should be prepared "free from parenthesis, devoid of repetitions, easy to handle, beautifully written and divided into chapters and sections." The students should no longer be taught about the religions and sects which are extinct; instead more attention should be focused on existing views and sects; moreover, the students should also be trained to refer to the books of the early Islamic period.<sup>77</sup> When an Islamic organization of Syria appealed to al-Azhar (through *al-Fath*) to send missionaries to India, Khatib commented by writing, "*Fâqid al-shayi laysa bi mu'tih*--One who does not possess, cannot give! Al-Azhar, all Islamic seminaries

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<sup>77</sup> Khatib, "al-Islāh al-Islāmi," *al-Zahrâ'*, vol. 2 (1925) pp. 597-598.

and Muslim governments have made no attempt to train missionaries..."<sup>78</sup>

The lack of leadership on the part of the conservative 'ulamâ' in propagating Islam to the non-Muslim world, in forcefully presenting Islam as the only solution for Arab society, and in combatting Christian missionary activities not only frustrated Khatib but also the Jam'iyyah al-Ikhwân al-Muslimîn (the Society of Muslim Brothers). Although Khatib's brand of salafism blended with neo-Wahhabism did not succeed in occupying the seat of Muslim leadership, his journalistic and Y.M.M.A. activities were instrumental in bringing about the circumstances in which Jam'iyyah al-Ikhwân al-Muslimîn emerged as leader of the Egyptian Muslims. According to Gershoni, the Y.M.M.A. was one of the two associations whose organizational and doctrinal influence led to the development of the Ikhwân al-Muslimîn Society.<sup>79</sup> Khatib and Hasan al-Banna worked together on various common issues.<sup>80</sup> When the Ikhwân Society decided in 1933 to publish a weekly paper, al-Banna realized that they had no money to embark on such a program. He took two Egyptian pounds from a friend and went to the Salafiyyah Press.

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78 *Al-Fath*, No. 510, p. 9; also see No. 515, pp. 7-8.

79 The other organization was Jam'iyyah al-Hidāyah al-Islāmiyyah (The Association for Islamic Guidance); see Israel Gershoni, "Arabization of Islam," *Asian & African Studies*, vol. XIII (March 1979) p. 29. On al-Banna's connection to Y.M.M.A., see Hasan al-Banna, *Muzakkirât al-Da'wah wa al-Dâ'iyyah* (Cairo: al-Zahrâ' li al-A'lâm al-'Arabi, 1990) pp. 68-71, 92, 101-103.

80 See, for example, the letter written to the Minister of Interior on the problems of immorality among Egyptian youths and their solution co-signed by Hasan al-Banna, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib and others. *Al-Fath*, No. 507 (Jamâdi al-Awwal 4, 1355 / 1936) p. 164.

Al-Banna requested Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib to accept the two pounds as the initial capital, and to publish and edit the weekly journal for the Society. The first issue of *Jaridah al-Ikhwân al-Muslimín* was published during the last days of May 1933 (Safar 28, 1352).<sup>81</sup>

Khatib did not only oppose the conservative 'ulamâ' on social and political issues, he sometimes even dared to disagree with them on purely religious matters. However, Khatib's opposition in purely religious matters also reflected his salafi-Arabist tendency. For example, in 1936, *al-Fath*<sup>82</sup> regularly published articles opposing the view of Muhammad Farid Wajdi (the editor of *Nûr al-Islâm*, the al-Azhar journal) in favour of permitting the translation of the Qur'ân. The opposition by Khatib on this issue, I believe, was not just a religious matter; it was equally related to the question of the position of Arabs in Islam. In allowing the translation of the Qur'ân in different languages, Khatib feared, the non-Arab Muslims would no longer turn towards the Arabs for leadership.

