

## Reformation of Islamic thought: a critical historical analysis

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*Nasr Abu Zayd*

*with the assistance of Dr. Katajun Amirpur and Dr. Mohamad Nur Kholis Setiawan*



*Reformation of  
Islamic Thought*

A CRITICAL HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

## *Reformation of Islamic Thought*

The series 'Verkenningen' comprises studies commissioned by the WRR that are deemed to be of such quality and importance that their publication is desirable. Responsibility for the contents and views expressed therein remains that of the authors.

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## PREFACE

The rise of Islamic activism since the 1970s and, more recently, Muslim terrorist attacks in the West, have pushed Islamic exclusivism and (violent) fundamentalism once again squarely into the public limelight. As a result, for many non-Muslims across the world, Islamic culture and religion are now closely associated with authoritarian rule, cruel traditions and human suffering. Sadly, these non-Muslims actually share Muslim fundamentalists' convictions that the 'real Islam' is simply incompatible with modernity, democracy and respect for human rights.

It is not hard to show that in reality 'Islam' and the Muslim World present a variegated, dynamic mosaic. Recent brands of fundamentalism are merely a segment of the full spectrum of evolving Islamic thinking, movements and practices. Nor is it difficult to find Muslims who are peaceful and progressive, and who are actively tackling contemporary issues of social justice, pluralism and female equality in their societies. However, it is much harder to find Muslim activists who are also well-informed by systematic and critical reflections of Islamic tradition, including the Islamic foundational texts (i.e. the Quran and the Sunna, the Prophet's Tradition). As a result, their intentions are often dismissed by literalist interpreters of both Muslim and non-Muslim origin as disrespectful of the Muslim heritage, superficial or apologetic.

The present study, which is written at the invitation of the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) by the eminent Egyptian scholar Nasr Abu Zayd, is the outcome of precisely such a well-informed reflection of Islamic tradition. It shows that early on, Muslim reformist thinkers from Egypt and Iran to Indonesia have tried to divest Islam of traditionalistic and legalistic interpretations, and have tended to stress the values of a cultural, 'enlightened' and dynamic Islam. Many of their contemporary successors reject the dogmatic Islam supported by conservatives and authoritarian political regimes; they want it replaced by a modern, spiritual and ethical Islam. Unfortunately, the paradigm of modernity as a Western product and the equation of democracy and human rights with Westernisation still prevail outside these intellectual circles.

Abu Zayd's reflections on the evolution of Islamic reformist thought have provided valuable input for the WRR's report *Islamic activism*, which was published simultaneously with this study. I sincerely hope that his work will contribute towards creating a safe, open and critical intellectual environment in which Muslims and non-Muslims alike will be confident enough to move away from paralysing stereotypes and paradigms.

Other relevant studies that were also published within the framework of this WRR research are:

- J.M. Otto (2006) *Sharia en nationaal recht. Rechtssystemen in moslimlanden tussen traditie, politieken rechtsstaat*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

- J.M. Otto, A.J. Dekker and L.J. van Soest-Zuurdeeg (eds.) (2006) *Sharia en nationaal recht in twaalf moslimlanden*, WRR-webpublication no. 13  
Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- M. Berger (2006) *Klassieke sharia en vernieuwing*, WRR-webpublication no. 12  
Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Prof. dr. W.B.H.J. van de Donk  
Chairman of the WRR

## PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

This research project is extremely indebted to the encouragement and the financial as well as moral support from the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR). When Wendy Asbeek Brusse and Jan Schoonenboom approached me with this project proposal, it felt as if they were reviving a project I had been mentally preparing for a long time. I enthusiastically agreed and I am glad I did. Since then the three of us have become involved in regular meetings, each of which constituted a 'petit séminaire'. Since the first draft was submitted one year ago, both Wendy and Jan have helped extensively in broadening the scope of the research by their continuous productive questions and comments. They spared neither time nor effort in reading the draft and providing corrective suggestions.

I am also indebted to Dr. Katajun Amirpur for her research assistance on Iranian Islamic thinkers and to Dr. Mohamad Nur Kholis Setiawan for his research assistance on Indonesian Islamic thinking.

I thank my capacity group colleagues at the University of Humanistics, Utrecht, for their support and encouragement. Last but not least, I hope that this very ambitious research project will assist in clarifying some of the common misunderstandings concerning the issue of 'reformation' in the Muslim World.

Finally, it is worth noting that for purely practical purposes, the diacritic marks normally used in the transliteration of the Arabic script have been omitted throughout this book. This also includes quotations. The glossary at the end of the book should help the reader's understanding of frequently used foreign (mostly Arabic) words.

Nasr Abu Zayd



# 1 INTRODUCTION

Although it has been vociferously and energetically promoted in the Western media in the wake of 11 September 2001, the issue of reforming Islamic thought is hardly new. One of the United States (US) administration's justifications for extending its war on terrorism by invading Iraq, has been the urgent need to bring political and economic – not to mention cultural – reformation to the entire Arab world by force. This US project of reformation includes religious education, whereby school curricula would be sanitized of religious elements that reflected any type of discrimination whether it be religious, ethical, or gender-based. Instead, under the proposed American reformation, religious education should enhance the values of freedom, equality, justice, and prosperity. Of course, enforcing given values is also not new. This approach echoes similar demands by previous colonial powers in Muslim countries in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The relationship between the Muslim and Western worlds is all too present in the modern history of Islamic thought. Indeed, the start of the confrontation between these worlds brought the challenge of modernity – all its values like 'progress', 'power', 'science', 'reason' – penetrating traditional societies and thus violating their well-established identities. The reaction was not invariably negative. Any negative reaction focused on military invasion, the occupation of territory, and exploitation of natural and human resources.

It is a fact that the fundamentalist and exclusivist trend of Islamic thought prevails in most presentations and even dominates in the media, particularly since the 11 September trauma. By contrast, the main focus of this research is on the positive, liberal, and inclusive reaction embedded in the writings of the Muslim thinkers who sought to reread and revisit Islamic tradition, including the Islamic foundational texts, namely the holy scripture, the Quran, as well as the Prophet's Tradition, the Sunna (the verbal and practical traditions related to the prophet). And so, the central question in this study is: *To what extent are these liberal, reformist thinkers engaged in genuine renewal of Islamic thought? Do they succeed in challenging the negative image of the West presented by the traditionalists?*

By raising this question and seeking to analyze the data accordingly, this study also hints at the possible negative impact of the present state of political affairs, namely the occupation of Iraq, the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the enforced reformation agenda implicit in the American 'Wider Middle East' project. Unfortunately, the present state of world affairs gives both traditionalists and extremists, not to mention the radicals and fundamentalists, a more powerful position than they might have ever dreamt of.

The research approach taken here is as follows: The remainder of this study is divided into four chapters, of which the first three are organized chronologically,

dealing with the pre-colonial period, i.e., the 18th century (ch. 2), the 19th century (ch. 3) and the 20th century (ch. 4). The choice of thinkers from the variety of countries such as Egypt, India, Pakistan, Iran and Indonesia reflects the wide diversity of the Muslim World, relating the mode of thinking to the historical and socio-political context. The focus here is mainly on those thinkers that were really innovative, by bringing new insights into the issues under discussion and hence by gradually opening up the space for debate. Chapter 4 discusses the emergence of political Islam. It also provides two case studies on Islamic thought in Indonesia (section 4.7) and in Iran (4.8). Indonesia offers an interesting case of Muslim thinking on religious and cultural pluralism as foundations for democracy. In Iran, the experience of everyday Islamism under a theocracy has produced a quite profound debate among Muslim thinkers on the relationship between religion and the state. Chapter 5 focuses on ways in which selected thinkers from outside the Muslim World deal with issues like *sharia* (Islamic law), democracy and human rights. I conclude this study with an Epilogue.

## 2 THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section will deal with the pre-colonial period, particularly the 18th century, when the importance of tradition was emphasized by re-invoking its authority and values in order to retain the social strength, solidarity and stability of Muslims. The basic ideas of thinkers such as Shah Wali Allah (1702-1762) of India and the *Wahhabi* movement in Najd will be outlined. This limited selection is aimed at a comparison of two cultural backgrounds, which produced two separate versions of Islamic revivalism.

### 2.2 CULTURAL DIVERSITY

It would seem imperative to start by showing the cultural diversity of the so-called 'Muslim World' prior to the process of colonization, when Islam was introduced to the world beyond Arabia. Quite simply this was because Islam had to readjust to a new cultural and historical context, with vast areas whose populations were no more reborn than were the Arabs. But while it is relatively easy to illustrate the contextual Arabism of Islam, demonstrating the complex process of reorientation that Islam has undergone in different cultural and historical contexts, is less easy.<sup>1</sup> Cultural historians are the only ones capable of furnishing some of the answers and of making clear the differences between, for example, Indian Islam in the 16th and 17th centuries, and that of Najd or Hijaz in Arabia in the same period.

Although it goes beyond the boundaries of this study to look at the multicultural composition of the Muslim World prior to the confrontation with the West, it might help to draw some lines of demarcation between various Muslim areas. In India, for example, Islam had to co-habit and productively interact with both Hinduism and Buddhism. A study of the forces and factors that brought Indian Islam closer to Hindu society would show that the pantheistic thought of the Muslim mystics, which found its affinity in the religious thought of the Upanishads, has invariably brought Islam and Hinduism closer, while the idolatrous connotations and concepts associated with many Hindu institutions pulled them apart. This was to some extent implicit in the situation (Nizami n.d.). The fear was that the idolatrous background of many Hindu institutions would affect the monotheistic character of Islam. When a Hindu wrote to shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1604) that Rama and Rahim (the Merciful, one of God's names in Islam) were the same, the latter objected, saying that Rama was a human being and could not therefore be considered as identical with the Allah of Islam. Shah Wali Allah and Shah Ismail Shahid fought against the adoption of all those Hindu practices associated with idolatrous leanings and ideas. On occasion, this kind of similarity and difference could lead to tolerance and mutual understanding, but under different conditions it could also spark intol-

erance and violent exclusivism. The partition of India into two states in 1947 was a triumph of the second trend, emphasizing the differences at the expense of similarities.

The Indian example of Islamic cultural dynamism could be contrasted with that of Arabia, where Islam was able to continue virtually unchanged. This explains the emergence of Wahhabism as a reformation movement based on a simple claim of 'returning' to the essentials of Islam without criticism or rethinking of tradition. Between these two examples one finds an array of cultural backgrounds that formed Islam and gave it specific local features. But what of South East Asia, where Muslims appear to have transported Islam over the course of several centuries? Apparently the initial sources of Islamic missionary activity were Gujarat and Malabar in Western India, followed by Arabs, particularly from the Hadhramaut. The people of the Indies were generally converted to Islam by peaceful means (Mehden 1995: 196-7). In what is now known as Indonesia, the vast majority of the populations of Java and Sumatra had become Muslims by the 18th century.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the Arab conquest of Egypt in 641 transported Islam to an already religious environment (Anawati 1975: 22). Soon enough, Islamic studies were visible, particularly in the fields of Islamic law, *fiqh*<sup>3</sup>, and *Sufism* (mysticism).<sup>4</sup> It is enough to mention the names of two great Egyptian sufis, Dhu Nun the Egyptian (796-861) (Smith n.d.: 242) and the celebrated poet Umar Ibn al-Farid (1181-1235) (Nicholson and Pedersen n.d.: 763).<sup>5</sup>

Despite a wide range of cultural differences, one sees certain similarities in the way issues of 'social degeneration' and 'political deterioration' were raised in various parts of the Muslim World. Prior to colonization and the 19th century polemic dispute between Modernity and Muslims, there was a degree of awareness of the decline of the Muslim World, and this invited a 'revivalist' response. By and large, it was Islam's status quo – namely Islam as law-oriented (sharia) faith – that gave direction to the revivalist movements. A sufi tendency diluted this orientation, arriving in the form of various sufi orders, particularly in India and Egypt.

