Finding reasons for the constitution in the Koraun

Title: "Koraun Bab-Mahdi: The Prince (1850)

Charles Kurzman

Introduction:

The Modernist Islamic Movement

Edouard Valmont was a French diplomat serving in Tehran, Iran, when a constitutionalist movement erupted and came to power in 1906. This movement, combining religious and secular forces, angered that Islam was compatible with democratic principles. Valmont was bemused. In a ghostwritten memoir, he held that Iranians, even apparently enlightened ones, suffer "the lack of real comprehension of the spirit of the Constitution." 12

As evidence of the difficulty modern institutions faced in an Islamic country, Valmont's memoir included a cartoon, reproduced at left, showing a clinical figure pointing with one hand to the Qur'an and holding up his other hand to block various onlookers from peeking. The caption read: "Finding reasons for the constitution in the Koran (from "Mulla Nasir-ud-Din"); the Persian "Punch"). The message seems clear: Muslims may claim that Islam supports constitutionalism, but such claims don't bear close scrutiny. It is, rather, Valmont's use of this cartoon that doesn't bear scrutiny. The original—published with a slightly different drawing in Mulla Nasrullah, the famed satirical journal of Baku, Azerbaijan—had an entirely different caption. It read, in Azeri Turk: "I cure the ill by writing down verses [from the Qur'an]." 3 The cartoon said nothing about constitutionalism, but rather mocked an old-fashioned religious practice. Valmont saw an image lampooning an Islamic scholar and inverted its meaning, from antireligiousism to anti-modernism. Valmont's suspicion of modernism Islam was common among Christians, even among scholars who studied Islam. Duncan Black Macdonald (United States, 1863-1943), for example, wrote in 1903 that Islam does not allow constitutionalism because the caliph "cannot set up beside himself a constitutional assembly and give it rights against himself. He is the successor of Muhammad and must rule, within [divine] limitations, as an absolute monarch." 5 Yet within a few years of that statement, some of the leading scholars of the Islamic world were arguing exactly the contrary. Muhammad 'Abdih (Egypt, 1849-1905; see chapter 3)—the highest-ranking religious official in Egypt—wrote privately in 1904 that he supported a parliamentary democracy. 6 In 1908, Mehmed Cemaleddin Efendi (Turkey, 1848-1917)—the chief religious authority of the Ottoman Empire, appointed


directly by the caliphs—and that he too supported con-
stitutionalism.5 Also in 1908, two senior scholars of
Shi‘i Islam telegraphed their support at a crucial mo-
ment in Iraq's Constitutional Revolution: "We would
like to know if it would be possible to execute Islamic
provisions without a constitutional regime."
Macdonald’s blanket statement about the incompat-
ibility of Islam and constitutionalism also ignored, or
dismissed, the half-century's crescendo of propos-
als for Islamic constitutionalism. These proposals
formed part of a movement that generated tremen-
dous intellectual ferment throughout the Islamic
world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
This movement sought to reconcile Islamic faith and
modern values such as constitutionalism, as well as
the cultural revival, nationalism, freedom of religious
expression, scientific investigation, modern-style
education, women’s rights, and a bundle of other
themes discussed later in this introduction (see also
the Contents by Theme). The authors and activists
engaged in this movement saw the tension between
Islamic faith and modern values as a historical acci-
dent, not an inherent feature of Islam. The modern
period both required and permitted that accident to be
repaired: the threat of European domination made
repair necessary, and the modern values associated
with European domination made repair possible. The
modernist Islamic movement pioneered the forma-
tion or reformation of educational institutions; as-
sumption for political liberalization or decentralization;
and the establishment of a periodical press through-
out the Islamic world.
One defining characteristic of this movement was
the self-conscious adoption of "modern" values—
that is, values that authors explicitly associated with
the modern world, especially rationality, science,
constitutionalism, and certain forms of human equal-
ity. Thus this movement was not simply "modern"
(a feature of modernity) but also "modernist" (a pro-
ponent of modernity). Activists described themselves
and their goals by the Arabic terms jadid (new) and
ma‘allī (contemporary), the Turkish terms yeni
(new) and yeniş (young), and similar words in other
languages. (By contrast, müslim, Malay for young,
was initially a pejorative term applied by opponents to
the modernist Islamic movement.7) A second character-
istic involved the usage of a self-consciously Islamic
discourse. Activists were not simply Muslims but
also wished to preserve and improve Islamic faith in
the modern world. This combination of characteris-
tics emerged in the first part of the nineteenth cen-
tury, as several Islamic states adopted European mili-
tary and technical organization, and various Muslim
travelers to Europe brought back influential tales of
progress and enlightenment. We have picked the date
1840 as a rough marker of the emergence of this form
of discourse.
Modernism distinguished the modernist Islamic
movement from previous Islamic reform movements,
which did not identify their values as modern, and
from contemporaneous competitors such as tradition-
alists who rejected modern values. Finally, it distin-
guished the movement from two of its successors,
which supplanted modernist Islam in the middle of
the twentieth century: on one hand secularists who
downplayed the importance of Islam in the modern
world, privileging nationalism, socialism, or other
ideologies; on the other hand religious revivalists
who espoused modern values (such as social equal-
ity, codified law, and mass education) but down-
played their modernity, privileging authenticity and
divine mandates. Following one classic study, we
have dated the moment of decline at roughly 1940,8
though modernist Islam continued to spread in sev-
eral regions after this date. Late in the twentieth cen-
tury, the combination of modernist and Islamic dis-
courses was revived in a subset of modernist Islam
that I have labeled "liberal Islam," which sought to
reconcile the reputation and accomplishments of
earlier modernists.9
The boundaries of the modernist Islamic move-
ment could be imprecise, but its core was clear: a set
5. Cemal Refik Elmas, Ayas Hansen, 1898–1913 (Po-
litical Memory, 1898–1913) (Istanbul, Turkey: Tercüman,
1978), pp. 43–47; M. Şükri Hançlıoğlu, Preparation for a
Revolution: The Young Turks, 1905–1908 (New York: Ox-
6. Abdullah Haak Haiz, Shi‘ite and Constitutionalism in
7. William R. Neff, The Origins of Malay Nationalism,
2d ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia: Oxford University Press,
8. Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), chap-
ter 13.
9. Charles Kuran, ed., Liberal Islam (New York: Ox-
ford University Press, 1998). Several authors are omitted
from the present book because their work was included in this ear-
lier anthology.
of key figures who served as lodestones for Muslim intellectuals of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Three figures in particular were famed throughout the Islamic world: Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (Iran, 1838–1897; chapter 1), his student and collaborator Muhammad Rashid Rida (Syria/Egypt, 1865–1935; chapter 6), and朦胧ith consultant Sayyid Ahmad Khan (North India, 1817–1899; chapter 40). Namik Kemal (Turkey, 1840–1888; chapter 17), and Ismail Bey Cagirintikli (Crimea, 1857–1914; chapter 29). Supporters cited and debated the statements of these figures, especially the polemical they either Afghani and ‘Abdul’s al-Wahhaj (The Strengthening Link) published in Paris, 1884; Rida’s al-Masry (The Beacon), published in Cairo, 1896; 1935; Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Tahrikul Ahmadiya Refinement of Morals, published in Aligarh, 1876-1896; Namik Kemal’s Harriet (Liberty) and Birei (Warning), published in Paris and Istanbul, 1866-1873; and Qasimkhani’s Teremih Pervadee (The Interpreter), published in Bakbakah, Crimea, 1883–1914. Even authors who disagreed with the modernist Islamic project located themselves in relation to these central figures. The present anthology includes influential writings by these authors. Yet the modernist Islamic movement was not limited to central figures, and this anthology seeks also to highlight the contributions of authors from around the Islamic world who were influential in their regional contexts, from South Africa to East Europe to Southeast Asia.10 But so well known to other Muslims or scholars of Islam. The anthology also samples the modernists’ varied forms of discourse: journalistic essays, scholarly treatises, and didactic fiction of various sorts, including dialogues, storytells, plays, and poems. In addition, the anthology presents a cross section of themes and positions. The modernist Islamic movement was never monolithic, and variation, even deep disagreement, existed on virtually all subjects. Modern values included both state-building and limits on state power; citizenship and liberalism; discipline and liberty; Europhilia and anti-imperialism. The modernist’s Islamic faith encompassed both mysticism and abhorrence of mysticism; mystical use of traditional scholarship and rejection of traditional scholarship; return to a pristine early Islamic and upholding of early practices in keeping with historical change. Considerations of influence and diversity guided the selection of authors and works in this anthology. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues who served as section editors and project advisors, applying their expertise to the selection of succinct, important, relevant, and characteristic contributions from the authors they have chosen. Inevitably, the anthology omits certain important figures for lack of space, and some decisions may be controversial. The Islamic faith of a couple of authors (to be discussed in a moment) may be in question—indeed, opposed charged that ‘Abdul and other leading modernists were “Jehovah’s Witnesses” and even “Saracens.”11 The medendism of some authors may be criticized—indeed modernists castigated another one another for going too far; not far enough, in the direction of the other. This is to be expected of any intellectual movement. Readers should note that the translations do not wish to construct a “canon” of modernist Islam but rather to make available a single volume for a representative sampling of voices in the movement. What can we learn from these voices? The following sections explore the issues that emerge from the writings of the modernist Islamic movement, each organized around the freedom of speech. I propose that this was the central intellectual issue of the movement: the right to say novel things in an Islamic discourse. In order to defend modern values, modernists had to defend the rights to defend modern values. This they did by referring to the particular challenges and opportunities posed by the onslaught of modernity by arguing that their own, often non-traditional, education qualified them to speak on Islamic issues; by pioneering new forms of discourse; and, finally, by laying out their modernist vision of Islam. 