Another issue in which Khatib was bitterly opposed to al-Azhar was the issue of bringing the Islamic sects closer to each other (*al-taqrîb bayn al-madhâhib al-Islâmiyyah*). In the late 1940s and the 1950s, the 'ulamâ' of al-Azhar were working towards creating more tolerance between the various sects of Islam: four Sunni and two Shi'ah schools of thought, the

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81 Al-Banna, *Muzakkirât*, pp. 185-186; Mitchell, *Society of the Muslim Brothers*, p. 185.

82 *Al-Fath*, Nos. 501, p. 5, 22; 502, p. 33; 504-506; 510, p. 232; 512, p. 283.

Imāmiyyah and the Zaydiyyah. The efforts of these 'ulamā' (who came to be known as *jamā'ah al-taqrīb*) resulted in the founding of a permanent office known as Dār al-Taqrīb bayn al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah under the auspicious of al-Azhar to further the ecumenical movement among the Muslims.<sup>83</sup> Finally, on July 7, 1959, the Grand Shaykh Mahmud al-Shaltut issued his *fatwa* recognizing the Imāmiyyah and Zaydiyyah schools to be as legitimate as the four Sunni schools of thought.<sup>84</sup>

Khatib strongly opposed any type of reconciliation between the Sunnis and the Shi'ahs. This opposition was also a manifestation of his salafi-Arabist tendency. Firstly, Shi'ah Islam does not give any special status to the Arabs in the Islamic social order. (This is one of the reasons why the *mawalis* [the non-Arab Muslims] were attracted to Shi'ism in the early Islamic period.)<sup>85</sup> Secondly, Shi'ism does not revere and venerate the companions of the Prophets (the *salaf*) simply because they were companions. In other words, Shi'ism does not ascribe to the idea that all *salaf* were necessarily *sālih*

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83 The main figure in this group was the Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar, Imam Mahmud Shaltut (1958-1963). For more on the ecumenical movement, see 'Abd al-Karim al-Shirāzi, *al-Wahdah al-Islāmiyyah* (Beirut: Mu'assah al-A'lami, 1975); Sayyid Murtada al-Radawi, *Fi Sabīl al-Wahdah al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Matbu'āt al-Najāh, 1980). Al-Shirāzi also mentions Hasan al-Banna in this group (pp. 10, 17). On al-Banna's attitude towards Muslim unity, see Mitchell, *Society of the Muslim Brothers*, pp. 216-217. W.C. Smith mentioned the Jamā'ah al-Taqrīb in *Islam in Modern History*, p. 5.

84 Muhammad Jawad Chirri, *The Shiites Under Attack*, (Detroit: Islamic Center, 1986) pp. 108-110; the *fatwa* of Shaykh Shaltūt was published in the journal of Dār al-Taqrīb, *Risālah al-Islām*, no. 3 (1379 / 1959) p. 227.

85 Syed Husayn M. Jafri, *The Origins & Early Development of Shi'a Islam*, (London: Longmans, 1979) pp. 114-117.

(good). Both these aspects of Shi'ism were against the salafi-Arabist tendencies of Muhibb al-Khatib. And, therefore, he strongly opposed the attempt by al-Azhar to create more tolerance between the two main sects of Islam. Khatib even wrote a polemical booklet in 1960 entitled *al-Khutût al-'Arízah li al-Usus al-lati Qâma 'alayha Dîn al-Shí'ah al-Imâmiyyah al-Ithnâ 'Ashariyyah*<sup>86</sup> in which he attempted to prove that the Shi'ah Imâmiyyah is not just a sect but a separate religion with which there can be no reconciliation.

