

## The Tribal Conflict, Authority and Fall of the Umayyads: Modern Interpretations and Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony

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### Introduction

Modern scholars have presented many theories in an attempt to identify the driving force of Umayyad history. As far as the tribal conflict (*al-<sup>ab</sup>ya*) is concerned, they generally offered two exemplars: the tribal conflict paradigm and the ruling family paradigm. The tribal conflict paradigm basically concerns the conflict between the northern Arabs of Qays and the southern tribes of Yemen, while the ruling family conflict paradigm illustrates the conflicts among leading members of the ruling family that disrupted the existing system. The struggle between the princes and the way in which they exploited tribal discord to strengthen their power against one another was the central element in framing the course of history.<sup>2</sup> The internal struggles among members of the royal family in the later Umayyad period are seen as contributing to the fall of the dynasty. *There was rivalry between the different branches of the Umayyad family; competition for power was evident between brothers and cousins and each of them contested the leadership. It can thus be observed that the division among members of the royal family led to the division of the ruling elites. A series of clashes occurred between them which ultimately fractured the Empire completely. The Umayyads lost their tribal vigour and were consequently unable to maintain their rule and were replaced by a rival tribal group. Some modern scholars, for example Wellhausen, Hugh Kennedy, and Hawting argue that the internal family conflict and the tribal conflict were intertwined. They also agree that the role of various members of the Umayyad royal family was decisive in shaping events in a particular direction but that most of the tribal conflicts emerged because of the backing of some important Umayyad family figures.*<sup>3</sup> This paper is devoted to the study of the modern sources in order to determine how they interpret the role of tribal conflict in the disintegration of the Umayyad dynasty. Secondly, it focuses on an analysis of the role of tribalism in the fall of the Umayyads in the light of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony.

The tribal conflict paradigm traces the roots of tribal conflict in the ancient history of the Arabs where the northern Arabs of Qays and Southern Arabs of Yemen were the competing forces. The modern scholars illustrate their theory by explaining the historic tribal rivalries revealed in the chronicles especially in the history of al-<sup>abar</sup>. These tribal conflicts played a central role in the decline of the Umayyad. The early Umayyad rulers successfully maintained the tribal balance and used their power to strengthen the rule. However, the latter rulers after of Hish[m b. <sup>Abd al-Malik</sup> (r. 105|724-125|743) failed to keep the balance of power among these tribal forces which ultimately led them to collapse.

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<sup>2</sup> For standard treatments of tribal politics, see Kennedy, Hugh, *The Prophet and the age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century (A History of the Near East)*, (London: Longman, 1986); Hawting, G. R. *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*, (Worcester: Croom Helm Ltd., 1986). Like Wellhausen, they intertwine tribal and family approaches. Note that Judd argues how, "in this conception, Umayyad is essentially reduced to a series of personal struggles between often flawed, occasionally tragic figures...while scholars disagree about whether the tribes or the princes propelled events, they generally agree that various Umayyad princes took sides in this struggle late in the Umayyads regime, sacrificing their elevated neutrality either out of necessity or as a result of their frantic competition for influence." Judd, Steven Clark, *The Third Fitna: Orthodoxy, Heresy and Coercion in Late Umayyad History*, unpublished PhD Dissertation, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan, USA: 1997, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> For this approach particularly, see, Wellhausen, Julius. *Das Arabische Reich und sein Sturz*, Berlin, 1902, tr. M. G. Weir as *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, London: Curzon Press, 1927; Kennedy, *The Prophet*; Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*; also Riy[d <Is[m, al-Naza< bayn afr[d al-bayt al-Umawi wa dawruhu f\ suq[<sup>t</sup> al-khil[fah al-Umw\yah, (Damascus: D[r Hass[n lil-%iba<a wa-al-Nashr, 1406|1985).

The roots of tribal conflict between the Qays and Yemen are found in pre-Islamic history. The genealogists divide the Arabs into two groups: (i) the descendants of Ism[<l or the northern Arabs, and (ii) the descendants of Qa+%n or the Southern Arabs.

The historical sources labelled the southern Arabs, the descendants of Qa+%n, as ahl al-Yemen or al-Yam[n\ya; while the northern Arabs and the descendants of Ism[<l are recorded in the historical sources by different titles, such as <Adn[n\ya, Niz[r\ya, Mu#ar\ya or Qays\ya. These titles are based on the genealogical roots of Ism[<l's descendants. <Adn[n was the son of Ism[<l, Niz[r the son of <Adn[n, Mu#ar the son of Niz[r, and Qays was the son of Mu#ar. This pre-Islamic division of Arabs was of great significance in the tribal hostilities that occurred during the Umayyad period. As Patricia Crone argues, "this division was of acute importance in the later Umayyad period in which the two descent groups would behave as rivals and engage in <a~abiyya 'partisan behaviour'."<sup>4</sup> Contemporary scholars evaluated the tribal conflicts of the Northern and Southern tribes. In 1861 R. Dozy assessed the tribal feuds of the Arabs, arguing that the early Muslim Arabs had inherited the legacy and hostility of their predecessors from pagan times and therefore continued feuding even after they had adopted Islam.<sup>5</sup> However, Wellhausen argues that there was no tradition of hostility between the southern and northern Arabs in the pre-Islamic period; the starting point of the tribal antagonism was the conflict between the Kalb (a Yemen\ tribe) and Qays, during the Civil War of Marj R[hi% in 684 CE.<sup>6</sup>