10. The regional classifications are inevitably somewhat arbitrary, as political centers and circuits of meaning reached geographic boundaries. Much of North Africa, for example, was part of the Ottoman Empire, but it is grouped here with the rest of Africa to provide a cross-regional balance.

problems remain vivid today for Muslims who wish to exploit modern values in an Islamic discourse.

Why Speak Now?

Modernism is hardly the first movement in Islamic history to claim a divine need for renewal and revival of the faith. Such calls could be heard already in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and revitalist movements revived up through the twentieth century, a period whose revitalist activity "tended an underlying theme for the modern Islamic experience." Some modernists called upon this and other precedents of reform, in part, to appease, to democratize their countries with Islamic traditions. (Rida chapter 6; among others, cited the hadith saying of the Prophet: "God tends to this nation at the beginning of every century someone who reneweth its religion.""

Yet the modernists faced a challenge that earlier reformers had not, namely the onslaught of modernity. Modernity was not a disembodied sword of ideas; it was associated, rather, with the impenetrable expansion of Christian Europe, which threatened Islam in at least five registers.

Militarily, modern means of warfare allowed Europe to conquer vast regions of the Islamic world. This trend began in the seventeenth century but gained such momentum by the nineteenth century that modernist Muslims worried about the prospect of complete subjugation. "Like a convict, the Muslim world remains everywhere under someone else's control," wrote Musa Jafelilah Bihi (Tunisia, 1795-1949; chapter 35). Even the Ottoman Empire, the most powerful Islamic state, had lost territory and submitted to treaties allowing foreign intervention in the empire's sovereign affairs. Naim Kedal (chapter 17), for example, argues that "the Ottomans nation is lived with the threat of extinction," and the Ottomans "are without any shadow of steel" if current talks continued. He urged this dual prediction to justify his call for democratic reform: "Every intelligent person realizes that as long as this tyrannical administration prevails in the state, foreign interventions cannot be stopped."

Economically, modernity appeared to generate wealth and commodities that the Islamic world lacked and which Muslim visits to Europe in the early and mid-nineteenth century marveled at the gas street lamps and other indicators of prosperity. Modernist Muslims attributed this prosperity to European economic productivity and to exploitation of other regions, including Islamic emirates.

A combination of resentment and respect is expressed, for example, by Mahmud Tawfiq (Afghanistan, 1895-1953; chapter 14): "Eurasian states, by contrast, not only exploit their own mines, but also those of the entire world. In addition to natural resources, they are also capable of industrial production. This is simply because they have the knowledge and we do not.

Cognitively, modern science challenged other worldviews with its dramatic claims of success. Modernist Muslims accepted these claims. Some emphasized its modern science of science, while others emphasized the seemingly miraculous advances made in recent years. All, however, recognized science as a challenge to Islamic understandings of the world. Ahmad Khan (chapter 40), for example, identified this threat even as he embraced modern scientific disciplines. "I am certain that these sciences spread-and their spreading is inevitable-and I myself after all, too, help and contribute towards spreading these-there will arise in the hearts of people as aches that cannot be endured and a desire to escape from Islam as it has been shaped in our time." According to Ahmad Khan, this threat required Muslims to wipe the "black stones" of traditionalism from "the original Islamic face of Islam."

Politically, modern institutions of government, steeped, according to their proponents, to maintain social peace and build national unity in ways that contemporary Islamic states could not. According to Khair al-Din (Tunisia, 1825-1901; chapter 2), Europeans "progress in the governance of mankind, which
has led to the utmost point of prosperity for their countries," revealed in the uprisings. The greatest benefit that the peoples of the Orient have received from the Europeans is to learn how to govern and to govern ourselves. As well as the assimilation of this knowledge, Muslims could not have developed this independently. Moreover, "you are others like you, would not have considered this to be a part of Islam." Al-Mahajjah al-Islamiyyah (2), (1981-1982) 28, in a speech to the newly founded Indonesian parliament, I have never seen the constitutional countries myself. But I've heard, and those who have seen the constitutional countries have told me, that the constitution is the cause of the security and the flourishing of the country."

Culturally, modernity introduced novel patterns of behavior that threatened to displace existing practices. Shakhay al-Khatib al-Majazi (Keny, 1890-1947; chapter 7) worried that "every day we see ourselves deteriorating into habits that are not only in ways that are good and which do not conform to our religion. Muslims adopted alcohol and European garb, but not their good customs, like their pastimes, their ways of conducting meetings, their love of country, their solidarity, and other things like them." Muslim women cut their hair in European styles but refused the value of "the knowledge European women have in fixing up their bodies and making themselves comfortable and neat, and rearing their children in a healthy way, and with good customs and manners, and the ability they have in [doing] handy work and crafts and cooking."

In sum, the challenges of modernity appeared to threaten the very existence of Islam. In the context of social Darwinist competition, many Muslims worried that Islam would not be able to compete. Khwaja Altaf Husseini (India, 1837-1914; chapter 39) worried that the "dilapidated half of the true religion, whose pillars have been tottering for ages, ... will remain in the world only a few days more." Abdul Rahman al-Kawakibi (Syria, 1854-1902; chapter 19) feared that "there is now close—may God forbid it—to the brake." A poem published in Iran and Afghanistan suggested that "the black smoke rising from the roof of the Fatherland is caused by us. The flames that devour us from left and right / Are caused by us." Yet these challenges also provided an opportunity, according to modernists Muslims. By realizing modern ideas, in this view, Islamic societies could not only survive but thrive, as well as recover the original ideals of their faith. "As new things are hardly blameworthy. On the contrary, most innova-
tions are praiseworthy," wrote Rifa'i al-Tabasi (Ivy, 1800-1877; chapter 1).18 According to Someian Sami Farahb (Albania,1850-1904; chapter 18), "it is a regrettable circumstance that, because today civilization seems to be losing exclusivity to the Christian nations, ignorant masses of our own nation take it to be a symbol or requisite of Christianity, and thus deem distancing themselves from it and guarding themselves against it to be a religious duty. We can affirm that it is not the religion of Islam which prevents Muslim nations from becoming civilized."

Even colonial dependence had positive implications, some modernists argued. Muhammad Iqbal (North India, 1977-1938; chapter 41), being an apostle of Pakistani independence, argued that the British Empire was "a civilizing factor" in the Islamic world. "England, in fact, is doing one of our own great deeds, which unfavorable circumstances did not permit us to perform. It is not the number of Muhammadans which it protects, but the spirit of the British Empire that makes it the greatest Muhammadan Empire in the world." Thomas Marshall Ummay (France, 1812-1884), a co-writer in Islam who infiltrated French colonizers of North Africa with his realistic approach for their brutality, nonetheless defended the potential of colonization to develop "an administrative organization favorable to the development of"

agriculture and commerce... an organization of religion and of justice, a large system of public education, and finally various philanthropic institutions.19 Sayid Syed al-Hadi (Malaya, 1857-1934), one of the founders of the Siyasseh reformist journal al-Iman (chapter 48), went so far as to praise British colonizers as God's "righteous servants.20

Not all modernists favored so unambiguously European civilization. Some distinguished between aspects worthy of adoption and those to be rejected. Rida for example, concluded that "what we need to acquire from Europe is its scientific achievements, technical skill and advanced industries. The acquisition of these aspects does not require all that amount of Westernization.21 Others, such as Ali Suri (Tur- key, 1839-1878; chapter 16), noted the hypocrisy of European ideals in the age of imperialism: "Just look how those Frenchmen tax pretentiously about freedom and equality, all the while seeking world domination with deceit." Al-Wali Kalam Azad (Bengal- ludia, 1888-1938; chapter 44) was bitterly critical of the "inequality" of British colonialism which "cannot possibly countenance any nationalistic awakening or agitation for progress, reform, or justice... as such agitation would spell the inevitable downfall of its domion power.22 Hadji Aqsa Salim (Sunnatra Java, 1854-1954; chapter 49) questioned whether the Dutch colonial government was "exercising its power in accordance with the spirit of the times, that is, on the responsibility for preparing these people to develop their own independent talents, so that Indonesians can have their own independent country?"23 Abd al-`Aziz al-Tha'alibi (Tunis- ia, 1879-1949) compared the freedom of the French press with French colonial decrees limiting the Tu- nisian press and "prohibiting the entry into Tunisia of newspapers and writings published in France and elsewhere.24 Yet these crises embraced the ideals of modernity, even as they berated Europeans for fail- ing to live up to these ideals.