In this backdrop, it is interesting to note that Khatib was appointed as the editor of *Majallah al-Azhar* (formerly known as *Nûr al-Islâm*), the journal of al-Azhar from 1952 to 1958.<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, the sources available to me do not say much about the last two decades of Khatib's life. The fifties and sixties were the decades when the salafiyyah movement went slightly off the track. Some Egyptian writers of the inter-war period (including Ibrâhim 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Mâzini, a contributor to *al-Fath*) extended the salafi partiality for Arabs to its logical conclusion: Arab nationalism.<sup>88</sup>

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86 In this booklet, Khatib mostly draws upon the old arguments and accusations against the Shi'ahs used in the heresiographical works of Ibn Hazm, and the polemical writings of Ibn al-'Arabi and Ibn Taymiyyah. For a Shi'i response to *al-Khutût*, see Lutfullâh al-Sâfi, *Ma'a al-Khatîb fi Khutûtihi al-'Arîdah* [With Khatib in his *Khutût al-'Arîdah*], 6th rev. ed. (Tehran: Munazzama A'lâm al-Islami, 1987).

87 *Nûr al-Islâm's* first editor (1930-1933) was Sayyid Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn, a regular contributor to *al-Fath* and co-founder of Y.M.M.A.; its second editor (1933-1952) was the famous Egyptian writer, Muhammad Farid al-Wajdi. See Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, p. 122.

88 Gershoni, "Arabization of Islam," pp. 50-57.



After leaving *Majallah al-Azhar* in 1958 at the age of seventy-two, Khatib devoted most of his time to editing and annotating the classical *hadith* literature for his Salafiyah Press. During the 1960s, a pedestrian walking on al-Fath street of Cairo could observe Khatib, in his white *jilbâb*, sitting behind the window of his library and working away on his books.<sup>89</sup> Sulaymân Musa regrets that Khatib should have given priority to editing classical literature instead of writing a detailed history of the events and the people with whom he worked during the first half of this century. In doing so, Musa believed, Khatib would have done a great and unique service to the contemporary Arab nationalist movement.<sup>90</sup> I agree with Musa, although for a different reason: Khatib did not have a very solid background in religious education to critically edit classical works. Surely a detailed autobiography of his eventful life would have proved more interesting and valuable than his annotations on *hadîth*.

However, for Khatib, preparing a critical edition of *hadîth* literature was as much a service to Arabism as it was to Islam. His work followed him even when he was admitted to the hospital in 1969. It was while he was proof-reading the thirteenth volume of *Fath al-Bâri fi Tahqîq Sahîh al-Bukhâri* on his hospital bed that Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib passed away on December 30, 1969 (Shawwâl, 1389).<sup>91</sup>

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89 Jundi, *Mufakkirûn*, p. 204.

90 Musa, *Wujûh*, p. 155.

91 Jundi, *A'lâm*, p. 383.

## CONCLUSION

*"The rhetoric may be nationalist,  
but the emotional identifications are Islamic."*

Ira M. Lapidus

The most important question in modern Middle Eastern history is about the role of Islam in the Arab world. After the collapse of the Ottoman empire in the First World War, the Arab world found itself without the caliphate system towards which it was always oriented. Various new trends --from Pharaonic nationalism to Arab nationalism-- were tried out by the intellectuals.

After studying these ideological trends in the post-World War II Middle East, western scholars over-emphasized the changes which liberal thinkers and external forces tried to impose upon society, and they ignored the Islamic thought that was retained, of course in a changed form, from an older tradition. As a result, they started writing the obituary of Islam as a social system. Malcom H. Kerr wrote in 1966, "Since the suppression of the Muslim Brethren in Egypt and the demise of the Islamic constitution of Pakistan, there has ceased to be any visible likelihood that Islamic legal and constitutional principles would be made to serve as the operative basis of a modern state in any Muslim country."<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, one must bear in mind that the trends like nationalism, secularism, and liberalism --away from Islamic orientation-- were, in a wider perspective, deviations and not

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<sup>1</sup> Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, p. 2.

the norm. The Islamic identity was always there: sometimes very visible, sometimes not so visible. Even Arab nationalism was never completely devoid of Islamic elements. In the preface to the paperback edition of her *Arab Nationalism*, Sylvia Haim writes, "Today [in 1975], however, the possible tension between nationalist ideologies and the strict observers of Islam has been completely obliterated." She further writes,