### 2.3 THE PARADIGM OF SHARIA

Before giving a brief account of this process, I must begin by outlining the epistemological principles of Classical Islam – in the form it reached the modern age. First, I should make clear that the four sources to be outlined here only represent one of the many facets of Islamic culture, namely jurisprudence, sharia. These sources present the epistemological principles or *usul al-fiqh* (jurisprudence) from which the normative law, *fiqh*, is deduced. As scholars of Islam are aware, sharia, in turn, is one of many facets of Islamic traditions and cultures distinguishable from others, such as philosophy, theology (*ilm al-kalam*) and Sufism, etc.



The reasons behind reducing Islam to the paradigm of sharia is that since the fifth century of the Islamic era, i.e., the twelfth century, Islamic philosophy and Islamic theology have been gradually marginalized. Philosophers and non-orthodox theologians were persecuted or attacked by both *fuqaha* (legal scholars) and political authorities. One pointer in this direction was the *mihna* (inquisition) crisis following the Caliph al-Mamun's edict of 833 imposing the Mutazilits' doctrine of *khalq al-Quran* (the creation of the Quran) and persecuting opponents of this line. This episode lasted for some 15 years (Hinds 1993: 2ff). In 12th-century Andalusia, the Caliph, seeking support for his wars against the Catholic kings, had the celebrated theologian Ibn Rushd excommunicated and his books burned. Two of the many other proponents to be executed were the great Sufis al-Hallaj (executed 910) and Suhrawardi (Shihab al-Din Yahya, executed 1191) (Arnaldes n.d.: 909ff).

According to the major schools of law, the sources of knowledge are ordered as follows in hierarchical terms. First and foremost, the Quran and its exegesis present the foundational treasure of knowledge, namely the Word of God revealed, in Arabic, to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century. Though basically addressing the Arabs, its message is meant for all humanity regardless of time and location. This is the guidance, the light, and the final divine plan for salvation both in this world and life to come. Second only to the Quran, are the sayings and the actions of the Prophet Muhammad, including also his approval or disapproval of the sayings or actions of his companions. This is the prophetic Tradition, known in Arabic as Sunna. It came to be considered as divine as the Quran, because it, too, is a revelation from God. The difference between them was explained in terms of differentiating between 'content' and linguistic expression or 'form'. As God's verbatim word, both the content and the linguistic expression (form) of the Quran are divine. On the other hand, the content of the Sunna, though revealed and therefore divine, is human in form; Muhammad put it into words. Even so, its position is not inferior to the Quran; it is equal though secondary. Muslim legal scholars even emphasized that the Quran needs the Sunna more than the Sunna needs the Quran. Not only does the Sunna explain what is explicit in the Quran, but it also explains what is implicit, such as how to pray and fast, how to learn about the conditions of purification or the amount of alms to be given. Without the Sunna the Quran is less clear. Indeed, the Sunna is the sole source of information needed to understand the context of the passages and chapters of the Quran, and the historical events that surrounded the revelation – a process lasting more than twenty years.

The third epistemological source of knowledge is the 'consensus' of the community of scholars, *ulama*. As there was no *consensus* among the scholars on the epistemological validity of the doctrine of 'consensus', neither could there be an agreement on its definition. Its final formulation limited both its scope and implication. Its scope was narrowed to refer solely to matters agreed upon unanimously by the first generation of Muslims, the *sahaba* or Companions of the Prophet, on the assumption that such a consensus must surely have been

grounded on a certain prophetic tradition that was not transmitted to the next generation. Consequently, its scope was limited to issues not mentioned, either explicitly or implicitly, in the above two sources (Bernard n.d.: 1023 ff).

The fourth and last source for acquiring knowledge is the application of rational syllogisms, inferring a rule for a given case not mentioned in the sources above, via an analogy with a similar established rule. The analogy should be based on similarity, as, for example, the one between consuming alcohol and smoking hashish, or on the rationale of the rule mentioned. The second type of analogy requires adherence to the theological doctrine of the existence of 'rational logic' behind God's divine rules, *qiyas*, a doctrine not commonly accepted by every school of law. Unlike 'consensus', *qiyas* were not applied by all legal scholars, but they did gain greater support among the majority (Bernard n.d.: 238).

## 2.4 REVIVALISM

Once again, in the 18th century, however, we see certain differences within the sharia-oriented revivalist movement. Taking India as an example, Shah Wali Allah (1702-1762) is considered the godfather of 'revivalist' Islam. His revivalism was a combination of 'sufism' and sharia-oriented thought. It differs markedly from Arabia's Wahhabi movement initiated by Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) and its highly Orthodox reformation. This can be explained by Islam's divergent historical and cultural backgrounds in both social environments. Whereas Islam in India was reshaped by its interaction with pre-Islamic Indian tradition, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, Islam in Arabia was to a great extent rooted in its Bedouin tradition and customs.

Heavily influenced by the breakdown of Mogul authority and the consequent loss of Muslim power, Shah Wali Allah sought to encourage the revival of a strong central authority by invoking a concept of two complementary authorities or caliphates; one was to be political, the other juridical. Both were to be responsible for the preservation of Islam. For the political authority he used the term *zahir*, meaning external, and he assigned it responsibility for maintaining administrative and political order and for applying the sharia. For the juridical caliphate he employed the term *batin* (esoteric) or internal, with its task of giving guidance to the religious leaders of the community, a role that Shah Wali Allah took upon himself (Brown 1996: 22-3). The similarity between his approach and that of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is obvious; both brought together political authority and the authority of the *faqih* (jurist, legal scholar), to work towards the restoration of Islam from its state of decadence. The difference between the two approaches remains in this characteristic Sufi tone of Indian Islam.

Within this Sufi tone, Shah Wali Allah succeeded in being critical of the Classical structure of sharia. He was able to reject *taqlid*, the uncritical adherence to the opinions of the ulama of the Classical schools of law, and to revive interest in the use of personal effort in deciding a point of law, *ijtihad*. Reviving this principle of

personal understanding enabled him to bypass the history of stagnation in sharia scholarship. He emphasized the spirit of law and its applicability in all times and places, rather than the form of law, which is shaped and formulated in accordance with conditions of time and place. Not only did he revive the concept of *maslaha* (Shah Walli Allah 1996: 11) or community interest, from the *Maliki's* school of law, but basically and initially he depended on Sufi's well-established distinction between sharia and *haqiqa*, whereby the first is considered historical and limited in time and space, while the latter is the Truth attained by spiritual exercise leading to the vision of Reality.

As a jurist sufi, Shah Wali Allah considered theology to be the imposition of rational contemplation on matters that are either clearly indicated in Scripture (the Quran and the Tradition of the Prophet) or matters unmentioned. Sunna, by contrast, was the agreed upon practice of the Muslim community. This interpretation allowed him to dissociate Sunna from theology, dividing the People of the *Qibla* (Muslims) into separate sects and destined factions beyond their following the essentials of religion (Shah Walli Allah 1996: 24). He could thus also underline the continued unity of the community, under the implicit notion of consensus inherited in Sunna. At the same time, Sufism was retained as providing spiritual significance to sharia practice. However, he had to be cautious in explaining some aspects of Sunna in line with the Sufi vision. Hence this remark assuring readers that he never went beyond the Scripture:

“Sometimes, when overwhelmed by the clamour of explanation, and when I have examined the setting out of principles as closely as possible, you will find me forced into the position of holding some views which were not held by the majority of debaters among the Theologians. An example is the theophany (tajalli) of Allah, may He be Exalted, in the planes of the hereafter, through images and forms. And as with the confirmation of a non-element world in which ideas and actions are embodied by forms appropriate to them in character, and in which new things come into being before they are created on the earth, the connection of the actions to psychological attitudes, and the being of these attitudes, in reality, a cause for requital in this worldly life and after death – the compelling predestination (al-qadar al-mulzim) and so on.

Then be informed that I did not venture to do this except after I had seen the Quranic verses and the hadiths and reports of the Companions and Successors supporting these views; and I saw groups of the elite of the People of the Sunna, who are distinguished by divinely inspired knowledge, professing them, and passing on their principles on them” (Shah Walli Allah 1996: 24-5).

As these concepts can be easily traced to ‘the world of imagination’ of the Andalusian Sufi and philosopher Ibn Arabi (1165-1240), it is sufficient here to demonstrate how the concept of Sunna, which is dissociated from theology, was deeply connected with Sufi theosophy (Abu Zayd 1998a: 51-95). This association of Sunna and Sufi theosophy is typical of Indian Islam, where two extreme opponents, Ibn Arabi, the representative of Sufi theosophy, and Ibn Taymiya (1268-

1328), the representative of the most conservative Hanbali school of law – were eventually harmonized (Hunwick n.d.: 321).

The story of reformation in Arabia took another direction, namely Ibn Taymiya without Ibn Arabi, though also based on a similar cooperation between a political and a legal authority. The proponent of this movement in Arabia was Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), who dreamt of establishing a theocratic state in which he himself would be the juridical adviser. In 1744, he won over the then prince of *Dariyya*, Muhammad b. Suud, to his cause. They “swore an oath of mutual loyalty (*baya*) to strive, by force if necessary, to make the kingdom of God’s word prevail.” This pact, with which they always faithfully complied, marked the true beginning of the Wahhabi State (Laoust n.d.: 678). From his writings it is easy to label his discourse as fundamentalist. However, his fundamentals are not the fundamental essential principles deduced from the Quran and the Sunna; in fact they are more closely aligned to the absolute adherence to the teaching of Ahmad b. Hanbal as propagated and explained in the writings of Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah (1292-1350) (Azmeah 2000: 9-13).<sup>6</sup> While the early Indian revivalist discourse presented by Shah Wali Allah encouraged later development, Wahhabism never developed beyond the basic ideas initially formulated by the founder. The absolute unity between the dogma and the political regime did not allow for any other political opposition beyond the advocacy of more radical and fundamentalist ideologies. The upheaval of radicalism and terrorism inside Saudi Arabia in the last two years, and its recently discovered connection with the al-Qaida network, demonstrate that this is inherent in the system.

At present, in the context of American pressure to reshape the entire Arab world politically and intellectually, there are a whole raft of gatherings, conferences and the like, basically designed to represent Wahhabism as a liberal, open, and democratic system – an attempted ‘makeover’ of the same old face. At a recent conference on ‘Women’s Rights’, male arrogance expressed in objections against the participation of women was so obvious in the many statements, that in order to ease tension, Prince Abdullah invited the participants for a separate meeting at the royal palace. The final report of the conference looks supportive of women’s emancipation and participation in the social public sphere, but always with the proviso of compliance with sharia (al-Hayat 2004: 4).

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

It is now obvious that there is little truth in the generalizations about Islam and the Muslim World that were made by the colonial powers in the 19th century. As we shall see, the fact that revivalism was basically about enhancing solidarity and preserving the social order in the face of decadence – and hence, emphasized the issue of law (sharia) – went on to make its mark on most reformation issues, until it regained its central position in political islamist movements.