Some modernists seemed, frankly, contradictory about European civilization. Iqbal (chapter 41), quoted above praising colonization's "civilizing" mission in 1909, warned Muslims against modernity a few years later:

But do not seek the glow of Love from the knowledge of to-day.
Do not seek the name of Truth from this infidel's cup!
Long have I been running to and fro,
Learning the secrets of the New Knowledge:
Its gardeners have put me to the trial,
And have made me intimate with their roots.
Roses! Tulips, rather, that wan one not to smell them—

Like paper roses, a mirage of perfume.
Since this garden ceased to enthrall me
I have nestled on the Paradoxical tree.
Modern knowledge is the greatest blind—
Idol-worshiping, idol-setting, idol-making.25

Later in life, Iqbal offered similarly antagonistic opinions. On one hand, for example, he praised Tur- key for its drastic Westernizing reform:

The truth is that strong the Muslim nation of today, Turkey alone has shaken off its dogmatic slumber, and at- tained self-consciousness. She alone has claimed her right of intellectual freedom; the alone has passed from the ideal to the real—a transition which entails keen intellectual and moral struggle.26 On the other hand, he castigated Turkey for Westernizing: The Turk, sans the self, Enraptured by the West, drags from her head A poison victim, and since the antidote He has renounced, what can she say except God save him.27

21. Ernst Eids Shahin, Through Muslim Eyes: M. Rufi Ridout and the West (Herndon, Va.: Interational Li- ation of Islamic Thought, 1995), p. 49.
22. `Abdu'llah al-Tha'alibi, La Tunisie arrache (Tunisia the

27. First published in 1912.
Iqbal’s Persian and Urdu poetry denouncing modernity may be at odds with his English-language prose embrace modernity. But this tension represents the challenge of the modernist Islamic movement as a whole. Modernity involved both threat and opportunity, external imposition and internal renovation. Modernists argued that the crisis demanded drastic reform in the Islamic world.

Who Can Speak?

Logically prior to the substance of their arguments, the modernists had to defend their right to make such arguments. They did so by challenging two forms of scholarly authority that stood in their way: the authority of the past and the authority of the credentialed. The authority of the past crystallized in the practice of taqlid, a term that literally means to follow established scholars but which modernists ritually denigrated as blind, irrational imitation of tradition. 26 All of the lodestones figures in the modernist movement weighed in on this theme. 27 and others: “It is better to follow a beast than an imitator,” wrote ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jaz’iri (Algeria-Syria, circa 1897–1983; chapter 15): “Taqlid and Islam are mutually contradictory,” wrote Abdallah Bubi (Tunisia, 1871–1922; chapter 32). “Taqlid of religious leaders who pretend to present true religion is no different from obedience to political tyrants. Either one is a form of idolatry,” wrote Muhammad Husayn Na’imi (Iran, 1860–1936; chapter 13).

Rather than follow precedent, the modernists argued that active reinterpretation of Islamic sources was permitted and even necessary under certain circumstances. Some cited revelation and precedent from the early Islamic era in support of this position. Jamal al-Din al-Qaimi (Syria, 1866–1914; chapter 23)—among many others—cited a hadith in which Muhammad sent a companion, Mu’ādh ibn Jabal (died 627), to serve as governor of Yemen: “The Prophet said to him, ‘How would you act as judge?’ He said, ‘I would judge by God’s book.’ The Prophet then said, ‘And if you do not find a ruling in God’s book?’ He said, ‘By the sword’ (precedent) of God’s Messenger.’ The Prophet then said, ‘And if you do not find it there?’ He said, ‘I would perform (ta’ziya; i.e., martyrdom) and I will breathe my last, and if he struck his chest. Muhammad said, ‘Praise God to give success to the messenger of the Messenger of God, as he has pleased the Messenger of God.’” 28

The concept of taqlid, derived from a root meaning “effort” or “struggle,” had for centuries been limited to a fairly technical meaning, referring to the intellectual effort of trained Islamic scholars to arrive at legal rulings on matters not covered in the sacred sources. 29 The modernists latched on to the term and broadened its scope to include three distinct usages: 30 First was the right to reach across the several legal schools (madhhab) in which scholars traditionally limited themselves, and draw arguments from any and all of them—Muhammad Shafiq al-Ansari (Iraq, 1857–1929; chapter 20) called it “outlandish” to “state that one is obliged to follow the madhhab of a particular scholar, and even more outlandish is the opinion of those who state that one is obliged to adopt one of the four madhhab.” Second was the right to bypass the madhhab and reach back directly to the sacred sources, namely the Qur’an and the precedent of the Prophet and his Companions—to “put the Qur’an in its rightful place,” in the words of Muhammad Al-Qur’an Khan (Bengal-Pakistan, 1868–1968; chapter 45). Third was the right to reconcile the sacred sources with human reason, to discern that “Islam is a religion that is compatible with reason; that is, it has no principles that contradict reason,” as stated by Muhammad Abdul Khadir Manalvi (Madarah, 1873–1932; chapter 42).

This widened door of taqlid should not have been shut in the early centuries of Islam, modernists contended. Syed Ahmad Sirkan (Sudan-Java, 1872–1943; chapter 48) wrote that taqlid was not only contrary to reason and revelation, but also “contrary to the instructions of the imams [founders of the four main Sunni schools of law] whom those practicing

nipple claims to beimitating.” Sir Said bin Falheenin (Talawak, 1858–1936; chapter 33) made a parallel argument about Muslims’ veneration of saintly figures, who would not have approved of such things and the extravagant praise and miracle attributed to them. “Indeed, some modernists suggested that the door of ijtihad had never been shut completely,” as scholars—even scholars opposing nipples—were forced by changed circumstances to devise novel approaches.30 Mula Kazim (Turkey, 1858–1920; chapter 22) wrote that “all of the alulmna [religious scholars] in every era wrote books to accordance with the needs of the day. . . . We have the same need. We must also reform the theological books in accordance with the needs of our era.” In a more critical tone, Ahmad Hassain (Singapore-Indonesia, 1888–1958, chapter 50) accused supporters of nipple of adopting the practice only when it suited them: “When these traditionalist religious scholars agree with the actions and words of the Prophet, they go directly to the hadith as the source of this agreement. But if they disagree, then they go to their earlier scholars”—that is, they engage in ijtihad—“on the basis that they themselves are not ‘original’ scholars and may not use hadith directly.”

Modernists saw nipple not as a religious requirement but as an instrument of institutional authority designed to suppress challenging views.31 Indeed, the modernists’ polemical denunciation of traditional Islamic thought may have been aimed more at the authority of conservative scholars that at their actual writings, most of which did not conform to the modernists’ caricature. Modemists in Iran, for example, were repeatedly accused by conservatives and interpreted by Indonesian authorities on charges of exposing ijtihad;32 and modernists in Central Asia had to tip toe around the issue to avoid trouble.33 The theme of authority arises time and again in the modernists’ works, especially the analogy between religious authority and political authority. Nipple, quoted above, likened nipple to political tyranny, and both to idolatry, “Islam delivered man from the slavery of priests. It recognized no intermediary between the Creator and the crowd,” wrote Mula Reza Quli Shamirat Sangar, (Iran, 1890–1944).34 Bubs (chapter 32) called conservative thought “useful only to oppressive rulers and sultans.” The Algerian reformist newspaper al-Moutassaf (The Critic), edited by Abd al-Hamid Ibn Badis (Algeria, 1869–1940, chapter 9), directed its opening editorial against the combined tyranny of political and religious authorities who sought “to rule the community’s political, economic, intellectual, and religious affairs.”35

Modernists proposed that contemporary scholars are just as qualified as their predecessors to engage in ijtihad. “Do not later men study, compose, and see things like earlier men?” Qasim asked, quoting a tenth-century scholar (chapter 23): “If people were limited to the books of the ancients, then a great deal of knowledge would be lost, penetrating minds would go astray, uncertain tongues would be blunted, and we would hear nothing but repetition.” Even the Prophet’s understanding of Islam, according to Khwaja Ahmad Din Amirali (North India, 1861–1936) of the Ahl-i-Qu’ran movement, was not necessarily superior to that of other Muslims.36 Or perhaps, if one believes in progress, later scholars are more qualified than earlier ones, a theme broached by Bubs (chapter 32): “Since God’s creation is progressing day by day, therefore the latest religions, Islam, is the most perfect religion of all the religions. Similarly, it is quite possible and in accordance with

God's name that in our time there might be scholars of the same degree as, or better than, the scholars of the past."