In spite of continuous assertions that the [Arab nationalist] movement was secular and that the Muslims, Christians and Jews would have an equal share within it, it soon revealed itself as an ideology deeply embedded in Islam, and that as long as it was not acceptable to Muslims it would remain of little consequence...It emerges as a deep-seated belief that seeks to reestablish the supremacy of Islam, which in its medieval expression may have become unfashionable and unacceptable in the West. The antagonism towards Christendom and Europe has not been altogether forgotten, and the adaptation of Arab nationalism serves to reexpress in modern terms Islam's view of itself.<sup>2</sup>

Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib's life, in this context, makes an interesting study of how Islam, in its various forms, was always relevant to the Muslims of the Middle East--sometimes vibrant, sometimes subdued but never dead. Khatib belonged to the most important generation of the present Arab world. More interestingly, he was a link in the chain of continuity of Islamic thought in the twentieth century Middle East.

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<sup>2</sup> Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, pp. ix-x where she correctly observes that the argument has come full circle: from Islam to secular Arabism and then back to Islam.

Khatib's early years reflect the desire among the Ottoman Arabs, specially in Syria, to reform the empire politically as well as religiously. This desire itself was a symptom of the concern which had occupied the Muslim mind regarding the supremacy of the West over the Muslim world. This gave rise to the salafiyyah tendencies among the Syrian Arabs. Khatib and his friends did not contemplate separation from the Ottoman Empire; but they strongly believed and struggled for political reform within the Ottoman system which they hoped, eventually, would lead to the supremacy of Islam.

However, the First World War forced the Ottoman Arabs to take sides: Khatib, unlike those Arabs who had a vested interest in the Ottoman system, choose to side with the Arabs against the Turks.

Khatib's role in the Arab Revolt and his contribution in *al-Qiblah* manifest to us that the Arab Revolt was not an Arab nationalistic movement: in the minds of its leaders, it was as much Islamic as it was nationalistic. After the fall of Damacus to the Arab forces, Khatib joined the short-lived Syrian Arab government of Faysal.

The failure of political reforms in the first part of Khatib's life influenced the direction of his life: from political reform to religious reform. And so we saw that in the second part of his life in Egypt, Khatib became an active figure in the religious reform embodied in the salafiyyah movement.

Khatib's life in Egypt provides us with a window into the diversity which existed in the cultural and intellectual debate after World War One. It brings us closer to the continuity of the Islamic trend which mounted a fierce attack upon the elite which was espousing a liberal and secular orientation for the Egyptian society. It showed us that Islam and Arab culture are deeply rooted in Egyptian society. Khatib represents, in my view, perhaps the best example of those Arab Muslims who have attempted to blend Islam with Arabism in a systematic and synchronized way.

Khatib's work in *al-Fath* and in the Young Muslim Men's Association reflect the Islamic element in the Arab and Muslim world's support for the Palestinian cause. Phrases used by Khatib in presenting Palestine as an Islamic cause can be seen even today in the fundamentalist terminology of the Middle East.

Khatib's life also portrays the frustration building up among the educated Muslims with the lack of leadership on the part of the conservative 'ulamâ' who were mostly under the control of the government. As a salafi journalist, Khatib was instrumental in preparing the ground for the emergence of the Ikhwân al-Muslimîn as the political aspiration of Muslims in Egypt.

Those who admire him --the salafi Arabists and some Arab nationalists-- like to remember him as the mentor of a generation, whereas those who dislike him --for his inclination towards Wahhabism and his narrow view of salafism-- like to

remember him as a British agent who worked for dismantling the last Muslim Empire. Whatever he was, there can be no doubt that Khatib's eventful life is a mirror into the political and social tensions of the first half of the twentieth century Middle East. His life also reveals to historians that the recent Islamic resurgence is a visible and vibrant expression of the ever-present Islamic sentiment among the Muslims of the Middle East.

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