## NOTES

- 1 What testifies to this contextual Arabism is firstly, that Muhammad, the messenger of Islam was an Arab; secondly, that the foundational texts and scriptures are in Arabic; thirdly, that the Arabs were the carriers of Islam beyond Arabia; and fourthly, that a process of Arabization had successfully taken place in many areas now known as the Arab world. The events in the history of Christianity mainly propagated by gentiles, besides the early translations of the scripture which made for the localization of the faith, did not occur in the history of Islam. Muslim prayers must still be conducted in Arabic regardless of the difficulties of pronouncing the formulas. This includes the obligatory recitation of certain Quranic chapters, by non-Arab Muslims. Moreover, a translation of the Quran is not considered to be a presentation of the Word of God in the same way as the Arabic Quran; it only presents the meaning void of the divinity attributed to the Word of God.
- 2 The history of Islam in Indonesia could be randomly divided into four periods: The first period, 1400-1650, covers the spread and creation of links with the centre(s) of the Muslim World. Early Islam in Indonesia was largely influenced by Sufi views, which was also characteristic of Islam in India, and by the 16th century, many of the archipelago's best-known scholars came from the Sufi orders. The second period, 1650-1868, is the era of Dutch imperialism and isolation, which led to the emergence of Indonesian Islam, or '*abangan* Islam'. This period is also characterized by the KPM (the Dutch merchant marine company). "By the 18th century, more orthodox Hadhramaut Arab scholars began to make their views on Islam felt, and external influences on Indonesian Islam began to shift from its former centre on the Indian subcontinent to the Middle East." The third period, 1868-1900, starts with the opening of the Suez Canal which facilitated the pilgrimage journey for the traditional ulama, thus reconnecting Indonesian Islam with the centre of learning in Mecca. The period of the 20th century, finally, witnessed the impact of the Egyptian reformation movement championed by both Muhammad Amarah Amarahh (d. 1905) and Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935) propagated by the publication of al-Manar journal (1898-1935.) During this period (1900-1939) the Al-Azhar institution in Cairo became the centre of learning for Indonesian Muslims, particularly after the Wahhabi forces gained control of Mecca. During the mid-1920s, there were some two hundred Southeast Asian students, mostly Indonesians, studying in Cairo. The Dutch authorities established a western educational system for Dutch children, but it attracted large numbers of Indonesians, particularly from civil service backgrounds. This gradually eroded traditional learning institutions, notably in big cities (Mehden 1995: 197).
- 3 This was started by al-Layth ibn Sad (713-791). A pupil of Malik ibn Anas (711-795), the founder of the first Islamic school of jurisprudence, he was in a position to assert his independence from his master, while maintaining a relationship marked by courtesy and openness to intellectual diversity. On the other hand, Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafii (767-974), is believed to have developed his school

of thought in Egypt. Hence, the majority of the Egypt Muslims who were Malikites gradually became Shafiites.

- 4 This is probably due to the cultural tradition in Egyptian religiosity. Because of its Coptic background, monasticism was born in Egypt and was instrumental in the formation of the Coptic Church's character of submission and humbleness. Thanks to the teachings and writings of the Great Fathers of the Egyptian deserts, Sufism flourished in Egyptian Islam.
- 5 Dhu al-Nun al-Misri was born in Upper Egypt and must have been influenced by Hellenistic teaching. He was called 'the head of the sufis', being first to explain the mystical doctrines and to provide systematic teaching around the various mystic states, *ahwal*, and the various stations of the mystical way, *maqamat*. Dhu al-Nun al-Misri was also the first to teach the true nature of Gnosticism. The use of the terms *hub*, for the love of God and *wajd*, for ecstasy, is attributed to him. Umar Ibn al-Farid studied the Shafii law and the hadith in his early youth, then became a Sufi. For many years he led the life of a solitary devotee in the hills of Cairo at al-Muqatam, where his tomb is still a centre of pilgrimage.
- 6 Ibn Taymiya produced his thought in the context of the 14th century, when the Muslim world was threatened by the Mongol invasion, in particular Syria and Egypt after the fall of Baghdad in 1258. Although their ruler converted to Islam, the Mongols did not follow the sharia either in their individual behavior or in political decisions. In fact, they adhered only to the pagan code of conduct both politically and individually. In this context, he and his disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya were highly critical and they revived and expounded the traditions of the Hanbali School in both theology and jurisprudence. The major issue at hand was: Is it sufficient for a Muslim ruler who does not apply sharia to claim that he is a true Muslim? It is not difficult for us both to know the answer and also to imagine its significance for modern fundamentalists fighting against Western secularization, as presented to Muslim countries by Muslim rulers. The Hanbali's teachings, as ideologized by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, were embodied in a militant group of tribes under the banner of the Ikhwan brotherhood, which succeeded in bringing most of the Arabian Peninsula under the sway of a single Imam (leader of prayer), Ibn Suud. As warriors the Ikhwan called themselves 'knights of God's unity and brothers of those who obey God'. In their fight for the faith they courted death and one of their war cries was: "The winds of Paradise are blowing. Where are you who hanker after Paradise?" As a militant organization, which has been almost duplicated by more recent militant Islamist groups, they went beyond the Wahhabi's doctrine to even greater extremes. All things not-traditional – not merely the newly invented but objects of all types – they vehemently denounced as *bida* (forbidden innovation). Electricity bringing light without oil or wax was iniquitous. The Ikhwan broke mirrors because they reflected images. And their personal appearance was required to follow the supposed example of the Prophet: moustaches to be trimmed almost out of sight and beards grown long. See also Azmeh (2000: 9-13) where he concludes by linking the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahab with the 1979 occupation of the sanctuary of Mecca by a group of fundamentalists led by Juhayman al-Utaybi.

## 3 THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section will be devoted to the reformation of Islamic thought in the 19th century, when the political and cultural interaction between the Western and the Islamic Worlds raised many basic issues. The first was that of reformation (*islah*). The crucial question was: Why was it that *they* were able to make progress while we became so backward? Why is it that *we*, who were the masters of the world for centuries, became so weak and vulnerable as to fall under the rule and control of Western power? Basically, the usual answer to these questions was that the necessary reformation required going back to the essential ethics and values of Islam, which had converted the pagan Arabs of the 7th century into masters of the world. Hence, reformation meant revivalism (*ihya*); and alongside the previous revivalist attitude of the 18th century, this meant revisiting tradition within the new light of modernity.

Thinkers from various Muslim regions will be introduced here, with an emphasis on their intellectual contribution to the issue of Islam and modernity. From India, the basic ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan will be sketched out, showing the impact of the polemic debate around the personality of the Prophet Muhammad with Orientalists such as Carl Pfander and William Muir. Riffa Rafi al-Tawtawi of Egypt, and Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq of Syria are early Arab intellectuals who traveled and reported directly on the modern, Western world. The image of the West they presented enabled other Muslim thinkers who lacked the same opportunities, to develop a critical view of the stigmatized political situation in the Muslim World. Here I will also analyze the basic ideas of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in the context of his involvement in a polemic debate with the French scholar of philosophy, Ernest Renan. Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi of Syria is an example of an Arab thinker who was highly critical. He was very aware of the extremely despotic character of the Ottoman Caliphate system and, through his critical writings, sought to free politics from its grip. Muhammad Abduh of Egypt was both deeply influenced by al-Afghani's ideas and inspired by his enthusiastic reformation tendencies. As such, he presented a whole Islamic reformation package which addressed almost every issue that would unfold in the 20th century. His project of reinterpreting the Quran and the Sunna will also be analyzed in the context of his polemic discussion with the likes of French historian and foreign minister Gabriel Hanotaux. The issue of women was first raised by one of Muhammad Abduh's followers, Qasim Amin, who studied in France.

### 3.2 THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNITY

The 18th century revivalist movement merely sought to reopen the debate about the sources of Islamic knowledge. The only concept to be challenged was that of 'consensus', while the concept of 'legal syllogisms' (*qiyas*), was re-invoked. The

objective was to enable Muslims to engage in reformulating the meaning of their lives. However, the 19th century brought investigation, research, appropriation, re-appropriation, and negotiation around the concept of Sunna and the meaning of the Quran, and indeed, subsequently, the meaning of Islam. This type of 'rethinking' was essentially and initially motivated by a strong commitment to develop Muslim societies in the direction of modernization on one hand, and to keep alive the spirit of Islam and its forces on the other. Modernity was, after all, a foreign force imposed upon the Muslim World from above by the dominant colonial European powers in the wake of the Ottoman Empire's deconstruction.

By the end of the 19th century, the British had successfully colonized much of India. The French, under Napoleon Bonaparte, occupied Egypt in 1798. France then invaded Algeria in 1830 and occupied Tunisia in 1881, followed by the British who marched into Egypt in 1882. The Dutch were established in Indonesia long before this. And there were many other excursions as the West's program of colonization unfolded across the Muslim World. From this, at least three challenges emerged that motivated and constructed the way Muslims rethought their traditions. First came the challenge of scientific discovery and advanced technology; second was rationality and rationalism; and third was the political challenge. Self-evidently, although these three challenges are presented here independently, they were invariably mixed together in any number of trends in the exegesis of the Quran that will be reviewed.

Modern science and technology were introduced to the Muslim World in the form of strange, unknown military equipment that resulted in defeat by the Western powers and led to the occupation of their land by non-Muslim invaders. When the French army reached Alexandria in 1798, the Mamluk warriors were ready for hand-to-hand combat. However, they were shocked to see the powerful artillery machines that killed dozens of soldiers with a single shot, from a long distance. Napoleon Bonaparte brought a number of natural and social scientists along with his army. Al-Jabarti's history tells of the reaction of the Azhari ulama when invited to watch chemical experiments performed by these men of science in the laboratory they set up in Cairo. Terrified, some ran away whispering the *istiadha* formula (seeking God's protection from the devil), perceiving these experiments as witchcraft. This was the first encounter of Egyptian intellectuals with modern technology created by modern scientific investigation and research. Their response was to learn, so as to gain the power to fight back. Both Turkey and Egypt began to acquire modern scientific learning by sending students to Europe, while at the same time importing modern technology, particularly weapons. The colonizers also possessed the intellectual weapon of holding Islam responsible for the weakness of the Muslim World. They saw and approached the Muslim World as solely Muslim, lacking any other sub-identity like Indian, Indonesian, or Arab. The matter became more complicated when those colonized unquestionably accepted this identity imposed upon them; such internalization of a reduced identity created an identity crisis. As a result, it was explicitly advocated that the Muslim World's progress



towards modernity required neglecting or even abandoning Islam. Suffice it to recall the French philosopher, Ernest Renan (1832-1892), and the French politician and historian Gabriel Hanotaux (1853-1944), who served as Foreign Minister from 1894 to 1898.<sup>1</sup> Renan posited the absolute incompatibility between Islam and both science and philosophy. In his doctoral thesis, *Averroès et l'Averroïsme* (1852; 'Averroës and Averroism'), he argued that whatever is labeled Islamic science or Islamic philosophy is merely a translation from the Greek. Islam, like all religious dogmas based on revelation, is hostile to reason and freethinking. Hanotaux also held Islam responsible for the backwardness of the Muslim World. His allegation was based on the theological difference between Islam and Christianity. In his view, the dogma of incarnation in Christianity builds a bridge between man and God, thus freeing man from any dogma of determinism. Islamic pure monotheism (*tawhid*) by contrast, creates an unbridgeable distance between man and God, leaving no space for human free will. This was the theological reasoning Hanotaux used to explain the political despotism characterizing the Muslim World (Abduh 1972: 201ff).