Even if they overcame the hurdle of absurd, modernists faced a second hurdle: many of them lacked the credibility historically required of religious scholars. Educational pioneer Nahwajih Mena (Egypt, 1846–1957), a seerenger prevented by her family from attending school, taught herself to read, memorized the Qur'an, and sought to interpret its verses. A male relative studying at the Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo objected to this act as "heretical," and said that even he would not proceed without a mentor.37 Modernists combated their handicap by arguing that credentialed scholars sought not to monopolize religious interpretation. Several modernists argued, along with al-Jazzar (chapter 13), that "the intelligent person must consider the statement rather than the person who is stating it." For Azaz, the Qur'an's verse, "Do they not consider the Qur'an"? (Sura 4, Verse 82), legitimized widespread interpretation, since the verse did not limit "they" to a small group.38 Further, some modernists suggested that all Muslims had a duty to engage in jihad. Khayr al-Din (chapter 2) and Na'im (chapter 13)—Sunnis and Shi'is, respectively—both cite the precedent of the second caliph, "Umar ibn al-Khattab" (634–644), who invited all Muslims to judge the propriety of his actions. In Khayr al-Din's telling, "Umar told the Muslims, 'O people, let him among you who has any deviation in his act or in his light.' A man stood up and said, 'By God, if we saw in you deviation we would rectify it with our swords.' " Umar replied, "Praise God who created in this umma him who would rectify with his sword my deviations." In these precedents, the independent religious judgment of noncredentialized Muslim was deemed praiseworthy.

Some modernists went further and argued that traditional education had become so sterile and scholastic that they actively disqualified their graduates from meaningful intellectual work, leaving the field open to the modern-educated. Al-Jibereh (chapter 11) praised traditional scholarship to "a very narrow stick, on top of which is a very small flame that neither lights its surroundings nor gives light to others." Bigi (chapter 35) blamed seminaries for the "widespread stagnation of minds that caused the mind of the Muslim world to remain lifeless and motionless, and therefore to die out."

The Singapore newspaper al-Imarat (chapter 46) excoriated traditional teachers who assigned rote exercises "in order to take up time, lullying belief that [education is like watching] plants grow." The Azerbaijan newspaper Kaspî (The Caspian) wrote that traditional schools "do not deserve to be called schools."

Education in secular subjects, by contrast, would prepare students properly for the practical study of Islam. Aboorayf Fizar (Bukhara, 1856–1918; chapter 34) made the analogy with trains and steamships, invented by "infidels" but resulting in increased pilgrimages by Muslims: "The question of studying is just the same. Under the old system, women are deprived of learning and most of the men live in illiteracy, and in every generation one or two great scholars appear. Under the new system, because it is easier, both women and men will become learned." The Young Anarist-UC-Deva society, founded in Nigeria in 1923, established a series of Western-style schools, arguing, in the words of one of its founders, "by this means alone... can Islam be better studied and understood."

This critique emerged from within the seminaries themselves, pioneered by traditionally trained reformists—not necessarily full-fledged modernists—who admired aspects of modern education. They sought to reform the seminars by incorporating modern disciplines—for example, examinations, grades, and prizes at the Darboonah seminary in India39—and modern disciplines. "A major reason for the decline in the 'ulama's influence within society," wrote a founder of the Nadwati al-'Ulama' seminary in India, "is the popular perception that they have

withdrawn into their cells and know nothing about the state of the world, so that in worldly matters their guidance is entirely unworthy of attention.42

Even when they failed in their attempts at institutional reform, leading internal critics served as role models for cadres of modernists. In Bukhara, Shihabuddin Maqani (Tatarstan, 1818–1889) inspired a generation of seminary-trained modernists who considered him comparable to Protestant Reform-

42. At the Azhar in Cairo, 'Abd al-Aziz achieved limited reform—but as the young, religious official of Egypt he helped to incorpo- rate al-Azhar graduates into a state-run judicial hierarchy. Nonetheless, 'Abd al-Aziz's plans for al- Azhar fired the imagination of dozens of young religious scholars who came to study with him, even for brief periods. One such student, Dimeyndidic Huseinov (1871–1928), became a world-renowned


45. A. Chris Beet, Egypt, Islam, and Social Change: al- Azhar in Conflict and Accommodation (Berlin, West Ger-

46. Marshall Brown, China in Conflict (London: Mor-

47. Hakan Kemo, National Movements and National Identity among the Crimean Tatars (1905–1916) (London, Nether-


49. Some seminarians despaired of reforming the seminaries. Mustawar Qazi (Turkistan-Uzbekistan, 1878–1931, chapter 30)—trained at the traditional schools of Bukhara—condemned such institutions for limiting themselves to commentaries on commentaries. "Our present schools take four or five years to teach only reading and writing, and our colleges take 15 to 20 years to study introductions (to canonic-

50. Qazi founded the first Naqd-i-jadid (new principles) school in Tash-


52. But it can be argued that some reformers, such as 'Abd al-Aziz, or the Mufti of Egypt, were more successful in bringing about changes in the way the educational system worked, rather than completely overhauling it. The Mufti, for example, advocated the use of modern teaching methods and encouraged the study of modern science. His efforts were largely unsuccessful, however, as the traditional education system remained largely intact.

53. Some reformers, such as 'Abd al-Aziz, believed that the only way to bring about real change was through the power of the state. They argued that the state should be the main driving force for change, and that religious leaders should support these efforts. This approach was more successful in some cases, such as in Egypt, where the Mufti of Egypt was able to implement some changes in the education system.
Islamic language. This strain shaded into outright sectarianism, such as Mirta Farh’s “Allahu Akbar (Amenable, 1812–1878), who saw no need for the present of Islamic education and doubted that Islam could ever be construed as compatible with modern values.

The modernists’ critique of seminary training did not imply complete democratization of the right to engage in Islamic reasoning. Despite the precedents that some modernists cited, arguing all Muslims to make independent religious judgments, the modernists generally replaced one form of credentializing with another—just as modernists did outside the Islamic world as well. Qusay (chapter 16) rejected a definition of freedom that permits “saying whatever comes to one’s mind,” giving the example of a French newspaper that denied the existence of God. "Abdul (chapter 3) offered a warning from the early outre- ries of Islamic history, when “every opinion-monger took his stand upon the liberty of thought the Qur’an enjoined,” leading to dangerous excesses. Ahmad Khan (chapter 4)—while favoring freedom of speech on the pragmatic grounds that open debate advanced the search for truth—was dismissive of “the opinion or independent judgment of every Tom, Dick, and Harry,” and sought to justify his position “not by any traditional argument, nor by any proofs of the mujahids based on independent judgment, but by nature.” Surka (chapter 48) implied jihad only to those who have the capacity and opportunity to understand the proofs of God and His laws.


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could be done by me, then I last certainly do ex-
actly what I did and what I am still doing: God knows
my pure intention.”

How to Spies:
The novel approaches of modernist Islam frequently
found expression in novel forms or discourse. The
modernists specified at least three ways in which the
literary forms of the past were inadequate.

First, modernists held that the long-standing literary
themes were insufficiently attuned to the concerns
of contemporary Muslims. They sought to replace
Arabic language, irrelevant fantasy, and crude humor
with noble and useful themes. Modernist Islamic
poets, for example, adopted traditional poetic forms
throughout the Islamic world. One of the most in-
fluential examples of this adaptation, Halil’s “The
Flame and Eros of Islam” (chapter 38), adapted the
traditional Urdu structure of the masnadads, with its
particular rhyme scheme and verse length, but filled
it with the imagery and symbolism of contemporary
life. In an unusually extensive and reflective introduc-
tion to the poem, Halil explained:

When I behold the new pattern of the age, my heart
became sick of the old poetry, and I began to feel
ashamed of bringing together empty fabrica-
tions. . . . It is true that much has been written, and
continues to be written about this. But no one has
yet written poetry, which makes a nation appeal to
all, and has been bequeathed to the Muslims as a
legacy from the Arabs, for the purpose of awakening
the community.”