As an exponent of the tribal conflict paradigm, Jurj\ Zaydan evaluates a~ab\ya and its role during the Umayyad period. According to his accounts, the Yemen\-Mu#ar\ conflict was not a dominant feature during the R[shid]n period, arguing that <Al\'s strength was based on the An~[r and his Yemen\ supporters, whereas Mu<[w\ya gathered his vigour from his Quraysh\ adherents and his Yemen\ relatives. This meant that Yemen\s could be found in both parties. However, Mu<[w\ya had calculated his army and attempted to win the support of the Yemen\s with gifts and by encouraging relations with them. He also married within the tribe of Kalb, a branch of Yemen\ tribes. Thus, when he came to power, he enjoyed the allegiance of both the Mu#ar and Yemen tribes. After the death of Mu<[w\ya, the Yemen\s supported Yaz\d because he was their nephew on his mother's side. However, the tribal conflict became evident after Yaz\d's death. The Yemen\s supported the Umayyads while Ibn Zubayr's strength was based on his Qays ancestry, which was a branch of Mu#ar.

The battle of Marj Rahi%, according to Zaydan, was an excellent example of the Yemen-Mudar conflict. The Mu#ar supported Ibn Zubayr while Yemen fought for Marw[n in the battle. After this battle, the tribal conflict remained a dominant feature of the Umayyad period. The Yemen\s remained loyal to <Abd al-Malik while the Mu#ar continued their hostility towards the Umayyads. When <Abd al-Malik consolidated his rule, then the Mu#ar also accepted his authority but remained consistently hostile across the Arab Empire. Zaydan notes that everywhere the two factions were represented, and each got the upper hand alternatively, with the changes in Caliphs, governors, and lieutenants. The Mudarite governor would promote Mudarites, the Yemen\te Yemenites. The balance was perpetually shifting. This distinction was of great importance in every branch of the administration, and even affected the appointment and dismissal of Caliphs, governors.<sup>7</sup>

In Zaydan's view, the Yemen remained the vital force in Umayyad rule and the Qays always played a marginal role. Power shifted to the Qays during the time of Hish[m b. <Abd al-Malik, and the Qays became partisans of the Umayyad. After his death, when al-Wal\d b. Yaz\d, whose mother was a Qays\, acceded to power, they gathered more strength. Zaydan considers that the tribal conflict reached its zenith in this period. Marw[n b. Mu+ammad organized the Mu#ar\ forces to avenge the death of al-Wal\d b. Yaz\d. The Mu#ar\s supported Marw[n while the Yemen\s assisted the <Abbasids. Zaydan argues that the dignity of the Quraysh remained established during the Umayyad period. They were mainly divided between the Umayyad and H[shimid families. It seems that Zaydan divided the Quraysh on a tribal basis. The H[shimids were powerful in |jj[z while the Umayyads were strong in Syria. Thus, the H[shimid and Umayyad families both had a prestigious position among the rest of the Arabs. As illustrated above, the Arabs were chiefly divided between the Yemen and Mu#ar, and within these two factions were further divided into sub-sections.

4 Crone, Patricia, "Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyads Period Political Parties?", *Islam*, 71 (1994), 1.

5 Dozy, R. *Histoire des musulmans d'Espagne*, (Leiden 1861), vol. 1, ch. 6; Hitti, P. *History of the Arabs*, (London: 1970, 10th ed. [first ed. published 1937]), 280.

6 Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom*, 180f, 209f.

7 Zaydan, Jurji, *History of Islamic Civilisation*, trs. D. S. Margoliouth, (Delhi: Kit[b Bhavan, Fine Press, 1978), 67|4.

Zayd[n] argues that whenever a conflict arose between the Yemen and Muḥar in a province, the central government in Damascus used to appoint a Quraysh\ to resolve the issue. Zayd[n] considers that this reflects the eminence of the Quraysh\s over other tribes.<sup>8</sup> Zayd[n] believes that clan-feeling was one of the foundations of Umayyad politics, arguing that the Umayyad came to power through “the clan-feeling of the Kurashites, and pressing into their service the other clan-feelings.”<sup>9</sup> Umayyad rule was based on the clan-patriotism of the Quraysh and on winning partisans. With the expansion of the state, this policy could not deliver the required results and it caused the fragmentation of society which ultimately led to its disintegration and revolts,<sup>10</sup> and tribal rivalries appeared in this context. The Qays favoured Marw[n] b. Muḥammad while the Yemen\s supported the ʿAbbāsids in their struggle against the Umayyads. Thus factionalism, according to Zaydan, was the most important factor in the demise of the Umayyads. The later Umayyad rulers failed to maintain the equilibrium between the power structure of the Qays\s and Yemen\s. The Yemen\s, who had once been the primary military strength of the Umayyads disassociated themselves from Umayyad rule and supported the opponents of the Umayyads.<sup>11</sup>

Wellhausen also regards tribal factionalism as one of the most important factors in the fall of the Umayyads, and his book, *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*, is one of the most substantial works in the field and has had a considerable impact on subsequent studies. According to Wellhausen’s investigations, pre-Islamic conflict between the Qays and Kalb incited the rebellions that occurred during the early history of the Muslims, and he traces the origin of such conflicts and rebellions from the historic conflict of Marj R[hi] in the ʿAbd al-Malik period.<sup>12</sup> He also asserts that the Umayyads’ inability to present a substitute for the pre-Islamic ʿasab\ya meant that the Arab tribes weakened their strength by fighting each other. This continuous tribal strife weakened the unity of the Arabs and the Arab cause was badly damaged. On the other hand, the conquerors attempted to unite among themselves by forging alliances with those who were in opposition to the Umayyads.