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammad Abduh (1848-1905) responded defensively, relating the backwardness of Muslims not to Islam per se, but to contemporary Muslim misunderstanding of Islam (Keddie 1983; Matthee 1989: 151-169; Kedourie 1966). Both argued that if Islam is understood properly and explained correctly, as was the case in the golden age of Islamic civilization, Muslims would not have been so easily defeated and dominated by European power. The basic question that confronted these early modern Muslims reformers was Islam's compatibility with modernity. How could a faithful Muslim live in a modern socio-political environment without losing his or her identity as a Muslim? Does Islam accommodate science and philosophy? Second came the question of the compatibility of the divine law (*sharia*) that constitutes traditional society, with the positive law that constitutes the modern nation-state. Were modern political institutions such as democracy, elections and parliament accepted by Islam? Could they replace the traditional institutions of *shura* (consultation), and the authority of the elite ulama (*ahl al-hall wa al-aqd*)?

Discussion of such questions is embedded in the issues of religion and politics. The issue of political Islam emerged under the colonial occupation of most Muslim countries. In Egypt, for example, it emerged as early as 1798, when Muslims became aware of a different lifestyle introduced into their everyday lives. Their colonizers looked and dressed differently, behaved and spoke differently. They ate *haram* (forbidden, illegal) food, drank wine, interacted freely with women who were not their *mahram* (a relative, husband, brother, father, etc.), and their women were dressed improperly. In brief, Muslim social and religious identity was severely violated by the very existence of intruders in an otherwise purely Muslim territory.

Ironically, or maybe paradoxically, Bonaparte presented himself to the Egyptian ulama as the protector of 'faith' against both the Catholic Pope and the corrupted

Ottoman Sultan. He then claimed that he had converted to Islam. None of this actually bore fruit. Although ‘Tradition’ was rethought in this historical and confusing context, the nature of the Quran, its structure and its historical background were never closely examined. As the foundational text of Islam par excellence, it was kept above any critical investigation. It was the sole preserved, paramount, and fundamental source of inspiration to be held and maintained. First and last, it was the verbatim word of God. Thus, Muslims perceived the Orientalists’ scholarship around the Quran, its history and structure as part of the European conspiracy against Islam and Muslims.

### 3.3 RETHINKING CONSENSUS: THE EMERGENCE OF NEW ULAMA

As mentioned above, the initial step in the process of the ‘rethinking’ tradition spurred by Muslim societies’ slide into subordination was taken in India, where demands for a new type of consensus made the actual breakthrough easy. In Egypt, the first encounter with Europe in the 19th century brought a similar, though probably more liberal revivalist approach. Shaykh Refaa Rafi al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) was attached as an *imam* to the first Egyptian military mission to France to acquire modern training. He was very much inspired by his teacher, Shaykh Hasan al-Attar, who was rector of al-Azhar from 1830-1834 and who had tried to introduce secular sciences to the curriculum of Egypt’s oldest Islamic educational institution (Dodge 1961).<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically, the objection came from the French director of the school of medicine in Cairo on the grounds that al-Azhar should continue as an exclusively religious institution. Hasan al-Attar, himself well versed in secular sciences including astronomy, medicine, chemistry and engineering, in addition to literature and music, did not see any contradiction between religious knowledge and secular disciplines (Report on Religious Conditions in Egypt 1995).

With such an inspirational master, Tahtawi managed to learn French and study some French thought and literature of the 18th century. Perhaps more importantly, he had time to see and observe everyday life in Paris, and to record his observations in a book that was published after his return to Egypt, entitled *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Pariz* (Summary of Paris). On his return, he was appointed director of the newly established School of Languages (*Madrasat al-Asun*). A translation bureau was attached to the school in 1841. Books were translated to Arabic from various (European) languages, covering the fields of geography, history, geometry, mathematics, engineering, law, etc. Tahtawi also became editor-in-chief of the first official newspaper *al-Waqai al-Misriyyah* (Hourani 1984: 71).

As well as being a pioneer of the intellectual awakening process of rethinking tradition, Tahtawi’s contribution to the study of Islam included a new turn to the idea of the ulama. In his view, the ulama were more than just guardians of a fixed and established tradition. He was himself well versed in the religious law, as Shafii by legal right, and believed it was both necessary and legitimate to adapt

sharia to new circumstances. Like Shah Wali Allah, he invoked the reopening of the gate of *ijtihad* (personal effort in deciding a point of law). He even went one step further by suggesting that there was little difference between the principles of sharia and of the 'natural law' on which they were founded, i.e., the codes of modern Europe. This implied that Islamic law could be reinterpreted in the direction of conformity with modern needs. It offered a principle of justification, namely that in certain circumstances it is legitimate for a believer to accept an interpretation of the law drawn from a legal code other than his own. Taken up by later writers, this suggestion was used in the creation of a modern and uniform system of Islamic law in Egypt and elsewhere (Hourani 1984: 75).

It is worth noting that the Muslim reformists were able to breach the principle of consensus by re-invoking the principle of rational reasoning, *ijtihad*. This was quite feasible and successful since it derived support from the principle of legal syllogisms or *qiyas*. Reformists were able to navigate through the volumes of law (*fiqh*) without limiting themselves to following a specific legal school. By providing greater freedom to select opinions and build legal syllogisms, this type of reformation became instrumental to legal formulation and sharia codification in many Muslims countries. Meanwhile, thanks to the printing press and modern educational systems, a new class of intellectuals was becoming involved and was challenging the hegemonic authority of the traditional class of *ulama* across the Muslim World. These were all essential elements in building the post-independence nation states. (Nowadays, the intensive use of the internet has fragmented the traditional authority of the *ulama*, and even that of modern intellectuals.) If the traditional *ulama* challenged and rethought the principle of 'consensus' and so opened a new space for rational reflection on Tradition, the new emerging class of intellectuals went one step further in the process of 'rethinking' (Eickelman and Anderson 1999). Even so, breaking 'consensus' would be the continuing major development throughout the 20th century.

### 3.4 AL-AFGHANI: THE PIONEER OF REFORMATION, ISLAH

Jamal al-Din Afghani inspired and instigated the need for reformation across the Muslim World, by combining active opposition to imperial power on the political and intellectual fronts with intellectual contributions in India, Iran, Egypt, and Turkey. As others have shown, "he supported movements working for constitutional liberties and fought for liberation from foreign control (Egypt, Persia). He attacked Muslim rulers who opposed reform or blatantly failed to resist European encroachment. He even envisaged the possibility of political assassination. His ultimate object was to unite Muslim states (including Shii Persia) into a single Caliphate, able to repulse European interference and recreate the glory of Islam. The pan-Islamic idea was the great passion of his life" (Goldziher and Jomier n.d.: 416-417).

There is no denying the impact of al-Afghani's personal character and ideas on modern Islamic thought in general, including that of India and Egypt. We know

from his writings that he studied in the Shii holy cities of Najaf and Karbila. Indeed, his writings and lectures show an undoubted knowledge of the tradition of Islamic philosophy, particularly of Avicenna, or Ibn Sina – which at the time was more common in the Shii schools where the Avicennian tradition was still alive, than in the schools of Sunni Islam. We also know that he visited India for the first time when he was 18 years old, and that he stayed there for 18 months. Already fully educated in the Islamic tradition, in India he would acquire his first knowledge of the sciences and mathematics of modern Europe, “adding to his store of learning some acquaintance with the European sciences and their methods, together with some knowledge of English” (Goldziher and Jomier n.d.: 4-5). After his expulsion from Egypt in 1879, al-Afghani returned to India and remained there until 1882.

In Paris in 1883, al-Afghani debated Ernest Renan on the subject of ‘Islam and Science’, in particular the ability of Islam to reform and adapt to modern civilization. Abduh joined him in Paris just one year later, and together they started the publication of the Arabic weekly newspaper *Al-Urwah al-Wuthqa*. Al-Afghani believed that Islam was like other religions, but that it was the one true, complete, and perfect religion capable of satisfying all the desires of the human spirit. Like other Muslim thinkers of his day, he was willing to accept the judgment bestowed on Christianity by European free thought, namely that it was unreasonable and the enemy of science and progress. At the same time, he wanted to show that these criticisms did not apply to Islam. On the contrary, Islam was in harmony with the principles discovered by scientific reason; indeed it was the religion demanded by reason. Islam needed a Luther. In fact this was one of al-Afghani’s favourite themes, and perhaps he saw himself as taking up this role of reformer. Once reformation had taken place, Islam would be able to play its essential role of a moral guide just as well as any other religion. This was proven by its heritage: the rational sciences had flourished, and they had been truly Islamic and Arab. Certainly the conflict between religion and philosophy would always exist in Islam, but only because it would always exist in the human mind (Hourani 1984: 122-123).

While al-Afghani’s political activities aroused the suspicions of the Government, notably of the British officials in Egypt, the shaykhs of al-Azhar inevitably protested to his teachings. These conservative theologians distrusted his advanced views on learning mainly for two reasons: firstly, his knowledge and revival of the study of philosophy – invariably seen in these circles as the enemy of true religion; and secondly, his refusal to be bound by certain religious customs which, in the eyes of the people, had acquired religious status (Adam 1933: 7). This criticism indicates that his teachings were really something new and, therefore, unacceptable.

In Iran the political issues of ‘how to deal with the West’ started with al-Afghani. As early as the 1880s, he had appealed for a union of the religious and non-religious opposition forces against Western colonial expansion. This would eventually be realized in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905/1906. When he made

his voice heard, Iranian dependence on the West was already an established fact. In 1813, in the wake of a series of military defeats, Russia had extracted from the Iranians a humiliating agreement whereby heirs to the Iranian throne had to be approved by Russia. Alongside the loss of further Caucasian provinces, the peace of Torkmantschay had also obliged Iran to pay massive reparations and to accept Russia's full consular jurisdiction over its citizens in Iran. In plain language, these notorious 'capitulations' had meant exemption from Iranian jurisdiction. The system would later be extended to European and Ottoman citizens.

In subsequent years Iranian dependence was intensified by the unscrupulous awarding of concessions to Russian and British businessmen. In 1872, the British businessman Julius de Reuter was granted extensive concessions enabling him to largely control the Iranian economy; in 1879, Russia was granted fishing rights in the Caspian Sea, and 1890 saw the culmination of this practice with the British owned Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia receiving a 50-year monopoly on the entire production, trade and export of Iranian-grown tobacco. This concession sparked off the first successful mass uprising in modern Iran. Protesting against the sell-out to a foreign power, Ayatollah Shirazi (d. 1894), who was generally accepted as the highest religious authority, published a judicial decree prohibiting believers from using tobacco. Iranians everywhere stopped smoking, and the Shah had no other option than to revoke the sale (Lambton 1965: 119-157; Keddie 1966). This uprising was precisely what al-Afghani had in mind. He felt that Muslims must act in unison to have a chance of making a stand against Western hegemony. He believed that Sunnis and Shiites had to overcome their differences in the face of this danger, and that even Muslims and non-Muslims should be able to stand together in a common fight based on a reformed Islam. Afghani went to Iran in 1887 and again from 1889 to 1891, influencing the younger generation of reform-minded intellectuals, some of whom would later play a decisive role in the Constitutional Revolution.