The traditional literary form of debate (mawariza)
was also adopted and infused with modernist con-
tent,84 as in Kawash’s fictional pan-Islamic assen-
ibly (chapter 19) and the starting invocation effected
by Firiq (chapter 38), in which debate between a
European and a British Muslim is staged with the
author embodied in the European character. Mod-
ernists condemned the traditional format, substi-
tuting the positive comparison of Islam with reli-
gions of other lands but also stressing the wonders
of modernity—generally focused on Europe, as in
books by Yahya and Mina Saleh Shahriz (Iran,
circa 1790–1845), but also Iran and India, as de-
scribed by Siraj al-Din Haktim (Kukurna, 1777–
1914), and Japan, as reported by ‘Ali Ahmad al-
Jarjawi (Egypt, mid-nineteenth–early twentieth
century).81 Theology (kalam), long suspect within
Christian circles for its rationalist heritage, was re-
newed by Mohammad Shabbil Nu’mani (North India,
1857–1914) and Imam Haji Ismail (Turkey,
1869–1946), among others.82 Traditional biogra-
phic literature was transmuted into modern bi-
ography, as in Faheyaj’s study of the 18th cen-
tury reformer Ibn Taimiyya, a popular figure among
the modernists,83 in which—according to the au-
thor—“every piece of information and fact is exam-
ined meticulously, and partisanship is avoided as
much as possible” (chapter 33).

A second movement among modernists involved
the development of novel forms of religious writing.

61. Nadjat Abu Zayd, "Al Dinwah as Timbucto of the
Culture of Persian Society," in Radiani Tharidi, ed.,
Theories of Modern Science & Technology in the Muslim
World (Istanbul, Turkey: Research Center for Islamic
History, Art, and Culture, 1984), pp. 419–424; Monta Amin, "The
Quest for the Secret of Strength in Islamic Nineteenth-
Century Travels Literature," in Nikif R. Kafadar and Rudi
Marche, eds., Iran and the Iran-Irving World (Seattle:
Mohamed Tawfik-Taghi, Reformism in Iran (Houndmills,
England: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 35–76; Mezli Sufi, al-Din
Haktim, Souvenirs de voyage pour les gens de Boukhari
(Delmar, New York, 1999); Michael F. Lakin,
"Making Mejl Muslim: The Travels of "Al Idol al-
43–170.

62. Me焕发 Abdul Malek, Modernot Modernism of Shabbil
Nu’mani (Lahore: Fauziart: Institute of Islamic Colonne,
19th Century, pp. 46–50; Milita Elia Elia, Le roman de l’Islam (The
Thomson of Islam) (Istanbul, Turkey: Pantheon变速箱, 1953),
pp. 166–127.

63. Henry Lajoy, Essai sur les doctrines sociales et policiers de
Fad al-Din Ahmad b. Tavitir al-Fawzi on the Social and Political
Institutions of Taj al-Din Ahmad al-Taimiyya (Calis, Egypt: Thinean franq: d’archeologie
1999), pp. 543–552.
The effort to reinvigorate Islam involved an intensive project of outreach and uplift, for which new discursive strategies were deemed necessary. All Mubarak (Egypt, 1824–1893) made this reasoning explicit in the introduction to one of the first Arab novels:

I have realized that the readers are inclined to making epic tales, narrative fiction, and entertaining works, rather than works on pure scientific or practical concerns. The latter works breed boredom and lead the reader to sleep. They... This persuaded me to write this useful book in a form of attractive narrative to entice the reader to absorb its useful information and instructions, which have been collected from many Arabic and foreign books in arts and sciences.\footnote{In an early Urdu novel, The Repentance of Nanak, by Nazir Ahmad (North India, 1836–1912), the title character burns a roomful of old books and identifies the atonement for such "poison" as "books of faith and morality." Similarly, Mahnoud Khoja Bebbuday (Samsunqad, 1874–1919; chapter 36), author of the first modern play in Central Asia, described theater as "a place for preaching and exhortation." The first plays in the Arab world were adaptations of French works produced in Lebanon in 1847; the first modern Urdu play was performed in 1853; the first modern Turkish play was produced in 1859; and other Islamic regions appear to have followed suit at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The third, and perhaps the greatest discursive innovation of the modernist Islamic movement was the periodical press, which is established in virtually every community of the Islamic world. Selections in this anthology include passages from Mombasa (chapter 7) to Durban (chapter 9), and from Malabar (chapter 42) to Singapore (chapter 46), which is relatively low cost and wide distribution of newspapers, magazines, and journals opened a stream of words that reached a relatively large readership (and listener-ship, as items were read aloud). The modernist Islamic movement held great hopes for its impact. A 1907 cartoon in Nolua Naazuddin, for example, showed a modernist waving a newspaper, ceasing traditionally garbed religious scholars to run fleeing from the power of the press.\footnote{Abdul, a young man, paid homage to the power of the newspaper in a poem, comparing it favorably to the legacy of the Egyptian pyramids: the newspaper is "the nourishment of the spirits," "the tongue of heavenly secrets," and "guidance for those who seek." It "alerts the unattentive" and "has taken it upon itself to spread the sciences among the common people." Later, he admitted a certain skepticism about this power—"These days there are people who believe that the illusions of nations may be cured with the publication of journals"—but participated in producing the two most influential modernist papers. An Indian opponent of the modernists mocked their confidence in the medium: "Faced with a gun, bring out a newspaper." Yet conservatives in Malay feared the power of periodicals of "the new style" enough to try to ban "papius debasing the Muslim-mediated religion." In 1929, religious conservatives also made use of the same media. Following periodicals such as Isba'ul al-San'a (News of Tradition) in Lahore (founded 1878), Dies va Mai (Religion and Life) in Kaizen (1906–1917), and Al-Saha (Religion and Life) in Damascus (1910–1913). In the 1920s, historian Daniel B. Brower and Edward J. Lazarin, eds., Russia's Orient: Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 197.}
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'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Watā'ī (Yemen, died 1759), a supporter of the isolatist Yemeni imamate, credited newspapers as "...great force, the instructive school, the scales of measuring, the activity of the community and the indicator of its conditions, the vigilant overseer of the government." Religious conservatives also published printed books rather than relying exclusively on hand-copied manuscripts. The press brought news of parallel and competing movements around the world. Like other periodicals of the era, they often reprinted, translated, or summarized articles they found interesting from other periodicals, increasing the density of linkages across regions and language groups. In addition, they trumpeted models of successful modernization. Japanese military victories over Russia in 1864, for example, were carried "live" in the newspapers of the world, offering inspiration. The Malay newspaper al-Iman (chapter 46) commented on "the ascent of the Japanese tree... who defeated the six-foot-tall giants," and referred to writings on Japan by the Egyptian national Muṣṭafa Kamīl (Egypt, 1874–1908). The Iranian newspaper Hādi al-ma'tīn (The Firm Rope), published in Calcutta, wrote at length on the implications of Japan's success. We need an independent renewal like that of Japan," Kяд wrote years later in Egypt (chapter 6).

The immediacy of the periodical press, especially daily newspapers, expressed in its very form the modernists' view of progress. Each issue presented the latest word, superseding previous statements. A properly informed person had to keep up with breaking news and ongoing debates. The newspaper format exerted pressure toward brevity, glibness, and a minimum of scholarly citations. As a result, newspaper writers were vulnerable to accusations of shallowness. Yet in the competition for religious authority, writers without seminary training may have preferred to write texts without detailed citations and expanded quotations, which seminary-trained writers were more adept at producing.

A similar case could be made for lectures, which eager students on the lectures themselves sometimes published. Afghani's Calcutta lectures on teaching and learning (Chapter 17), for example, was published despite Afghani's complaint that his host "left this talk to be delivered only in an abbreviated form." Similarly, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Maghribi (Lebanon, 1867–1956; chapter 27) published a lecture in Beirut despite complaining that his host "gave me time only for a phone call. So forgive me if I hasten or if I gloss over certain aspects." These inelegant, ritualized apologies may mask the lack of full scholarly apparatus expected of written work on religious subjects.

In sum, the modernist movement adopted traditional literary forms to modernist purposes and pioneered new forms, especially a periodical press that emphasized the contemporaneity of knowledge and de-emphasized scholarly citation.

What to Speak

The substance of the modernist Islamic appeal may be summarized in any number of ways. I choose to emphasize five general topic areas, each of which is deep enough to capture a significant portion of the modernist writings included in this anthology, and wide enough to involve significant differences of opinion within the modernist movement: Religious interpretation has already been covered in this introduction, and we turn now to the other four.

Culture/Revival

The sense that cultural decline had gripped the Islamic world was not limited to modernist authors. Conservatives also pointed to the massive changes they were witnessing, as for example Akbar Allahbakhsh (North India, 1846–1921): The timbrels and the music—both have changed. Our sleep has changed, the tale we told has changed. The nightingale now sings a different song. The color in the cheeks of spring has changed. Another kind of rain falls from the sky.
images involved rebirth and renewal, often with references to the Protestant Reformation in Christianity. "Truly, we are in a dire need for renewal and renewal," wrote Rida (chapter 6). This effort must combine "religious renewal and earthly renewal, the same way Europe has done with religious reformation and modernization." Iqbal (chapter 4), in a moment of respect for the West, drew on parallel imagery:

"Germany has witnessed the upheaval of the Reformation, which has erased all marks of earlier times. The beauty of the temple priest has been nullified, and the delicate ship of thought has embarked on its course.