G. R. Hawting attempts to justify Wellhausen’s thesis, asserting that his own work “is certainly not intended to supersede *The Arab Kingdom*”.<sup>13</sup> However, he argues that it was not only tribal conflict but also conflict within the royal family that led to the Umayyads’ decline. Hish[m]’s successors could not resolve the conflict of the third *fitna*. The tribal conflict emerged initially because of the conflict within the royal family, but once it started it could not be stopped, even after the establishment of Marw[n]’s rule. Hawting claims that the Kalb tribe of Yemen\ origin supported Sulaym[n] against Marw[n], but even when Sulaym[n] was defeated, the Kalb did not cease to struggle against the pro-Qays\ government of Marw[n] and instead joined the ʿAbbāsids.<sup>14</sup> Hawting asserts that the conflict among members of the royal family weakened the state and its opponents; in other words the Kh[warij] and Shi<\s combined their forces against the Umayyads. He confirms the central role of conflict in the royal family in the demise of the Umayyad rule.<sup>15</sup>

*Gabrieli considers that al-Walḍ II harboured personal animosity against Kh[ilid al-Qasr]. However, the Umayyad princes and Yaman\ elites considered this kind of treatment as part of a pro-Qays\ political agenda. Thus, the major divisions of the Syrian army declined to accept the authority of al-Walḍ and gathered around other members of the royal family who were considered to be suitable as rulers. The Yemeni factor was therefore decisive in that it helped Yazḍ III to present himself as an alternative candidate for the position of caliph. Gabrieli held al-Walḍ responsible for the decline of the Umayyad rule since he failed to calculate the political and tribal implication of his actions against his personal enemies.*<sup>16</sup>

## II

Dennett also criticises Hish[m] because of his inability to nominate his own son for his succession in place of al-Walḍ II who was not suitable for the caliphate.<sup>17</sup> Dennett asserts that Yazḍ III was responsible for the fall of the Umayyads because he undermined the legal authority of the caliphate institution.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 68-4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 63-4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 138-141.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>12</sup> Wellhausen, *Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, 201.

<sup>13</sup> Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam*, xix.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>16</sup> Gabrieli, F., “Al-Walḍ b. Yazḍ il califfo e il poeta”, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*(RSO, Rome), no.15, 1935, 17-19.

<sup>17</sup> Dennett, D. C., *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 201.

He took the oath of allegiance to al-Walīd II and then violated it without any legal justification. Yazīd III actually rejected the traditional authority patterns and presented his own political programme which was “almost pure Kharijism”.<sup>18</sup> His rebellion suggested that the oath of allegiance to a legitimate ruler was an insignificant act. This was clearly a violation of the fundamental principle of Umayyad rule. Furthermore, Yazīd III’s reform policy restricted the caliph in the exercise of his absolute authority to resolve issues.<sup>19</sup>

Dennett argues further that the internal conflict between the members of the royal family tore down the unity of the Syrian army, which was the primary source of Umayyad rule. The Umayyad government was decentralised and the provinces were semi-autonomous, and in this context, the Syrian troops had provided them with cohesion and harmony; however, the internal family conflict shattered the unity and superior authority of the Syrian army. Yazīd’s rebellion provided the platform for such activities, and when Marwān b. Muhammad came to power the exhausted and crumbling consensus of the Syrian army was replaced by the Jazirian army. Dennett praised Marwān b. Muḥammad for his military and political wisdom. He successfully shifted the power from Damascus to Jazīra with the help of his Jazirian-based troops.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the long-established military and political strength of Umayyad rule changed. Dennett argues that the breakdown of the traditional Syrian army authority was the real cause of the destruction of Umayyad rule and that the role of the ‘Abbāsīd movement did no more than fill the vacuum.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, he identifies the decentralised structure of the Umayyad administration as one of the significant factors in the demise of the Umayyads. The central government of Damascus was dependent on the financial share given to it by the semi-autonomous provinces, and the central government had, moreover, to rely upon the Syrian army which had lost its strength after the death of al-Walīd II.<sup>22</sup> Dennett concludes that the ‘Abbāsīd movement was not the real cause of the Umayyad fall; rather, it was the destruction of the traditional Syrian army that gave the ‘Abbāsīds the opportunity to destroy Umayyad rule.<sup>23</sup>

Like Dennett, Shaban also criticises some of Wellhausen’s assertions, arguing that Wellhausen interpreted all the important events of the Umayyad period in the context of pre-Islamic tribal conflicts, whereas socio-economic interests were the driving force behind the events. He further asserts that it is illogical to explain all events on the basis of Arab tribal jealousies without considering their ability to adjust to new socio-political conditions.<sup>24</sup> Shaban believes that these socio-economic interests played an important role in shaping events, from the tribal conflict to the conflict among members of royal family,<sup>25</sup> and claims that Marwān II curtailed his opponents, particularly Sulaymān b. Hishām who joined the Khawārij, his private mawālī’s army, and ‘Abd Allah b. Muḥawīya with his Shi‘a followers.<sup>26</sup> However, the mawālī’s demand for equal rights and their dissatisfaction with the Arab settlers over the war policy of the later Umayyads created the opportunity for the people of Khurāsān to rebel.