### 3.5 RETHINKING SUNNA, HADITH CRITICISM: THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW EXEGESIS OF THE QURAN

Just as Afghani's influence was visible in Iran, so it was in both India and Egypt. His strong and persuasive argument for reformation in all aspects of life, social, political as well as intellectual, would develop gradually toward applying new interpretations to the basic sources of Islam, namely the Sunna and the Quran. The Sunna encompasses the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad as well as his approval and/or disapproval of the sayings and actions of his companions. Unlike the Quran, which was recorded in writing early on, the Sunna was transmitted orally before the compilation of the collections of tradition by the end of the 2nd/8th century. The fact that all the reports containing tradition were transmitted orally, with the potential for fabrication for various reasons and motivations, prompted the early scholars of hadith – who were very aware of these pitfalls – to develop certain critical rules to evaluate authenticity, and hence to include what was to be accepted, and to avoid fabrications entering the collections.

Within the modern context of 'rethinking', this traditional critical approach towards hadith was re-invoked and even developed beyond its traditional critical paradigm. Rethinking the Sunna was associated with efforts to reopen the meaning of the Quran and addressing modern issues. This was done by seeking to establish a new Quranic exegesis without the usual heavy reliance on tradition in the classical commentaries of the Quran. Put differently, the criticism of the Sunna was basically one result of Muslim thinkers being involved in Quranic exegesis in a somewhat different way. The strong demand for a new approach to the Quran that would open its meaning to new, challenging circumstances, made it essential to distance modern Quranic exegesis from the traditional type heavily loaded with hadith quotations.

Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan of India (1817-1898), who was not a traditional *alim*, was the first Indian modernist to introduce new, hitherto unknown themes in his interpretation (Troll 1978; Malik 1980). An apologist, he tried to justify the religious dogmas presented in the Quran in the light of modern scientific discoveries. The view that the Quran should occupy the central place in guiding the behaviour of Muslims, as against the dominant role of the prophetic traditions generally accepted by the ulama, was apparently gaining popularity among a section of Muslim intelligentsia of late-19th and early-20th century India. This was intended primarily to create space for the interpretation of the Quran in modern terms, while also eradicating the superstitions so prevalent in Muslim societies. Sayyed Ahmad Khan was the first to have raised this issue, pointing to anomalies in the interpretation of the Quran and suggesting that these lack even general principles on which to base an understanding of the Holy Scripture. Most of what the classical commentators had provided were derivations from the Quran of canon law, scholastic theology and admonitions. Indeed, not inconsiderable part of the classical commentaries is "worthless and full of weak and fabricated (Prophetic) traditions" or comprises baseless stories borrowed from Judaism. In his view it was therefore imperative to free the field of Quranic exegesis from tradition, substituting instead the principles of 'reason' and 'nature'. He proposed that the Quran stand on its own, requiring only application of a dedicated and enlightened mind for its understanding. The principles of interpretation should not depend on hadith because this would jeopardise the eternal and universal quality of the Quran. For him, the great miracle of the Quran is its universality which allows every generation to find in it the meaning relevant to its situation, despite the constant increase in human knowledge. Hadith-based interpretation tends to limit the meaning of the Quran to a particular historical situation, thus obscuring its universality (Brown 1996: 44).

This approach led Ahmad Khan to a critical examination of the second source of Islamic knowledge, the Sunna. Influenced by Biblical criticism of the transmission of the hadith's reports by European scholars like Carl Pfander (1803-1865) and William Muir (1819-1905) on the one hand, and reacting to the close-minded, Wahhabi oriented Ahl-i-Hadith group on the other hand. This was a group in India that adhered uncritically to the full authenticity and the legal authority of

the hadith as the second divine source. Thus, he “eventually came to reject almost all hadith as unreliable” (Brown 1996: 33). However, this is not to say that he rejected the Sunna altogether, even though the hadith is considered to be the major carrier of the Sunna.

Like Ahmad Khan, the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh (1848-1905) seems to have taken a critical, though more cautious, attitude towards the material handed down in the canonized collections of the Sunna. Abduh did not elaborate theoretically on redefining the authentic Tradition. However, on occasion, he did refute traditions that contradicted either the explicit meaning of certain Quranic passages or contradicted both reason and common sense. This is very apparent from his rejection of traditions related either to magic or satanic elements, and those where angels descend to fight the enemy alongside Muslim warriors. As we shall see, his semi-rational interpretation of the Quran requires a critical approach to tradition (Brown 1996: 37).

The early-20th century thus saw the emergence of a so-called Ahl-i-Quran movement, a group in India that opposed Ahl-i-Hadith and emphasized that the Quran is the exclusive authentic divine source while hadith is an auxiliary source subject to historical criticism. This was a critical response to the emphasis laid on the authority of the Sunna by the Ahl-i-Hadith movement, causing a tilt towards a ritualistic version of reformation. Rather than the authenticity of the Sunna as transmitted through hadith reports, the basic challenge presented by Ahl-i-Quran was whether or not the Sunna is equally positioned to the Quran as divine revelation. This challenged the classical position whereby the Sunna is held to be a form of revelation equal to the Quran in authority, though different in form.

Egypt also witnessed a controversy similar to that in India, though less violent in tone. Like the Indian Ahl-i-Quran, that was influenced by the stress Sayyid Ahmad Khan laid on the Quranic universalism versus Sunna historicity, the Egyptian critics of the Sunna developed Abduh’s cautious attitude toward hadith literature into a more radical attitude, raising the slogan “Islam is the Quran alone” in an article in *al-Manar* in 1907 (Sidqi 1907: 906ff).<sup>3</sup> Strong reactions to this claim came from several Muslim countries, India among them. One of the more interesting outcomes of this debate around the authenticity of hadith has been the emergence of attempts to separate the issue of Sunna authority from that of the historical authenticity of hadith criticism. Thus, the results of modern hadith criticism were, at least in part, accepted, while the authenticity of Sunna was, in principle, preserved.

### 3.6 RETHINKING THE MEANING OF THE QURAN

The orientation of modern exegesis of the Quran can be divided into three basic trends, each of which essentially addresses the main challenges of modernity, i.e. science, reason, and politics. While the challenges of both science and reason

were dealt with in the 19th century's new exegesis of the Quran in India and Egypt, the challenge of politics would unfold in the 20th century, notably with the ending of the Caliphate and the founding of Pakistan. Absolute confidence in science was most apparent in India, and this explains al-Afghani's keenness to refute 'naturalism' in the only book he wrote.

### 3.6.1 ISLAM AND SCIENCE

We have already encountered Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the Indian who examined the issue of science in his exegesis of the Quran. As we have seen, his criticism of the hadith and the consideration of the position of the Sunna were both meant to free the Quranic exegesis from the heavy impact of tradition, thereby facilitating the introduction of a somewhat more modern understanding of God's message. In criticizing classical Quranic commentaries in terms of sources and subjects of interest, he accepted only those parts of the commentaries dealing with literary aspects of the Quran. His major interest was to bring the meaning of the Quran into harmony with the modern discoveries of the natural sciences. Natural scientific discoveries, he asserted, need to be taken into account while explaining the meanings of relevant parts of the Quran, since they do not contain anything that clashes with the 'law of nature'. Modern scientific discoveries are the manifestations of God's promises in reality, while the Quran presents God's promises in words. Based on this argument, Ahmad Khan suggested that the Scripture has to come to terms with the law of nature, including scientific discoveries. He therefore rejected miracles, as well as many Quranic descriptions which he considered 'supernatural' in their literal sense. These he described as metaphors and indirect expressions of reality (Khan 1995: 1-20).

In Ahmad Khan's view, Quranic words and expressions should not be understood exclusively in their direct literal meanings; the Holy Scripture often uses metaphors, allegories, and other indirect expressions. To give this claim authentic traditional support, he explained how the classical ulama did not always accept literal meanings of many Quranic words – where such meanings contradict common sense or human intellect. They recognized miracles, and, therefore, accepted supernatural Quranic descriptions in their literal sense merely because the natural sciences were not sufficiently developed in those periods. However, since very little was known about pre-Islamic Arabic literature, he concluded that it was possible for words and phrases to have meanings other than those explained by lexicologists. Hence, it is imperative also to apply other sources and to accept meanings of the Quran which are based on such sources, even if these are absent from the dictionaries (Khan 1995: 15).

Evidently, Sayyid Ahmad Khan uncritically accepted the explicit concept of the Quran as a Text, which had been a well-established concept since its canonization. This explains his admiration for sections of the classical exegesis which stresses the literary aspect. Although skeptical about the quantity of knowledge available around pre-Islamic Culture, he methodologically emphasized its impor-



tance. He concluded that the Quran should, first and foremost, be understood, explained and interpreted by the Quran itself, namely by understanding its own internal structure. Such a principle derived from the Holy Book (Khan 1995: 2 and 13-15). Secondly, understanding the pre-Islamic Arabic literature is a pre-requisite to understanding the Quran.

Methodologically speaking there is nothing new in Sayyid Ahmad Khan's presupposition. However, the difference between his interpretation and the classical commentaries lies in the domain of meaning – the modern meaning – which considers science, especially natural science, to be the new religion of secularism. Fascinated by the new world of science and discovery, he had to find a way to integrate it into his holy scripture. I propose here that Sayyid Ahmad Khan's effort to open the meaning of the Quran to accept scientific findings is the embryo of what would later develop into seemingly opposing directions, namely an emphasis on the scientific supremacy of the Quran (al-Iskandrani 1880; 1883; 1897; al-Jawahiri 1971; al-Sharafi 1990: 69-76), and an emphasis on the 'islamization' of knowledge and science.<sup>4</sup> The first direction shows that all scientific theories are implicitly alluded to in the Quran. Accordingly, the miracle of the Quran extends beyond the classical theory of stylistic supremacy and takes in scientific supremacy. The second, the islamization of knowledge, seeks the Islamic roots for modern knowledge. We will return to both tendencies later.

### 3.6.2 ISLAM AND RATIONALISM

Although Muhammad Abduh was neither a theologian nor a philosopher, he admired the philosophical and mystical knowledge of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. However, while al-Afghani was more of an activist and provocative teacher (Amarah 1968: 29), Abduh gave up politics and concentrated on the arena of thought, particularly after being exiled for involvement in the Urabi affair which ended with the British occupying Egypt in 1882. Heavily influenced by Afghani who had brought the idea of a new, modern interpretation of Islam to Egypt, Abduh adopted a synthesis of classical rationalism and modern socio-political awareness. This enabled him to re-examine the basic sources of Islamic knowledge, the Quran and the Sunna, as well as the structure of Islamic theology. This prepared the ground for what would be known as the *ishlah* (reformation) movement.

After being appointed religious councilor (*mufti*) of Egypt in 1899 (Abduh 1972: 105f), Abduh addressed many practical social and cultural issues from an Islamic rational perspective. He established a program for the reform of Muslim higher education and of the administration of Muslim law. He also sought to implement these practical changes in 1892 with proposed reforms of education in general and of al-Azhar in particular. In addition, he proposed a whole plethora of plans to reform the legal system. His efforts to reform aspects of al-Azhar were partly successful. However, given the stiff resistance from the traditional ulama, he began concentrating more on intellectual reforms. All these activities demon-

strated his confidence both in 'reason', and 'religion' as the best foundation against reason going astray. The issues of Islam and modern knowledge that were so fundamental to his writings made him re-examine the Islamic heritage. It prompted him to open the 'door of *ijtihad*' even wider, and in all fields of social and intellectual life. Since he saw religion as an essential part of human existence, the only route from which to launch real reform was a reform of Islamic thought.