The French have also seen a revolution, which has overturned the world of the Westerners. The descendants of the Greeks aged by their worship of antiquity, have become youthful again with the pleasures of renewal. The soul of the Muslim has a similar ferment today, (but) this is a divine secret which the temple is unable to express."

Let us see what springs from the bottom of this ocean; let us see what color the sky now turns.

The modernists disagreed vehemently among themselves as to the extent to which cultural revival must erase existing cultural forms. Those who favored almost complete erasure crossed the line from Islamic modernism to secular modernism, as in the case of Hasan Tascada (Ishak, 1978-1969), who favored "absolute submission to Europe, and the assimilation of the culture, customs, practices, organization, science, arts, life, and the whole attitude of Europe, without any exception save language." Islamic modernists, by contrast, justified the erasure of aspects of recent culture as a recovery of older or more authentic culture. In the words of Khayr al-Din (chapter 2), "There is no reason to reject or ignore something which is correct and demonstrable simply because it comes from others, especially if we had
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formerly possessed it and it had been taken from us. On the contrary, there is an obligation to restore it and put it to use." In more provocative language, Halide Edip Adıvar (Turkey, 1882–1966; chapter 28) wrote that "all-round Westernization" reinforced rights that "Islam had already proclaimed ... a thousand years ago," and expressed the "vital racial interest of the Turkish soul." 83

Adıvar’s reference to race introduces the issue of purportedly biological social hierarchies, which modernists valued along with other "scientific" doctrines of the era. Certainly many Muslims engaged in racial discrimination prior to the modern era, just as Europeans and others did. 84 Arabs such as Kawakibi (chapter 19) objected to Ottoman Turkish "use of the term 'Arab' for slaves and black animals." Non-Arab Muslims such as Murad Alaku Pickthall (England, 1873–1956) detected and denoted the iniquity among Arab scholars to "think that the Arabs are still 'the patrons', and the non-Arabs their 'inferiors'...." 85 One modernist theme was the erosion of these racialized distinctions, for example the campaign in Southeast Asia to allow female students of the Prophet Muhammad to marry Muslim men who did not share their descent. 86 Salih likened this to "the struggle between aristocracy and democracy," and concluded, "It is this spirit of democracy which constitutes one of the main reasons for the spread of Islam in the world. Those who extinguish this spirit belong to those who hamper the development and spread of Islam." 87

Yet modernists—Muslim, Christian, and otherwise—replaced older forms of racism with a new version based on scientific research into the alleged hierarchy and evolution of human capabilities. It may be unfair to single out a particular author, but Mahfuz (chapter 27) is typical of many modernists in mentioning groups at a particular "stage in their social evolution, ... in Africa or China for example, constrained by their social situation or the disposition of their temperament to adopt polygamy." A similarly scientized view is evident in Marghribi’s discussion of women, whose "weak self-confidence, gullibility, and lack of discipline" are said to justify the lesser value of their courtroom testimony. Similar views have been documented in Egypt and elsewhere. 88

Modernism also adopted a second form of social hierarchy, that of capitalism. Some modernists favored social-democratic reforms—notably Salim (chapter 49), in this anthology, and Muhammad Hafizurrahman Silsvari (North India, 1901–1962) 89—and an Islamic Communitarian movement emerged to the left of the social democrats in Indonesia in the late 1930s, with figures such as Haji Mohammad Misbah (Java, circa 1870–1940) criticizing Salim and other Islamic modernists: "To be sure, they perform the precepts of the religion of Islam, but they pick and choose those precepts that suit their desires. Those that do not suit them they throw away. Put bluntly, they oppose or defy the commands of God ... and rather fear and love the will of Satan—that Satan, whose evil influence is apparent in this present age in the system of Capitalism." 90 Support of capitalism was indeed the dominant economic theme in the modernist Islamic movement. Khayy al-Din (chapter 2) praised societies in which "the circulation of capital is expanded, profits increase accordingly, and wealth is put into the hands of the most efficient who can cause it to increase." Sabah al-Din Khuda Bakht (North India, 1877–1931) espoused the right of Muslims "to attend to their religious obligation without sacrificing their worldly prosperity." 91 Modernists made a moral distinction between rich people who invested it modestly economic and cultural enterprises and those who did not, denouncing the latter for their "submersion, ... in luxury and

cernal appetites, and their avoidance of any kind of glatory other than ascension and wealth," in the words of Kawakibi (chapter 19). It is probably not coincidental, and the master deserves systematic study, that the modernist movement was bankrolled in part by industrialists and traders promoting international economic linkages, such as Husoyn Baybaya, a leading merchant who supported Islamic constitutionalism in eastern Turkestan in the early twentieth century. 93 or H. Z. A. Tagiev and other industrialists who supported cultural reform in Azerbaijan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. 94

Some Islamic modernists worried about wholesale adoption of Western culture. Bahiabuz Al-Baziyi (Egypt, 1886-1918; chapter 5), while promoting education in modern subjects, suggested that "If we pursue everything Western we shall destroy our own civilization, and a nation that has lost its civilization grows weak and vanishes." Rais (chapter 6) assailed the faction of Egyptians that, "in imitation of the benefits of Europe and its liberals, is hostile to religious and despises the devout, who constitute the majority of the nation." Salim (chapter 49) criticized "saphil" of Western manners, and Aghayer mocked the "Westernized Oriental" as "Western only on the surface." Aghayer warned, "Simply to transplant Western civilization to the Orient will only result in disabling the rectitude of the Oriental. One becomes neither Eastern nor Western, but something in-between, with all the weaknesses of the one without the qualities of the other." 95

Modernists aimed these critiques at one another, just as religious conservatives aimed them at modernism as a whole. All modernists, presumably, con-

sidered themselves in happy equilibrium, rejecting existing customs where necessary while maintaining the most important Islamic values. Yet what to reject and what to maintain was frequently a subject of debate. One broad field of disagreement was the topic of popular religious practices associated with Sufism. Some modernists had Sufi backgrounds—the most influential modernist in Damascus, al-Jaza‘ri (chapter 15), was a Sufi sage and justified his rationalism on thoroughly Sufi grounds. 96 Some modernists wished to maintain certain Sufi practices and beliefs, including Franbai, who urged Albanian Sufi organizations to develop into a political party; 97 and Ubayyidullah Sindi (India, 1772-1844), who defended Sufi mysticism as both "the Axis of Islam" and "an international or purely human conception of a universal religion." 98 More commonly, modernists held Sufi practices to be aberrant, especially the veneration of saints. 99 The profit to be had from such practices lured sham clerics eager to "gain fame and earn more worldly profit," according to Fakhradini (chapter 33). "As a result, the Muslims were overwhelmed in economic and political affairs, and so were destined to be crushed under the feet of others." 100 At the same time, reformist Sufi leaders condemned certain of their colleagues on similar grounds, accusing them of "spending their lives in the pursuit of the things of this world and vain lifestyles," 101 and trying to ban the commercialization of religious practices. 102 In relation to Sufism, as to other Islamic practices and beliefs, the scope

and meaning of cultural revivis was contested both within and outside the modernist Islamic movement.

Political Reform

A second major goal of the modernists was the implementation of constitutionalism. Here too, Islamic dictators on human equality were marshaled in support. "[A]lthough God, most exalted, preferred some to others in endowments, He made them equal in accountableness, with no distinction between the honorable and the base, the leader and the subordinate," wrote Tüsun (chapter 1). "Equality means nothing but sharing the same laws, and being equal before the law. Similarly, according to Abdullah Abu Omar (South Africa, 1870–1940; chapter 3), "If God made no distinction between man and man, we had no right to do so. And until we are regarded as equal in this country, there is no such thing as a democratic institution." Mustafa Fazil Pasha (Turkey, 1829–1875), wrote in 1866, in one of the earliest manifestos of Islamic constitutionalism, that Islam dictates human fate in the afterlife, but does not limit "the rights of the people," and therefore cannot justify tyranny: "There are no Christians or Moslem politicians," he argued, "for there is only one justice, and politics is justice incarnate." Sayyid 'Abd al-Aziz 'Imad al-'Ulama 'Khalkhal (Iran, mid-nineteenth–early twentieth century), writing soon after the promulgation of the first Iranian constitution, stressed that "God has not made any distinction among his obedient servants. Prophets and messengers, serfs and kings, the old and the young, men and women, servants and masters, religious authorities and the masses, descendants of the Prophet and non-Arab Muslims, the rich and the poor, are all equal and partners in their obligations, according to the laws of justice, fairness, and equality."102

Modernists referred to a variety of sacred sources to establish the legitimacy of constitutionalism. Namik Kerzeli (chapter 17) quoted the Qur'an injunction, "And seek their counsel in the matter" (Sura 3; Verse 159), concluding that "the salvation of the state today is dependent upon the adoption of the method of consultation." Chiragh 'Ali (North India, 1844–1995; chapter 39) argued that the Qur'an does not interfere in political questions, nor does it lay down specific rules of conduct in the Civil Law, concluding that "the Qur'an or the teachings of Hadith are neither barriers to spiritual development nor free-thinking on the part of Muhammadans, nor is it an obstacle to innovation in any sphere of life, whether political, social, intellectual, or moral." 103

remains "in conformity with its geographical location, circumstances, and population." The best to be hoped for, he concluded, was to hold the sultan’s ministers accountable to an elected parliament.