Shaban notes that the tribal rivalries were in fact based on the policy of war. The Qaysīs were in favour of expansion, while the Yemenīs were against the expansionist policy and demanded the conferring of equal rights for the mawālī and assimilation with the local population. The Yemenīs’ policy of assimilation was fascinating to the Arab settlers as it secured their economic interests. Thus, the opponents of Umayyad rule, particularly the ‘Abbāsīds, initiated their movement on the issue of equal rights and the assimilation of non-Arabs into the Muslim community. Shaban argues that the socio-economic interest of various tribes played a significant role in the fall of the Umayyads, and that “it is absurd to interpret this conflict as simply a tribal squabble”<sup>27</sup> rather the tribes of Qaysī Muḥār and Yemen standing for political parties of the Marwānīd period (684-750CE). The Muḥārīs were the adherents of an expansionist policy of the state and were not in favour of the assimilation of non-Arabs. On the other hand, the Yemenīs were against the policy of expansion in favour of the assimilation of non-Arabs. Al-‘Ajijī b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī, the governor of Iraq during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik and Walīd I, as well as the majority of the governors during the Marwānīd period, were from the Qays. Then Sulaymān b. ‘Abd al-Malik and ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz favoured the policies of the Yemenīs and won their support.

<sup>18</sup>Dennett, D. C., “Marwān ibn Muhammad: The Passing of the Umayyad Caliphate”, unpublished PhD dissertation, (Harvard University, 1939), 201, 220.

<sup>19</sup> Dennett, Conversion, 220.

<sup>20</sup> Dennett, Marwān, 247.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., preface, 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>24</sup> Wellhausen, The Arab Kingdom and its Fall, viii.

<sup>25</sup> Shaban, M.A. Islamic History: A New Interpretation, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 153.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 120.

Although the Yemen\s governed Iraq during Hish[m's period they were finally marginalised and ousted from state affairs. These Yemen\s agitated against al-Wal\d b. Yaz\d and favoured Yaz\d b. al-Wal\d. During the period of the 740s, Shaban argues, the <a~ab\ya between the Yemen\s and Mu#ar\s governors reached in its zenith. The Qays\s gathered around Marw[n II and upheld his authority and as a result, the Yemen\ joined the Abbasids to achieve their political objectives.<sup>28</sup>

In Shaban's view, both the tribal conflict and the ruling family conflict paradigms were artificial. In fact, the imperial policy paradigm played a central role in shaping events during that period. He focused particularly on the expansionist policy and the treatment of non-Muslims, and according to him, the Qays and Yemen were convenient labels for parties with different policies regarding the rule of the empire. On the basis of the above discussion, it is clear that Shaban disagrees with Wellhausen's argument.<sup>29</sup>

Patricia Crone, another expert on the Umayyad period, asserts that Shaban's argument that the Mu#ar and Yemen were political parties is a fallacy and that they were basically tribal groups rather than political parties. She argues that, practically all belonged to the parties to which their nisbas assigned them; membership to the supposed political parties was overwhelmingly determined by descent. What is more, exceptions are hard to come by before the Civil War: in <a~abiyya on behalf of, or between Qays|Mu#ar and Yemen before 744, the protagonists seem always to have sided with the party to which they belonged by descent.<sup>30</sup>

Crone presented detailed accounts of the governors of the Umayyad period. The data shows, contrary to Shaban's argument, that the Qays|Mu#ar and Yemen were not political parties on the basis of their differences of opinion regarding an expansionist policy or assimilation. The Marw[nids appointed governors from both tribes without any discrimination.<sup>31</sup> Crone's work is considered to be the best critique of Shaban's thesis regarding the interest groups who based their argument on the tribal conflicts. She argues that Shaban's thesis invalid. In this context, she also refers to Wellhausen who argued that there was no documentary evidence regarding the conflict between the northern and southern tribes prior to the battle of Marj R[hi% (684 CE).<sup>32</sup> She further criticises Shaban's argument that the rivalry between Qays|Mu#ar and Yaman is unlikely to have remained a purely tribal episode during the Umayyad era.<sup>33</sup> Shaban asserts that these tribal groups were basically political parties of the Marw[nid period (684-750 CE). The Qays supported the programme of military expansion and the segregation of Arabs and non-Arabs, whereas the Yemen were against the expansionist policy and demanded the assimilation of non-Arab converts to Islam in Muslim society. Shaban argues that the majority of the Marw[nid caliphs appointed Qays\ governors for their expansionist policy except those who were not enthusiastic about expansion, like Sulaym[n and <Umar b. <Abd al-<Az\z. Shaban maintains that Hish[m also reduced the Yaman\ role in politics, particularly after the dismissal of Kh[lid al-Qasr\. Consequently, the Yemenis staged a coup against al-Wal\d II and installed Yaz\d III to the throne in 744. The Yemenis were defeated again by Marw[n II who came into power with the help of Qays\s. At this stage, the Yemenis supported the <Abb[sids, who were in favour of the policy of assimilation of Arab and non-Arab in Islam.<sup>34</sup> Crone criticises Shaban's argument and, having collected data about all the governors appointed during the Umayyad period which suggested that there was no particular policy in that respect, asserts that the historical sources do not validate his analysis.