In his *Tafsir al-Manar* he elaborated the concept of the Quran as a 'text', first by implicitly emphasizing its literary structure, and then by bringing the style of its 7th-century message into line with the intellectual level of the Arab mentality. Hence, whatever seemed irrational or contradictory to logic and science in the Quran, must be understood as reflecting the Arab vision of the world at that time. All verses referring to superstitions like witchcraft and the evil eye were to be explained as expressions of Arab beliefs. Moreover, literary figures of speech (like 'metaphor' and 'allegory') appear in *Tafsir al-Manar* as the basis of a rational explanation for all miraculous events and deeds mentioned in the Quran. Hence, Abduh explained the verses in which angels are sent down from heaven to fight the *kuffar* (infidels) as an expression of encouragement; they were meant to comfort the believers and to help towards victory (Abduh 1972: 506-11). This was precisely the first explicit effort towards the re-contextualization of the Quran against the 7th-century cultural background, a method that was developed by both later Egyptian, Arab and Muslim intellectuals. This process of re-contextualization led Abduh to de-mythologize the Quranic narrative. He also came close to de-mystifying the Holy text.

While Sayyid Ahmad Khan was trying to harmonize the Quran with science by equating both – the equation between Divine 'promise in action' and 'promise in words' – it was quite enough for Abduh to place the Quran in the 7th-century context, thus excluding any attempt of comparison between the Quran and science. His most important contribution in this area was his insistence that the Quran is not meant to be a book of history nor a book of science; it is a book of guidance. Consequently, any search for a proof of a scientific theory is invalid. Quranic narratives, on the other hand, should not be taken as historical documents either. Indeed, historical incidents mentioned in the Quranic narratives are presented in a literary and narrative style to convey lessons of admonition and exhortation (Abduh 1972: 30ff). Abduh was very clear about the difference between 'historiography' and the Quranic stories. Historiography is a scientific field of knowledge based on inquiry and critical investigation of available data (reports, testimonies, memories, and geographical or material evidences, for example). In contrast, the Quranic stories are intended to serve ethical, spiritual and religious purposes. They might be based on some historical incidents, but their purpose is not to provide knowledge about history. This explains why the names of persons, places and dates are not mentioned in these stories. Even if the story is about a prophet or about one of the enemies of a prophet (like the Pharaoh), many details are omitted. Thus, Abduh was clearly against the method of the classical exegetes who tried to clarify these *mubhamat* (unmentioned

elements.) He insisted that the importance of the story does not depend on such knowledge. Rather, it depends on the lesson of 'admonition' that can be deduced from it.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to emphasize here that Abduh's intellectual liberal discourse presents the intellectual side of the modernizing project initiated by Muhammad Ali (1760-1849) to establish a modern state in Egypt. This project was carried out by Ali's grandson Khedive Ismail (1863-1879), who explicitly wanted Egypt to be like any European state. Abduh's ideas were very influential in the 20th century, right across the entire Muslim World, thanks to the journal of *al-Manar* (1898-1936) established by Rashiid Rida (1865-1935), Abduh's pupil and colleague. As we shall see, although the journal was the channel for propagating Abduh's ideas, Rida modified these into a more conservative direction by unfolding their traditional rather than liberal dimensions.

Like Abduh, Ahmad Khan's efforts to free the field of Quranic exegesis from tradition meant that he substituted the principles of 'reason' and 'nature' for the classical heavy dependence on quotations from tradition. He suggested that the Quran stands on its own, requiring only application of a dedicated and enlightened mind for its understanding. The principles of interpretation should not depend on hadith, since that would endanger the Quran's eternal and universal quality. Thus, for Khan, the great miracle of the Quran is its universality, which enables every generation to discover relevant meaning in it, irrespective of the constant increase in human knowledge. Hadith-based interpretation tends to limit the meaning of the Quran to a particular historical situation, thus obscuring its universality (Brown 1996: 44).

In his exegesis, in particular, Muhammad Abduh took great pains to declare Islam innocent of maintaining the backwardness of the Muslim World. In distinguishing between 'Islam' and 'Muslims', he laid the responsibility on human actors who had misunderstood and misinterpreted the pure message of Islam. Following on from this distinction, Islam and Islamic tradition were considered the only frames of reference that stimulated progress. Hence, in Muslim eyes progress and regress were no longer viewed as the outcome of the socio-political and cultural environment in a given community. The socio-political decadence resulted from a failure to comprehend religious tradition. The only solution was to turn back to the pure, accurate understanding, which in the past had enabled Muslims to gain mastery of the world. Any solutions presented by the other side – the West – would provoke a reaction based on the identity bestowed by the invader, i.e., identity reduced to the single aspect of religion.

The rationalism of Khan and Abduh reflected their admiration for the principles of the French Revolution, which attracted many Turkish and Arab Muslim intellectuals. Abduh's apologetic criticism of Christianity and the Church was motivated both by an inferiority complex towards Europe and its Christian cultural background, and by the influence of Europe's rationalism. According to his cele-

brated, much-quoted and highly suggestive statement on the subject of Islam, Christianity and Europe, Europe's powerful and aggressive move forward was the result of abandoning Christianity. Indeed, Europe had no other option, Christianity being a religion of submission, obedience and leaving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. Islam, on the other hand, demanded that Muslims acquire power and sovereignty. Seeing a world where Europe occupied and dominated Muslim lands, it was logical for Abduh to conclude that 'real' Islam was to be found in Europe, where people were not Muslims. He therefore urged Muslims to acquire all of Europe's technological benefits while adhering to their own heritage for moral, ethical and spiritual guidance. This mix of looking to Europe as an example of materialistic progress, and to the 'past' for guidance, reflected a pragmatic political strategy; fighting the enemy by borrowing advanced Western military technology. Indeed, there was no danger in taking on board science and technology. As for borrowing rationality and modern European enlightenment, this could be justified by classical Islamic theology and philosophy, especially of the Mutazilites and Averroës.

### 3.7 CONCLUSION

Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Abduh have prepared the ground for Muslim intellectuals throughout the 20th century to open up the meaning of the Quran, and hence the meaning of Islam, thus allowing them to cope with modernity in different ways. As illustrated, Sayyid Ahmad was basically occupied with the challenge of modern science while Abduh was concerned with the issue of rationality in general. If Khan's approach is to be considered both the embryo of the later *al-ijaz al-ilmi*, the belief that the Quran anticipated modern scientific theories, and also of the trend of 'islamizing' science and knowledge, Abduh's approach tended to what has come to be known as the 'literary approach'. Even so, the 20th century was to witness the politicization of Islam and Islam's struggle against Western hegemony, a movement that would start in India and end with the creation of Pakistan as the state of Muslim Indians. In this context, Mawdudi's ideas and concepts became the real source of future political and ideological interpretations of the Quran.

## NOTES

- 1 A statesman, diplomat and historian who directed a major French colonial expansion in Africa and championed a Franco-Russian alliance that proved so important in the events that led to World War I. As a French nationalist he was committed to policies of colonial expansion. During his ministry, French domination was established in French West Africa, Madagascar, and Tunisia, while inroads were made in Algeria.
- 2 Al-Azhar Mosque was established by the Fatimids, who conquered Egypt in 969. It represented something more than a local place of worship and was also an assembly mosque or *jami*. As the majority of Egyptian Muslims were Sunnites using their orthodox codes of law and their traditional forms of worship, the Fatimids were anxious not to cause offense. Rather than an oppressive approach, the Fatimids tried to win over their Sunnite subjects with a system of ideology and propaganda. One of the principal ways of promoting Fatimid prestige was via their legal system, which was permeated with their particular ideology. Under the Ayyubid dynasty (1171–1250), al-Azhar was severely neglected – the idea being to restore the Sunnite tradition and sweep away the Fatimids. During the Mamluk period (1250–1517), al-Azhar was re-established in an important role. Firstly, it was called upon to help preserve knowledge of the Arabic language, as the Mamluks themselves spoke Turkish dialects. A second responsibility of the colleges and mosque schools was to maintain respect for the sharia as the only means of protecting the rights of the people against the unbridled militarism of the Mamluks. Al-Azhar's third task was to teach the Quranic principles of ethics and social justice in a period of scandalous selfishness and extravagance among the ruling class. Fourthly, in a period of quite brutal officialdom, the Shaykhs of al-Azhar were obliged to keep alive Muhammad's traditions of love, forgiveness and kindness. Al-Azhar served the people in a fifth way, by providing shelter at times of danger. Finally, during the Mamluk period, al-Azhar was needed to maintain religion on a high level amidst fanaticism caused by two centuries of crusader aggression, and poverty-driven superstition and ignorance, particular in rural areas. The re-establishment of al-Azhar after Saladin had reduced it to the status of a minor mosque was highly significant, even in the context of Egyptian history, given the urgency of preserving the true culture and religion revealed by the Prophet.

When Western Asia was devastated by Mongol invasions in the thirteen and fourteen centuries, Cairo replaced Baghdad as the principal cultural centre of the Arabs. Not only had Al-Azhar become an important congregational mosque and educational center, but it was now also a shrine for the pious, a hostel for pilgrims, a refuge for the poor and a gathering place for ascetics. In 1497, Vasco da Gama sailed around the Cape of Good Hope, mapping out a new trade route to India. Before long the Cape would become the route for Europe's trade with the East, and Egypt forfeited its customs and trans-shipment revenues. The inevitable losses and depression that followed meant that the Sultan was unable to pay his Mamluk officers and Bedouin allies enough to keep them content, and

army morale collapsed. Indeed, on top of wrecking Egyptian trade, the Portuguese also invaded the Red Sea.

Ottoman rule over Egypt was guided by three principles, two of which positively affected the role of al-Azhar. The Pasha, who was appointed for one year only, was to be assisted by two advisory councils (*diwans*) established at Cairo. In addition to leading administrative officials and Mamluk Amirs, the councils also included the heads of the four codes of law and a number of important shaykhs. This gave al-Azhar the power to influence political affairs. In leaving the local affairs of Egypt to be handled by the Mamluks, the Ottoman conquest left al-Azhar subject to the control of the local Mamluk officials, and required from it the same services during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, as it had rendered during the period of the Crusades and the Mongol invasion.