In addition, constitutionalists faced a tension between limiting state power to protect liberty and building sufficient state power to effect societal changes. Their solution to this dilemma lay in the idea that ruling by consent would increase the state's effectiveness, as in Khayrb al-Din's formulation (chapter 2): "It is God's custom in Hāj world that justice, good management, and an administrative system duly complied with be the causes of an increase in wealth, peoples, and property, but that the contrary should cause a diminution in all of these things." Some modernists adopted the recently developed European view that the role of the state lay in cultivating consent through training, as did a 1903 Egyptian educational text: "There is no way to educate and strengthen something, except by training and drilling it in the performance of its function, until it can accomplish it with smoothness, speed, and precision."

Other modernists reversed the order and considered state power the prerequisite for all other reforms. The"First conditions of any progress and reform," wrote an Iranian educator, were "security and order"—a view expressed in the Young Turk slogan of "Union and Progress."


Science and Education

Modern science held such power, in the world-view of modernist Islam, that it could only be described in terms generally reserved for divine entities, as in this statement by Afghani (chapter 11): "How difficult it is to speak about science. There is no end or limit to science. The benefits of science are immaterial, and these finite thoughts cannot encompass what is infinite. Besides, thousands of eloquent speakers and sages have already expressed their thoughts to explain science and its nobility. Despite this, nature does not permit me not to explain its virtue. Thus I say: If someone looks deeply into the question, he will see that science rules the world. There was, is, and will be no riot in the world but science.

The power of science, Afghan continued, accounted for the reverses suffered by the Islamic world. "The English have reached Afghanistan; the French have seized Tunis. In reality this aggression, aggression, and conquest have not come from the French or the English. Rather it is science that everywhere manifests its greatness and power. Ignorance had no alternative to prostrating itself humbly before science and acknowledging its submission."

This oppositional pair, "science" versus "ignorance"—designating all forms of knowledge aside from modern science—paralleled the traditional opposition between the age of Islam and the pre-Islamic age of ignorance (aḥbāb aṣālim). Indeed, numerous modernist Islamic authors made the parallel explicit, recounting the scientific advances of the early Islamic era and their influence on later European scientific developments. A cartoons in Muḥa Niazuddin, for
example, showed a speaker castigating an audience: "Sure! There are hundreds of [Qur'anic] verses and hadiths about science being obligatory upon all. The Europeans have taken our ancient science and reached civilization... but we have remained backward."111 Ameer 'Ali (Bengal, 1849-1928; chapter 43) credited the Prophet Muhammad as well for his "devotion to knowledge and science... distinguishing him from all other Teachers, and bringing him into the closest affinity with the modern world of thought." The intellectual centers of the early Islamic centuries, Ameer 'Ali continued, developed "a true and strongly marked scientific spirit, which dominated over all its achievements. The deductive method, hitherto proudly regarded as the invention and sole monopoly of modern Europe, was perfectly understood by the Muslims." Pride in the past greatness of Islamic science was coupled with dismay at later stagnation. Some attributed the shift to external forces, such as Ameer 'Ali's emphasis on destruction wrought by the Mongol conquest. Others attributed the shift to internal developments, as in Ameer 'Ali's accusation that a religious elite "tried to stifle the sciences" and was marvelously served in its designs by despotism. Frasheri (chapter 18) took this accusation a step further, suggesting that centuries of scientific stagnation undermined any pride in past accomplishments: The Europeans borrowed many things from us, that is to say from our ancestors or more precisely our contemporaries who lived eight or ten centuries ago; however, none of the things in their hands today is something that was borrowed from our ancestors. Europe borrowed, a seed of civilization from the Islamic world, she plowed that seed. It is natural that a seed should decompose in the earth in order to bear fruit. That seed decomposed; the cycle has been repeated many times, with the result that its very genius has changed. The knowledge that Europe derived from the scholars of Islam was very considerable by [the standards of] the time, but by present-day standards it is nothing.112

Along similar lines, Azad ridiculed the attempt "to invoke the Qur'an to lead its support to the achievements of modern research in the different spheres of scientific thought, as if the Qur'an was delivered over 1,300 years ago just to endorse in advance, in the form of ridles, what for centuries, [European scientists] could find out for themselves without the aid of any revealed scripture."113 A countermine in modern Islam held that early Islamic science was a foreign import, not an expression of the original Islamic spirit. Yet this importation was in turn accused of atheism by conservative scholars. "The danger of atheism helped to motivate education reform, which was intended to comen with European-run schools by teaching modern science along with the belief that science was consistent with Islam." "Ahmed, would-be reformer of al-Ashar in Cairo, criticized Western-style schools for trying to turn Muslims into Europeans, which he likened to making chicken lay goose eggs."114 Gaspardini (chapter 29), pioneer of judo schools in the Russian Empire, excoriated Russian-educated Muslims who knew European languages and science but were "unable to read and write in their own language!" Ahmad Khan (chapter 40), founder of the Aligarh school in India, sought to pro...


The modernist Islamic movement was the promotion of girls' schooling. Modernists justified girls' schools on various grounds. One focused on the rights of women. Rokaya Sabrak Haroun (Sengal, 1890-1928), a pioneer in women's education in South Asia, emphasized his theme in her presidential address to the Bengali Women's Education Conference in 1936: "The apparent lack of female education says that women will become virtuous and morally fit. They call themselves Muslims and yet go against the basic tenets of Islam, which accords women an equal right to education."115 As Mursi (chapter 7), among many other women, emphasized, "The Prophet himself says that women and men both should be educated."116

The rights of women extended to a variety of behaviors, including military service, that women of the early years of Islam engaged in, wrote Fakhreddin (chapter 33). According to Maghribi (chapter 27), "Many of the ways the Prophet used to treat his wives we see today as inapplicable and undesirable," such as camel-racing with his wife and watching entertainment together in a mosque. Aside from education, modernists disagreed as to which rights women should enjoy. In 1917, Muslim women's organizations in Russia urged limits on polygamy, so that it would not infringe on the rights of first wives; the (male) All-Russia Muslim Congress, meeting the same year, took a more radical position, calling for a complete ban.117 In 1918, a women's association in India called for an end to polygamy, emphasizing the Qur'anic guarantee of women's right to equal treatment by their husbands; other (male) modernists were scandalized even over one who had himself called for such a ban.118 Similarly, modernists debated women's right to divorce and their right to participate in politics. The Azerbaijan People's Republic granted women's suffrage in 1918,119 yet the republics in Turkey refused, refusing that Aycan (chapter 28) called "perhaps a blessing," since women have thus been protected from the danger of being identified with petty politics, and their activities outside the political world could not be stopped for political reasons.

As these examples indicate, gender did not necessarily predict a modernist's position on any particular aspect of women's rights. Even hijab—moost "Islamic" dress—which Western observers took as a potent symbol of Muslim women's oppression, divided modernist Muslims along ideological rather than gender lines. In Iran, pioneering educator and editor Maryam Anad Muzayyan al-Salihaa (Iran, 1915-1919), a woman, defended hijab, but published the work of other Iranian women who objected to it.120 Qasim Amin (Egypt, 1861-1908; chapter 4), a man, and Nazira Zain-ed-Din (Lebanon, born circa 1890) have been influential figures in the debate.121

119. Margaret Stimmel, Muslim Women in Morocco, 1890-1917 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 102.

God in His creation has set laws whose transformation cannot be deceived [by humans]. But this transformation would not occur through employing women in men’s occupations or in men’s women’s occupations."