Shaban's argument seems valid only for the time of the third fitna,<sup>35</sup> when Yaz\d III's power was exclusively based on Yemen while Marw[n was completely dependent on the Qays\ forces.<sup>36</sup> Crone also rejects Shaban's assertion regarding Sulaym[n's non-expansionist approach, arguing that Sulaym[n continued the foreign and expansionist policies of his predecessors.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 119ff, 123, 142, 156, 157.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., esp. 100-137. Note that the jihad policy and treatment with the non-Arabs has been well illustrated in Khalid Blankinship's work. Blankinship, Khalid Yahya, *The End of the Jih[d State: The Reign of Hish[m Ibn <Abd al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads*, (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

<sup>30</sup>Crone, Patricia, "Were The Qays and Yemen of the Umayyads Period Political Parties?" *Der Islam*, 71:1, (1994), 5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 28-31.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.,3.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.,3.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 7-11, 12, 17, 18.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 5.

Yaz'd b. Muhallab persisted in continuing to expand in the frontiers of Khur[s]n. Similarly, the policy of conquering western India was carried out without any change during the period of Sulaym[n].<sup>37</sup> Contrary to Shaban's opinion, Crone asserts that Yaz'd III's reforms were basically "Qadarite convictions than his Yemen\ associations and this is the one and only occasion on which a convergence between Qadarism and Yemenism is attested."<sup>38</sup> Blankinship, another revisionist, extends Shaban's argument in a simplistic manner, arguing that in contrast to the tribal conflict paradigm, the change in imperial policy damaged the state which had been established as a Jih[d] state since the early period of Islam. Military expansion against the unbeliever was not only a financial source for the state but also conferred authority and legitimacy to rule; thus the failure of jih[d]\ expansionist policies on the external front gave rise to the internal problems of the regime.<sup>39</sup> Blankinship maintains that Hish[m]'s successors attempted to reform the jih[d] policy and introduced many programmes to overcome the losses but it was too late to save the caliphate. The Umayyad army had to face a series of military defeats by non-Muslims during Hish[m]'s reign which led the Umayyads into a serious financial crisis and a weakening of the Syrian army. Pre-existing tribal and provincial rivalries simply intensified the situation.<sup>40</sup> Blankinship blames Hish[m] b. <Abd al-Malik for the fall of the caliphate because he continued his expansionist policies throughout his regime on almost all frontiers without observing the consequences, nor did the expansionist policy generated much to meet the military expenses. Consequently, the Umayyad caliphate became "a hollow shell, ruined by the expense its military excesses claimed in lives and wealth."<sup>41</sup> Blankinship mentions many unsuccessful campaigns which placed an enormous fiscal burden on the state and required the imposition of heavy taxes to meet the army's requirements, and argues that continuous engagement in war weakened the Syrian army. The Mu#ar\ tribal forces of the Jaz\ra, who had been deprived of power around sixty years earlier in the battle of Marj R[hit] in 684 AD, took the opportunity to assert its own power. Thus, the failure of the state to devise a suitable jih[d] policy culminated in its destruction.<sup>42</sup>

Riy[# <Is[m, an Arab revisionist scholar, argues that socio-political circumstance made Ibn Mu<[wiya the unifier of hostile groups under his leadership. The common fabric between them was hostility towards Marw[n] b. Mu+ammad. There was no sincere intention in the slogan of establishing rule for the family of the Prophet. Riy[# gives a detailed account of socio-political movements of that period, noting that when Ibn Mu<[wiya came to Kufa to see <Abd Allah b. <Umar, he did not intend to confront Ibn <Umar. It was the Shi<\s of Kufa who called on him to revolt against the Umayyads when they heard about the death of Yaz'd b. al-Wal\d and the internal conflict in the Umayyad house. They advised him that the Ban] H[shim] had the right to rule rather than the Umayyads. Riya# considers that Ibn Mu<[wiya's rebellion against Ibn <Umar was due to the support of the Shi<\s of Kufa, and particularly the Shi<\ faction of the Zaydiya, who ousted the <amil (deputy) of Ibn <Umar and took control of the citadel. They then marched to Hira where Ibn <Umar resided with his army. Ibn Mu<[wiya was defeated and forced to retreat into Persia.<sup>43</sup>

Marw[n] b. Mu+ammad was busy eliminating the elements of unrest in Syria, Egypt and other central provinces. Knowing Marw[n]'s situation, and with the help of Yemen\s in Kufa and Hira, and \$a++[k] b. Qays, and with the support of his Kh[rij]\ fellows among the Ban] Shayb[n], Ibn <Umar consolidated his position in al-Jaz\ra and marched to Kufa where his forces confronted the Marw[n]ids army of al-Na#r b. Sa<\d al-Khurash\, which consisted of Mu#ar\s. Upon the arrival of \$a++[k], the armies of Ibn <Umar and al-Khurash\ both stopped fighting and made a coalition to fight the Khaw[rij].

However, the coalition forces were defeated. Ibn <Umar went to W[~i%, a centre of Kalb\s and Qays\s. Al-Khurash\, on the other hand, fled to Marw[n] b. Mu+ammad. Al-\$a++[k] then pursued Ibn <Umar to W[si% and compelled him to accept his authority. Ibn <Umar agreed and duly pledged allegiance to him. Al-\$a++[k] then appointed him as w[l\ of al-Ahw[z] and F[ris]. Marw[n] consistently fought against al-\$a++[k] and finally killed him in 129 AH.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>39</sup> Blankinship, *The End of the Jih[d] State*, 97-102.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 97-102

<sup>43</sup> Riya# <Is[m, *al-Niz[<*, 192-194.