- 3 This journal was established in 1898 and continued to the death of its founder Rasdid Rida, Abduh's disciple in 1935.
- 4 The scientific supremacy of the Quran (al-ijaz al-ilmi), according to an article published in the weekly supplement of *al-Ahram* newspaper, 27 October, 2000, p. 2, is not meant to convince the Arabs of the authenticity and divinity of the Quran. The writer says that for Arabs it is enough to establish the Quran's inimitability on its rhetorical eloquence; however, for non-Arabs this explanation is neither enough nor acceptable. Moreover, in Western culture, science is the supreme mode of knowledge. The article is basically written in response to the criticism directed to the notion of 'the scientific supremacy of the Quran'. It is claimed that linking the Quran to scientific theory, which is changeable and subject to challenge apace with the development of human knowledge, actually damages the divinity and the eternity of the Quran, the word of God. Defending the validity of al-ijaz al-ilmi, the writer distinguishes between scientific fact and theory, asserting that the Quran's supremacy is built on the former not the latter. If such facts are explicitly or implicitly set out in the Quran, it represents the solid and universal proof of its divinity. In this context the compatibility of Islam, specifically the Quran, with modern science, became a matter of concern for a number of non-clerical Muslim intellectuals. Relevant publications for reference here include al-Iskandrani 1880 and 1883; Fikri, 1897; al-Jawhari. The latter is a multi-volume tafsir in which the author does his utmost to identify all links with modern science, modern technology and even discoveries in the Quran. Six verses, 5:27-32 for example, are dealt with in 25 pages including many headings starting with 'linguistic explanation', *al-tafsir al-lafzi* and ending with 'the iron safe in the Quran', *al-khazain al-hadidiyah fi l-Quran*. Cf. al-Sharafi 1990: 69-76.
- 5 For a detailed account of Abdu's views concerning the Quranic narrative, see *Tafsir al-Manar*, Cairo 2nd reprint, vol. 1, pp. 19-21, 210-11, 215, 229-30, 233-4, 271; vol. 3, 47-8; vol. 4, pp. 7, 42, 92-3. Abdu was influenced profoundly by classical Islamic rational theology; this is very obvious in his *Risalat al-Tawhid* (Treatise on the Unicity of God, first published in 1315/1897), the first modern treatise in Islamic theology. He also wrote his most celebrated defense of Islam against Christianity in which he indulged in the discussion of questions of knowledge and civilization, entitled *al-Islam wa l-Nasraniyya maa l-ilm wa l-madaniyya* (first published in 1902).

## 4 THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the reformation of Islamic thought during the 20th century and the introduction of the concept of a modern national state, particularly in Egypt and Turkey. The issue of reformation needed redefinition to create room for the adoption and integration of modern Western concepts and institutions such as 'freedom', 'reason' and 'democracy'. The issue of politics emerged after the dramatic collapse of the Ottoman Empire following the end of the First World War and the decision in 1924 by the new national Turkish movement to abolish the Caliphate. These events raised the question of whether the Caliphate had represented an Islamic institution or merely a form of political system which could be replaced without losing the identity of Islam. The Egyptian Ali Abd al-Raziq (1888-1966) defended its abolition by demonstrating that there is no such thing as a political system with the specific label Islamic. Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935) responded in another vein, defending it as an authentic Islamic system that should be re-established to prevent Muslims from lapsing back into paganism (*jahiliyya*). The political response came in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood, established in Egypt in 1928. The Brotherhood aimed to re-establish Islamic society in Egypt as an ideal example to be copied everywhere, prior to the re-establishment of the Caliphate. Hence, re-islamization became the antonym of modernization, which was presented as Westernization.

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### 4.2 THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL ISLAM

This section will analyze the ongoing debate in the Muslim World between the opponents of modernity and of Islamism. Rather than examining individual thinkers, it will focus on issues, i.e. sharia and law, democracy and civil society, women's rights, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, Muslims and non-Muslims (minority rights), and the position of the sacred texts. These are all issues that are still debated today. The ideas of thinkers from across the Muslim World will be subjected to critical analysis. The debate will be presented in the domestic arena of Egypt, Iran and Iraq, and Indonesia, to allow for insights into the local context. This shows the mutual interaction between Muslim thinkers and ideas arising in the context of the various domestic debates. Moreover, it shows the impact of Europe in stimulating this debate in the Muslim World.

#### 4.2.1 EGYPT

In the previous chapter we saw that the reformation movement initiated by al-Afghani and elaborated by Abduh reflected a perplexed view of Europe and modernity alike. Europe was both the enemy to be combated and the master from whom to learn. On the other hand, the golden past – the Islamic Heritage – was perceived as the repertoire of moral, ethical and spiritual values. Be that as it

may, after his death in 1905, Muhammad Abduh's rational spirit remained alive throughout the Egypt of the 20th century. The rational and conservative tendencies perpetuating his writings were both separately expressed. Meanwhile, the national movement against the British occupation grew apace. Just two years after Abduh's death, Egypt witnessed the birth of three political parties, each with its own cultural and political agenda and its own newspaper. The National Party, *Hizb al-Ummah*, had the journal *al-Jarida*, the Reformation Party, *Hizb al-Islah*, had *al-Muayyad*, and the Patriotism Party, *al-Hizb al-Watani*, had *al-Liwa*.

The issue of political and social reformation was present everywhere in the Muslim World prior to 1924. Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1848-1902) of Syria, who spent the last years of his life in Egypt, devoted all his efforts to combating despotism, whether political or religious. Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (1804-1878) was more interested in issues pertaining to the reformation of language and literature. Raised as a Maronite, converted to Protestantism and subsequently to Islam, his life and writings – mainly travel journals (al-Azmeh 1995: 7) – reflect a critical attitude towards religion. Indeed, this made him one of the early advocates of two important ideas which would later be disputed, namely freedom of religion and the separation between religion and politics. He based his plea for freedom of religion on the idea that religion is essentially an individual choice rather than a communal commitment. The only way to preserve this is to separate religion and politics. Influenced by his travels, there was a socialist tendency in his ideas. This earned him the label of early Enlightenment thinker. For Kawakibi, the necessity of dissociating religious authority and political power was based on his analytical explanation of the danger inherent in combining the two in one hand. His harsh criticism of the despotic Ottoman system declared Islam innocent of such despotism, thus refuting the claim by some Western writers that this was an inherent trait of Islam. His defense presented Islam as a middle way between democracy and aristocracy (al-Kawakibi 1993: 15-16).

The liberal side of Abduh's thinking was also reflected in the writings of Qasim Amin (1863-1908). This graduate of the School of Law advocated the emancipation of women in social life. His writings, 'Emancipation of women', *Tahrir al-Marah*, (1899) and 'The New Woman', *al-Marah al-Jadidah* (1901), have provoked oppositional writings that totalled some 30 critical books and pamphlets. The religious institutions were badly shaken and the educated classes were deeply disturbed. The Khedive, the Turkish viceroy ruling Egypt at that time, had a keen eye for popularity. He made it known he was dissatisfied. And, for a time, Mustafa Kamil, then at the height of his power as a nationalist leader, turned all his energies to combating the ideas of Qasim Amin. More importantly however, Abduh, as a reformer, gave his implicit endorsement by keeping silent (Bin Salamon 1982: 119; Amarah 1968: 172). Whether or not Amin's ideas matched identically with those of Abduh, there is no doubt of the impact of Abduh's discourse. The hesitation of the Imam Abduh, Egypt's mufti at the time, to openly and clearly support Amin, despite being challenged and provoked to



respond, requires us to reconsider the position of Abduh as a pure rationalist thinker (Bin Salomon 1982: 138-142). Conservative ulama in Egypt recently criticized Qasim Amin's works as some sort of conspiracy against the Islamic family system (Bin Salomon 1982: 51; Abu Zayd 1994: 48-52).

It is important to note that while studying in Paris, Qasim Amin collaborated with both Afghani and Abduh in the publication of the Arabic language weekly *al-Urwa al-wuthqa*, of which only 18 issues appeared. Another aspect of Amin's involvement was his patriotic book *Les Egyptiens*, Paris 1894, written in French in reply to the Duke of Harcourt whose *L'Egypte et les Egyptiens* (1893) looked at the country and its social structure in particular from an exaggeratedly colonialist viewpoint. Again, like Afghani and Abduh, Amin was involved in discrediting the polemic colonialist discourse, but from a patriotic perspective.

The quest for social and political reform was paralleled by a search for educational reform. In view of the difficulty of introducing real reforms into the traditional curricula of the Al-Azhar university, a new, independent college was established in 1872 by the reformist Ali Pasha Mubarak (1832-1893). The aim of this *Dar al-Ulum* (house of sciences) was to introduce a certain number of students from al-Azhar to modern branches of learning during a five-year training course prior to teaching in the newly established modern schools. Another institution, *Madrasat al-Qada al-Shari* (The School of Sharia Judges), was founded in 1905. Its program of legal studies was both theoretical and practical. It aimed to train future judges in modern procedural and normative law, alongside sharia, and to equip them for modern courts. Most intellectuals who played an important role in Egyptian political, social, cultural and religious life graduated from this college.

One year later, a modern, non-religious university opened as the non-governmental *Al-Jamia al-Ahliyyah* or National University. Its inaugural memorandum of 1906 stated that it was a secular institution whose doors would "be open to every seeker after knowledge regardless of nationality or religion." Sad Zaghlul, the then leader of the National Party, severely criticized the university's chairman of the board, Ahmad Zaki, for an inaugural speech stressing the past glories of Islam. Zaghlul felt this was inappropriate at the opening of a "university that has no religion but knowledge" (Reid 1991: 31). A few years later, with the university facing a budget shortfall, the government stepped in with financial backing. In 1925, this move transformed the independent institution into a state body under the new name *Jamiat Fuad al-Awwal* (Fuad I University.) Following the 1952 revolution its name changed again, this time to Cairo University (*Jamiat al-Qahira*). As it developed apace into a great national university, al-Azhar also relinquished its status as Egypt's sole centre of academic learning (Dodge 1961: 143-4). Taha Husayn, a blind student studying at Azhar, immediately transferred to the new university. In due course, he would become the champion of reform and innovation in 20th-century Egypt.

Although Cairo University was intended as a secular institution, this did not mean an automatic open door for a Christian thinker like Jurji Zaydan, founder-editor of *al-Hilal*, to teach Islamic history. Zaydan discovered oriental scholarship in the reading room of the British Museum in 1886 and this soon colored his vision of Arab and Islamic history. He complained that earlier Arab historians set out discrete facts without drawing links or looking for underlying causes – a criticism clearly expressed in Ibn Khaldun’s celebrated *Muqadimmah*. Zaydan also rejected glorifying history: “the true history of the nation (*umma*) is the history of its civilization and culture, not the history of its wars and conquests as proclaimed by Islam’s earlier Arab historians” (Reid 1991:35-6). For most contemporary Muslim scholars, his critical approach was unacceptable. He certainly upheld the sincerity of the Prophet Muhammad, but he also opposed the idea that Islamic civilization was exclusively derived from Byzantium and Persia, claiming that the ancient civilizations of the Fertile Crescent were Arab. This non-religious explanation for the Islamic conquests was not well accepted by the pietists who took the view that secular causes were irrelevant at best and at worst actually detracted from divine omnipotence (Reid 1991: 36). As it transpired, the college of judges was closed a few years later and the college of Dar al-Ulum was annexed by Cairo University in 1946. As we have seen, as a supposedly secular educational institution, Cairo University had a problematic start in life due to the contingent context of the process of reformation and modernization: accepting modernity under pragmatic pressure while continuing to comply with tradition. This made it possible for the traditional educational institution, al-Azhar, to go on persecuting scholars who tried to innovate on the basis of a critical approach to tradition. Inevitably, the victims were affiliated with Cairo University, while the inquisitors were either from Dar al-Ulum College – also part of Cairo University – or al-Azhar.