A variant of this argument, adopted so commonly that it may well constitute a third strand, held that schools would make women bett"er mothers. Bahbah al-Badīya (chapter 5) made this case, responding to the view—common in global scientific discourse of the era—that education deserts women: "No matter how much a mother has been educated, or in whatever profession she works, this would not cause her to forget her children nor to lose her maternal instinct. On the contrary, the more enlightened she becomes, the more aware she is of her responsibilities. Haven’t you seen ignorant women and se"a"nt women ignore their crying child for houses?" Were these women also occupied in preparing legal cases or in reading and writing?" The founder of the first girls’ schools in the Sudan, Bahibik Bedri (Sudan, 1886–1954), justified modern education on the grounds that it "would enable a girl to run her home in such a way as to attract educated young men of her own race, from among her relatives or fellow citizens. This would help to prevent our educated men from marrying foreign girls a thing which would bring to nought our efforts in educating them." Even quite conservative religious scholars, such as Maulana Ashraf’ali Thanwari (North India, 1864–1943), could support women’s education on the grounds that ignorance, ‘the ruination of the religion of the women of Hindustan, . . . went beyond the women to their children and in many respects even had its effects on their husbands.” This line of reasoning allowed some modernists to call for limits on girls’ education; women needed only to learn child-rearing, home economics, and moral virtue. In Ahmad Khar’s words: “The learning that will be beneficial today to women is the same that benefited

them is the past, namely, religion and practical morality."

Queen Surayya Tazi (Afghanistan, 1887–1968), daughter of Malikah Tazi (chapter 14), combined all three sorts of arguments—benefit to family, benefit to society, and the rights—into consecutive sentiments in her announcement of the opening of the country’s first girls’ schools in 1921: “Women who charge of bringing up the future generation, the most important responsibility in life. If we deprive women of education, we have, in effect, incapacitated half of our body and have destroyed our subsistence with our own hands. It was not in vain that ‘Ezar Muhammad’ (may peace be upon him) made the acquisition of knowledge obligatory for both men and women.”

The emphasis on women’s role as mothers was measured in the modernist Islamic discourse on masculinity. The crisis and decline of the Islamic world was associated in male authors’ writings with effeminate men—that is, men who did not embody the masculine roles associated with success in the modern world. Malikah Khan (chapter 12) goaded mistresses by noting that certain women “have perceived the meaning and values of humanity far better than the men, that is, better than our men.” First (chapter 34) accused tribal religious scholars of pedantry—“indecent acts with a beardless youth”—identifying premodern malaise with homosexual-ity, as did a variant in Mulla Nauruddin showing traditionally gendered men groping and kissing dancing boys, and a Turkish modernist accusing traditional religious scholars of “adultery, homosexuality, drinking.” How can we restore the vitality of this great religion with these Shuyukh al-Islam [religious officials], with these tawabun ‘afsan [semi-ascetic students] whose ideas of faith do not go beyond voluptuous desires to own beautiful girls and boys in Paris?”

Mulla Nauruddin (chapter 41) turned the image of emasculation onto modern-educated Muslim men, bemoaning “the bony graduate of high culture”—


131. Mulla Nauruddin, May 19, 1946, p. 3.


preciseptrously male—“whose low, timid voice betokens the dearth of soul in his body, who takes pride in his submissiveness, and complains of sleepless nights, and produces unhealthy children for his community. If he does produce any at all.” Male modernism projected their conception of idealized heterosexual family onto the nation as a whole, representing the nation as a female in need of male salvation and protection. The male modernist, Bishrihan protected, tends to be “in despair about liberating us [women] as he has been shown our enslavement. We are weary of his despair.”

The Legacy of Modernist Islam

Many observers of the modernist Islamic movement, even many sympathetic observers, have said all along that it won’t amount to much. One British supporter recast his optimism after being attacked in western Egypt in 1897, an experience that “has convinced me that there is no hope anywhere to be found in Islam. I had made myself a romance about these reformers, but I see that it has no practical basis.”

In 1916, a Belgian missionary concluded from his study of Islamic modernism that “we may not expect much to result in the way of uplift to Islam from rationalizing and intellectual defence and prayer.”

Not all observers have been so critical. For example, the Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher (Hungary, 1850–1921), twirling the “efforts, in a large number of theological instances, to find support in Qur’an and hadith for the requirements of modern political life, as also for the requirements of progress in civil life.


Introduction


(136) Concluded with cautionous optimism, "These cultural tendencies, intimately related to religious life, that are making themselves felt in various parts of the Muslim world, carry the seeds of a new phase in the evolution of Islam." Many Muslims of the early twentieth century seem to have agreed with Goldziher’s assessment. Thousands read modernist Islamic newspapers; millions of Muslims celebrated the constitutional revolutions in Iran (1906) and the Ottoman Empire (1908); millions more participated in the anticolonial movements led by Islamic modernists in North Africa and South and Southeast Asia. At the same time, millions opposed the modernist Islamic movement, but sympathy for the movement appears to have diffused beyond the elite intellectual circles that spawned it.

(137) In modernity such sympathies largely dissipated, even among the educated. By the 1930s, the movement was in serious decline, its energies sapped by secular nationalism, socialism, and fascism, which emphasized the modernist aspects of modernist Islam, and by religious revivalist movements emphasizing the Islamic aspects. Among secularists, the Soviet Union witnessed the most spectacular denunciations of previous identities—Azerbaijani Islamic modernists signed an open letter admitting that “we were deceived and mistaken” in their earlier views, for example—but similar transitions occurred even without the threat of Soviet purges. This split did not occur evenly throughout the Islamic world; modernist Islam was still arriving during this period in some regions, such as West Africa or China, where Yağub Muğrabi (China, 1879–1949; chapter 52) and others only began to study in the Middle East in large numbers in the 1920s and 1930s; the Sudan, where Muhammad Ahmed Makjub (Sudan, 1909–1976; chapter 10) and other college graduates developed a modernist-Islamic nationalism; and the Hadzam—where a “boomerang effect” brought modernism via Southeast Asia. In regions where Muslim scholars played an active role in nationalist movements—Algeria and Indonesia, for example—modernist Islam seems to have had greater staying power. A recent critique has suggested that this bifurcation reflected a “disintegrative tendency” inherent in the juxtaposition of “modernist” and “Islamic.” Another approach might view the split-up of modernist Islam in terms of the weakening of liberalism throughout the world—not just among Muslims—during the Interwar period, with authenticity on the right and the “New Man” on the left crowding out the moderation of multiple identities, old and new. This approach might find support in the resurgence of interest to modernist Islamic figures among Muslim intellectuals of the late twentieth century, contributing to global intellectual trends shifting away from fascism and communism. Rachid Ghannouchi (Tunisia, born 1941) has dedicated his recent work on civil rights to Afghanistan, “Afghani, and other modernists.”

(138) Chandra Muzaffar (Malaysia, born 1947) has republished excerpts from Amzer ‘Ali and Anad. The centennial of the death of Afghanis lastly led to a high-level official in the Islamic Republic of Iran to praise modernism as “necessary for the survival of Islam at the theoretical, practical, political, and social level.”

(139) The modernist Islamic movement’s primary legacy, the aspect that appears to attract contemporary Muslim thinkers, is its defining feature: the attempt to reconcile modern values and Islamic faith. Admitting...
that one has both modern values and Islamic faith is the first step in this reconciliation. Some of the admissions generated in the first century of modernist Islam may strike later readers as embarrassingly foolish and cavalier, such as resistance to European civilization as the world’s sole civilization, but rejecting such formulations does not necessarily amputate the underlying values. Mass education, rapid international communication, and globalized commodity markets have generated huge populations in the Islamic world who are imbued with modern values such as a cultural revival (defined in a particular manner), democracy (in Western lines), science and education (as practiced globally), and particular rights for women (as anticipated by international organizations). Even Islamic revivalism share many of these concerns—though they might be sidelined by association with their modernist roots.

Accepting modern values as modern is only the first step in reconciliation. The second step is to theorize the compatibility of such values with Islamic faith. This search for consistency may itself be a characteristically modern concern, as previous eras were less insistently on the discursive construction of a coherent individual self. Even some modernists have rejected such an attempt, such as Taha Husayn (Egypt, 1889-1973), who suggested that every human is composed of two separate parts, rational and emotional: “Both of these personalities are connected with our constitution and make-up, and we cannot escape from either of them. What, then, is to hinder the first personality from being scholarly, inquisitive, critical, and the second believing, assured, aspiring to the highest ideals?”

More commonly, the modernist Islamic movement has taken up the task through a process of double translation: modern values into Islamic terms, and Islamic values into modern terms. Translations are famously imprecise, and modernist Islam involves particularly difficult pairings: the Islamic concept of justice with the modern concept of law and judicial systems; the modern concept of citizenship and rights with the Islamic concept of equality; the Islamic concept of consultation with the modern concept of combinational democracy; and so on. Critics may argue that these concepts lose something in translation, but the modernist Islamic movement argues that they gain something through juxtaposition.