After his death, all the anti-Umayyad opposition forces united under Ibn Mu'awiyah, but within a year Marwan II had defeated them all and by the end of 130 AH peace was restored.<sup>44</sup> Rifa'at al-Isma'ili maintains that the tribal conflict between the Yemenis and Mu'awiyahs in Khurasan destabilised the government's authority and enabled the rise of the Abbasid movement.<sup>45</sup> Kennedy, another renowned revisionist, argues that Hisham b. Abd al-Malik had successfully suppressed the tribal rivalries that re-emerged after his death and destroyed the Umayyad rule,<sup>46</sup> and considers that that the removal of al-Walid by force had undermined the principles of succession: moreover, the Umayyads also lost their religious authority.<sup>47</sup> He maintained that al-Walid II's death was the immediate cause of the demise of the Umayyads' rule since the tribal feuds among the Qays and Yemen that had been suppressed during Hisham's reign re-emerged, which resulted in the destruction of the rule.<sup>48</sup> Kennedy affirms the controversial personality of Yazid III, who has been considered as either a virtuous reformer or a barefaced opportunist, and considers that tribal factionalism was one of the most important factors in the demise of Umayyad rule. He framed his discussion of the third civil war in terms of tribal animosities, with the Qays-Yemen conflict as its prominent feature, since Marwan suppressed the Yemenis with the help of his Qays' alliance.<sup>49</sup> Kennedy also argued that the Umayyad dynasty declined and disintegrated because it lacked religious authority,<sup>50</sup> and that good education played a central role in the rise and success of the Thaqafis under the Umayyads.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Kennedy considers tribal conflict, economic crisis and the lack of religious authority of the late Umayyads as the significant factors in the fall of the Umayyads.

### III

The modern scholars are, as noted, divided into two groups: the modern classical and the revisionist scholars. The modern classical scholars, including Zaydan and Wellhausen, consider that the tribal conflict between the Yemen and Mu'awiyah played a central role in the decline of the Umayyads. The tribal conflict and breakdown of the traditional authority of the Syrian army provided an opportunity for the Abbasid revolution. The revisionists on the other hand, including Dennett, *Gabrieli*, G.R. Hawting, Crone, Shaban and Kennedy, identify multiple factors that played a role in the decline of the Umayyads. They believe the paradigms of tribal conflict and conflict within the Umayyad house are intertwined and cannot be separated. Shaban and Crone present the tribal conflict and conflict within the house of the Umayyads in modern terms. Shaban argues that the Yemen and Mu'awiyah were political parties and had their distinctive political agendas, whereas Crone's work is an attempt to reject Shaban's thesis. However, both agree that the tribal conflict played an important role in the decline of the Umayyads.

### IV- The Role of Tribal Conflict in the Umayyad Fall and Gramsci's Theory of Cultural Hegemony

Gramsci's theory of hegemony was constructed in the context of modern Western Europe. He argues that the hegemony of one group over society is based on consent; while coercion is applied occasionally on a small group of people at the time of rebellion. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony is also applicable to an analysis of the phenomenon of tribalism during the Umayyad period. It would be helpful to determine the role of tribalism in undermining the authority of the Umayyads, and Gramsci's theory is highly relevant to an analysis of the tribal context of the Umayyads. They established their authority on the basis of their tribal strength and their capacity to make agreements and coalitions with their opponents. They extended their rule because of their strategy of coalition-building with coercion. The Yemen tribes of Syria were their traditional power base among the masses as well as in the armed forces.

However, the early Umayyads had been careful to root their power amongst conflicting tribes in different parts of the dynasty and as such, they attracted interest groups of tribes and religious elites from all provinces into their political structure. In the Umayyads' historical perspective, the agreement between Mu'awiyah and al-Asad was an attempt to unify the Arab Kingdom under one hegemon. Through this reconciliation, the Syrian political elite came to dominate the united dynasty.

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., al-Nizami, 200.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>46</sup> Kennedy, *The Prophet*, 105.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 86.

Thus, it can be observed that Mu'awiya's project of reconciliation was a hegemonic strategy. He consolidated his authority by combining consent with coercion. In a tribal society, he attempted to respect tribal norms in order to win over the masses. He maintained equilibrium between the conflicting and hostile tribes without ignoring the centrality of Syrian political and military elites. Thus, he constructed a hegemonic bloc that was able to integrate divergent tribes and groups of diverse interest. The Marwanids inherited this legacy from Mu'awiya. They also came into power with the assistance of Syrian Yemen tribes and they also carried out Mu'awiya's strategy; hence, they achieved hegemony because of their successful strategy of reconciliation and agreements. Thus, the masses accepted their hegemony with consent; however, when required, they took coercive measures.

Gramsci unfolds his concept of cultural hegemony by explaining the role of civil society. It is pertinent to understand the concept of civil society in order to explain how it is relevant to the study of the Umayyads. Gramsci distils Marxist theory through devising his ideas of 'hegemony' and the 'manufacture of consent'.<sup>52</sup> He observes that society in capitalist states is divided into two sections: a political society which rules through force, and civil society which rules through consent. Gramsci's concept of civil society differs from the modern concept of civil society according to which the public sector is voluntary and non-governmental organisations are considered to be civil society. Gramsci views civil society as a public sphere wherein political parties and trade unions acquire consciousness from the bourgeois state which serves as a vehicle to shape the ideas and beliefs for the public. The ideas of the bourgeoisie are propagated through media, universities, and religious institutions in order to 'manufacture consent'. Thus the bourgeoisie maintain their hegemony when the civil society accepts their ideas as a norm of their cultural identities. Gramsci refers to hegemony as a form of control exercised by the dominant class. According to Marxist theory, the dominant class is a group which controls the means of production, and the subordinate class is a group of workers, the proletariat, who are compelled to sell their labour in order to survive. However, Gramsci argues that through moral and intellectual leadership, the dominant class has created a dominant culture which helps it to assert its authority over the subordinate class ethically, without coercion, while the subordinate class extends its consent and accepts an inferior position.

The concept of civil society is difficult to understand in the tribal structure. Perhaps the poets, religious scholars, and tribal leaders are part of civil society, even in a tribal set-up. These religious and tribal leaders play the role of the intellectuals to convince the masses to support the ruling class. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is greatly relevant to the present study, particularly in the context of the relationship between civil society and the state. Gramsci recognizes the potential of the civil society to support or to threaten the state. He suggests that where there is a weak and divided civil society, 'a war of movement' is necessary to capture the state. A war of movement means a military struggle. In the absence of a strong civil society, the state cannot significantly maintain its control over matters; and the state has to use coercive apparatus to maintain its authority. However, where the civil society is strong and complex, and the ideology of the state is deeply embedded in the institutions, the use of coercive power can be limited because the civil society convinces the majority of the people to extend their support to the ruling class with consent.

The sharp division between the Yemen and Mu'ar tribes was a challenge for the ruling Umayyad elites. Both tribes attempted to have a maximum share in authority. The success of the early Umayyads was based on their strategy of a balance of power between the hostile tribes. In Gramscian terms, this is explained as the 'national-popular' dimension of hegemony, requiring "the unification of a variety of different social forces into a broad alliance expressing a national popular collective will."<sup>53</sup> Further, the state's ideology is significant in establishing the hegemony of the ruling class. Gramsci asserts that ideology must be capable of serving the interests of the ruling class. The ruling class always attempts to mobilize and encourage the intellectuals to transmit the state's ideology among the masses to win their support in its favour.<sup>3</sup>

Gramsci believes that political movements devise various strategies to seize or maintain state power in different environments. He compares the success of Lenin in the Russian revolution with the possibilities of revolution in states in Western Europe. Socialist ideology and strategy were latent in the Russian context but remained unsuccessful in Western Europe where the capitalist ideology had a consensual basis combined with the state's coercive apparatus.

<sup>52</sup>Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 192.

<sup>53</sup>R. Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought, An Introduction*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), 25.



He asserts, In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West ... when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks.<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, the civil society's institutions helped the Western Europe states to maintain their hegemony against any direct revolutionary attack. The revolution in Western Europe was not possible without creating alternative ideological hegemony in civil society.<sup>55</sup> Thus, in Gramscian understanding, the role of civil society is vital to the formation of hegemony in modern states. It is necessary to analyse the dynamics of a pre-modern society such as the Muslim society during the period of the Umayyads. In pre-modern societies, tribal and religious institutions formed complex and associational life. These tribal and religious movements played a significant role in threatening or bolstering the authority of the state.<sup>56</sup> The Arab tribal system was intact during the Umayyad period and the tribes possessed strong military and economic resources. The early Umayyads attempted to consolidate their authority by creating an environment where the powerful tribes secured their socio-political and economic benefits. The Umayyads conferred their socio-political position to the Arab tribes over the non-Arabs. Therefore, the Arab hegemony over the non-Arabs was established. Perhaps the Arab tribes played a dual role in Gramscian understanding. The tribal allegiance meant military support as well as acceptance of authority with consent. Thus, power rested within society. At this point, Gramsci's thinking is analogous with that of Ibn Khaldun's theory of *asabiyya* when he argues that authority consists of two inter-related components in the Bedouin tribal society. *Sulṭah* or rule is established on the basis of a tribe's *asabiyya*. In other words, authority is based on tribal strength whose close-knit members have strong blood ties with common interests. Secondly, the rule of a tribe is only maintained when other tribes recognise the superiority of that *asabiyya*. Thus, other tribal groups begin to acknowledge the pre-eminence and submit their political allegiance to that tribe. At that stage, the dominant tribe makes *iltiḥām* or builds a coalition with the leading tribes. Thus, the ruling tribe establishes its authority by forming the social integration of different tribes around its own ideology. Ibn Khaldun asserts that "A dynasty rarely establishes itself firmly in lands with many different tribes and groups. This is because of differences in opinions and desires. Behind each opinion and desire there is group feeling defending it."<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the ruling tribe must possess a strong position to unify the conflicting tribes and convince them to extend their loyalty to the ruling elites. In the absence of such tribal authority, the religious authorities play a significant role and they initiate their movement on the basis of religion to unify the hostile interest groups.

In this context, it can be observed that the Umayyads established authority over the other tribes of Quraysh. The pre-Islamic supremacy of the Umayyads also helped them to consolidate their hegemony over the H[shimids. Both Muḥ[wiya and *Abd al-Malik* played a significant role in securing authority. Once they had established authority, they focused on creating harmony among different hostile tribes. They also attracted the religious scholars, as has been discussed in previous chapters, to consolidate their religious authority as well; thus they mobilized both elements of tribal society to convince the masses to extend their consent to the Umayyads. Both the Yemen and Muḥ[ar extended their socio-political allegiance to the Umayyads until the period of Hish[am b. *Abd al-Malik*. Looking at the early Umayyad period reveals that they used coercive and oppressive measures to suppress the rebellions and revolts against them, but at the same time they constructed a dominant culture with the assistance of the intellectual and religious leadership. With these measures, they not only maintained their authority but also created a space and culture where the subordinate or dominated class extended its consent to accept their hegemony without any significant opposition. However, the later Umayyads, because of their internal conflict, lost the support of civil society. Consequently, they did not have any alternative except to exercise coercive measures to stabilise the state.

All the later Umayyads after the death of Hish[am b. *Abd al-Malik*, used coercive means to establish the right of the government. Al-Wal[īd b. Yaz[īd significantly fractured the balance of tribal politics. The Muḥ[ar gained more power in his period; whereas, the Yemen came to power during al-Wal[īd's period. The Muḥ[ar supported Marw[ān b. Muḥ[ammad in reaction. The competing tribal groups of Yemen and Muḥ[ar served the Umayyads but when the later Umayyads could not maintain the balance of power, they began to work for their own interests.

<sup>54</sup>Gramsci, A Selections from the Prison Notebook, 238.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 181-182.

<sup>56</sup>Hague, Harrop and Breslin, Comparative Government and Politics, an introduction, (Macmillan, 1992), 147.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, trans: Franz Rosenthal, (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), 130.

The Yemen tribes of Syria lost their authority when Marwān b. Mu'ammad came into power with the help of his Muḥarrīr army of al-Jaz'ira. Despite having great leadership abilities Marwān b. Mu'ammad had to utilize coercive measures to consolidate his power but he failed because he could not convince the masses. Moreover, the divided and weak tribal society could not legitimise his authority.

## V

In evaluating the sources on the issue of *al-ḥarb al-ḥimā* (tribal conflict) and its role in the fall of the Umayyad, it is assumed that the later Umayyads could not maintain their *al-ḥarb al-ḥimā*. Therefore, it is observed that a conflict emerged within the members of the Umayyad family. Similarly, on a national level, the Arabs could not preserve their *al-ḥarb al-ḥimā* and conflict broke out among the Arab tribes. Consequently, the Arab Umayyad kingdom was replaced by the *Abbasids* who were mainly supported by non-Arabs of Khurasan. The conflict within the Umayyad royal family provoked Yemen and Muḥarrīr tribal conflict. The pre-Modern historians examined Hishām's unfriendly relations with his would-be successor al-Walīd b. Yazīd. Therefore when al-Walīd came to power, he dismissed all Hishām's governors and deputies and punished them mercilessly with the exception of the governor of Iraq, Yūsuf b. 'Umar. As a result, the tribal conflict influenced all socio-political and religious spheres of life. The *Abbasid* movement took advantage of the internal conflict and came into power with the assistance of their Khurāsānī fellows. Moreover, the *Abbasids* utilised a religious spirit to achieve their political target. In this context, Ibn Khaldūn's *al-ḥarb al-ḥimā* theory seems logical. The Umayyads lost their control when the conflict emerged among members of the royal family. Further, the Umayyads could not understand the pace of socio-political change. They consistently based their power on Arab culture which was in fact a culture of ruling through Arab tribalism, whereas the *Abbasids* devised an alternative ideology and founded their rule on Arab-Persian culture. They actually came into power with the help of non-Arabs. Thus, they had to share authority with their non-Arab supporters. Therefore, in contrast to the Umayyads, the *Abbasids* could not enjoy absolute authority.

The anti-Umayyad forces remained unsuccessful against the Umayyads' authority. However, when conflict appeared among the Umayyad family members, they began to lose the support of the tribes. The allegiance of tribes was divided among the leading members of the Umayyad family. Thus, in Gramscian terminology, 'a war of movement' broke out for the survival of the state. This can be observed in the episode of Yazīd b. al-Walīd and Marwān b. Mu'ammad. Moreover, when the *Abbasids* observed the weak and fragile tribes that lacked the leadership of any strong hegemon, they started a 'war of manoeuvre' against the Umayyads on religious grounds. As noted above, Ibn Khaldūn argues that in the absence of tribal unity, religion can play a role in social cohesion. Here we can see that the *Abbasid* presented an alternative ideology based on religious rhetoric. Marwān b. Mu'ammad's governor of Khurāsān attempted to pacify the people of Khurāsān by introducing the economic reforms. It was an unsuccessful attempt at 'a war of position' or passive revolution.<sup>58</sup> Earlier, 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz had attempted to revitalize the state through 'a war of position' but he also failed due to his brief period of rule, and opposition within the Umayyad royal family. As a result, it can be concluded that the Umayyads lost 'a war of position' in the episode involving 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and Naḥr b. Sayyār. Further, they also lost 'the war of movement' and the 'war of manoeuvre' after the death of Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik. It was their failure to win the consent of tribal and religious authorities that led them to their decline.

<sup>58</sup> The 'war of position' or passive revolution means an attempt to control possible opposition through devising reforms without changing the existing structure of authority. It is basically an endeavour to renew the hegemony of the ruling elites – a kind of revolution from above. Gramsci, *A Selections from the Prison Notebook*, 446-481.