#### 4.2.2 IRAN AND IRAQ

In Iran and Iraq, the debate centered on whether to codify a modern constitution (*mashruta*) or to remain within the traditional domain of sharia. A coherent and serious statement on issues of political and social reform was issued during the constitutional revolution of 1905-1911. This involved a remarkably large and significant number of the Iranian ulama, who referred to Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Naini’s (1860-1936) treatise of 1909 on constitutional government from the viewpoint of Shii Islam, entitled *Tanbih al-umma wa tanzih al-milla darasas wa usul-i mashrutiyat*. This book delineated the positive doctrinal reasons – firmly grounded in the Quran and Sunna – for supporting constitutionalism. He defined the functions of the state as establishing an equilibrium within society and defending it against external attack. The power enjoyed by the state should be limited to what is needed to fulfill these functions. Inevitably, any excess tends in the direction of tyranny. This in turn tempts the ruler to usurp the divine attribute of sovereignty and thus to commit the cardinal sin of *shirk* (polytheism). The only comprehensive manner to avoid such a perversion is by the *isma* (freedom from sin and errors) of the ruler, as exclusively attributed to

the Imams during their lifetime. After the occultation of the twelfth Imam, it was both possible and desirable to reduce such perversion to a minimum by limiting the power of the ruler and instituting an assembly (*majlis*) of representatives charged with implementing the consultative principle (*shura*) enunciated in the Quran. Any such assembly might only act as a legislature for matters not already covered by the sharia, or by giving specific implementation to items legislated for in a general manner by the Quran and the Sunna. The functioning of the assembly should be regulated by a constitution. A number of ulama should be appointed to the assembly as a safeguard against enunciating laws in potential contradiction of sharia.

Thus, Nani's statement of the desirability of constitutional rule in Shii terms not only indicated how in later decades the ulama were able to refer to both the Quran and the constitution as sources of authority for political life, but it also explained how they could ally themselves with secular elements in the pursuit of common political goals (al-Gharabawi 1999: 103ff). We can clearly see here the influence of al-Kawakibi's critique of both political and religious tyranny, whose book *Tabai al-Istibdad* (The Nature of Despotism) was translated into Persian in 1907 (al-Gharabawi 1999: 107).

Representing the first step towards democracy, the Constitutional movement failed as early as 1908. This enabled the hegemonic powers to regain influence in Iranian politics. Hence, the country's relationship with the West entered a new phase with the accession to power of Reza Shah in 1921. He downplayed reliance on the quasi-colonial powers Great Britain and Russia and initiated a series of modernizing reforms whereby the world would see 'his' Iran as an independent nation state. Feudal landlords, new enterprises and a steadily growing class of civil servants all benefited. But some of the reforms, like the forced resettlement of nomads, had terrible consequences. Others, like the prohibition of the veil in 1936, met with stubborn popular opposition (Chehabi 1993: 209-229). The process opened with the empress relinquishing the veil and civil servants being ordered to present their wives unveiled at official functions. The government then ordered women's head coverings *hijab* to be ripped off in the streets and prevented veiled women from entering public buildings, including schools and ministries. Many traditional fathers responded by removing their daughters from school and forbidding their wives from going to work or even shopping. There was also a new dress code for men: turbans and caftans were banned and European suits became de rigueur. Reza Pahlavi wanted to create a laical nation that followed the lead of the West, and he viewed Islam as a hindrance to modernization. Critics of his approach, clerics in particular were given a taste of the iron fist (Faghfoory 1987: 413-432; 424ff). When one cleric prevented the unveiled empress from entering the sanctuary of Qum, Iran's theological capital, the emperor arrived in person, entered the sanctuary wearing jackboots – in itself a major offense – and slapped the man's face. Thereafter, he was seen as a sworn enemy of the clergy. Even so, at the start of his reign, senior Iranian clerics had spoken out in favor of the Shah himself, and of the monarchy. When all was said

and done, compared with the new Republic in Turkey, the monarchy seemed the lesser evil (Akhavi 1980).

#### 4.2.3 INDONESIA

Through the *al-Manar* journal, the reformist ideas of Al-Afghani and Abduh found their way into Indonesia, until 1945 a Dutch colony. Since contacts between the West and Islam in Indonesia dated from well before its independence, Islam had for a long time played an important role in the resistance to foreign power and exploitation. The challenge of foreign dominance generated a reactionary reformation movement in which religious thought strengthened the power of political resistance and also increasingly met the needs for social change. Thus, the Islamic discourse of the colonial era can be seen as generating the later religious renewal of modern Indonesia from post-independence to the present.

On the other hand, religious reform movements cannot be separated from religious movements elsewhere in the Muslim World, particularly in the Middle East. The religious reformation of the late 19th century in the 'heartlands of Islam' that was initiated by influential thinkers such as al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, had a massive impact on the discourse in Indonesia. Historical records show that the *al-Manar* journal played a significant role in the religious movement in Sumatra and Java, to name two of several regions in Indonesia. It triggered the publication of the *al-Imam* journal on Sumatra, and the *al-Munir* journal in Padang, West Sumatra, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Roff 1985).

Several factors contributed to this spread of the renewal movement from the Middle East to Indonesia. Firstly, several Indonesian Muslim activists studied in Cairo and were associated with Abduh's modernism (Abaza 1994: 73-90). Roff has indicated that the number of Malay-Indonesian students in Cairo increased significantly from the early 1920s (Roff 1985: 82-83). This enabled them to publish their own Malay-Indonesian journal in Cairo, entitled *Seruan Azhar* (the Echo of Azhar). As Hooker has shown, this was in fact an echo of the earlier Middle Eastern Islamic renewal movement in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago (Hooker 1984: 96-97). Secondly, many religious leaders who undertook the pilgrimage to the holy land were also in contact with renewal ideas from the Middle East. Several of these Indonesian ulama, who studied in the land of the *Haramayn*, the two holy places of Mecca and Medina, did not return directly to Indonesia. Hence they were able to make contacts with a number of religious thinkers, particularly those who campaigned against non-Muslims or against the European occupation of Islamic and Muslim countries (Azra 1992: 30-38). Thirdly, both the *al-Imam* and *al-Munir* journals continued *al-Manar's* mission of propagating Islamic renewal in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago.

The main concern of *al-Imam* was to portray the psychology of Malay-Indonesian society as defective in its understanding of Islam. According to Roff's

research, it wanted to show the backwardness of Muslims in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago compared to communities elsewhere. This backwardness was said to root in an understanding of Islam that contradicted its authentic spirit. Truth, it argued, does not allow Muslim creativity to be shackled; instead, it generates positive efforts to tackle social problems and identify solutions. To this end, *al-Imam* suggested that local leaders should stress the quality of education, while insisting that the ulama should purify Islam from any non-Islamic element. Hence, *al-Imam* emphasized the need to reinterpret the Quran and the Sunna, to abandon taqlid and thus to purify Islam.

*Al-Munir* continued after the demise of *al-Imam*. The fresh aspect of its religious renewal movement was its (European inspired) insistence on the importance of well-organized religious institutions, a notion not yet acknowledged by most Indonesian Muslim leaders at the time (Azra 1992: 123). Like *al-Imam* and *al-Manar*, *al-Munir's* religious orientation was certainly 'radical'; it published articles on issues considered taboo by several contemporary traditionalists whose opinions were based on classical and sectarian fiqh literature. It also emphasized the importance of legal reasoning, ijtihad, and condemned taqlid, while proposing free access to the various fiqh schools.

The impact of Middle Eastern discourse through channels such as *al-Manar* and the pilgrimage can be seen from the emergence of new movements and organizations. Among these were the *Muhammadiyah*, founded in 1912 by Ahmad Dahlan (1869-1923) (Alfian 1989; Syamsuddin 1995: 35-72), and the *Nahdlatul Ulama*, created in 1926 by Hasyim Asyari (1871-1947) (Fealy 1994; Feillard 1995). Today they are the two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia. Their founding fathers studied in the Haramayn for several years. Given its mission to purify Islam of non-Islamic local cultural elements through a quasi-Wahhabi project, the *Muhammadiyah* can be regarded as a reformist Muslim organization. At the height of traditional education in the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) community, mainstream Islamic education was based on books written by ulama of the 17th century (Bruinessen 1994; Masud 1996). The *Muhammadiyah*, however, proposed a system of education that taught both religious and secular knowledge. Its founder, Ahmad Dahlan, insisted on the opening of the ijtihad, allowing Muslims to indulge in religious reasoning to meet contemporary challenges. While staying and studying in Mecca in 1903, Dahlan met Rashid Rida, Abduh's most popular successor, and made direct contact with the Islamic reformation (Nasution 1992: 675). This resulted in *Muhammadiyah* promoting the upward mobilization of Muslims so that they could enter into a 'modern' community. Its emergence in pre-independence Indonesia also marked the start of modern non-violent resistance to the Dutch colonizers (Alfian 1989: 347ff).<sup>1</sup>

The *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), currently the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, was initially planned as a base for the cultural resistance of traditional Islam. Its significance comes from its status within the organization of the ulama, i.e. the *Muhammadiyah* ulama, who at the time were steeped in the traditional

values propagated by Wahhabi reform in Saudi Arabia. The NU's emergence was a reaction against such movements which rejected Indonesian Islam for its accommodation of local values. Hence, its main concern was the 'struggle' to preserve religious and local values. However, this did not necessarily make it an anti-modernist organization. Rather, it rejected certain forms of modernization that could hamper religious life in Indonesia, and it opposed the purification reforms initiated by Wahhabism.

### 4.3 FROM REFORMATION (ISLAH) TO TRADITIONALISM (SALAFIYYA)

One of the major consequences of the First World War was the dissolution of empires, including the Ottoman Empire. In this context the issue of the Caliphate was first raised in British India as a politico-religious movement in the post-war years. On one hand, it was rooted in Pan-Islamism, which came to the fore around 1900. On the other it was stimulated by a nationalist movement in India. Turkey's defeat in the First World War seriously endangered the position of the Ottoman Sultan-khalifa. Would his power remain great enough to protect Islam? Would the Holy Places of Islam remain under his sovereignty? In September 1919, amidst widespread rumours around the Treaty of Sèvres, the Muslims of India organized the *khilafa* movement. Khilafa conferences met in several cities in Northern India, and a Central Khilafa Committee made Bombay its headquarters. The khilafa movement started as a communal movement and met with mass approval within the Indian Muslim community. Substantial funds were collected, partly from small contributors, but the movement also gained the support of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi became a member of the Central Khilafa Committee and issued a Khilafa Manifesto in March 1920. These aspects of the movement adversely affected Hindu-Muslim relations, which were so vital to its nationalist character. Gandhi's suspension of non-cooperation in February 1922 constituted a severe blow in this respect. Having borne the brunt of the nationalist battle, Indian Muslims now felt betrayed by the Hindus.

No less deadly blows came from the Turks. The nationalist government in Ankara succeeded in restoring Turkey's position. The khilafatists mistakenly supposed that its leader, Kemal Pasha, was acting on behalf of the Sultan-khalifa. In November 1922 the Sultanate in Turkey was abolished and the khalifa was 'Vaticanized', thus losing all temporal power. The khilafatists declared this status incompatible with the office. When their leaders tried to explain away what had happened, their followers left them. Total collapse of the movement followed in March 1924 with abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate. It evolved into an instrument for the furthering of Muslim, rather than Hindu, interests. However, by 1928, even in this form, the organization had lost all significance (Niemeijer n.d.: 7). Amidst the stress and uncertainty of this transitional period the Muslim World suddenly found its identity, the Caliphate, stripped away.

The decision by the new national Turkish movement to abolish the Caliphate raised the question of whether it was an Islamic institution or merely some type of political system that could be replaced by another without losing Islamic identity. Interestingly, this question emerged in the Sunni world only, since it was there that the Ottoman caliph was the religious symbol of unity. Although irrelevant for Shiis, the issue would surface again, much later, in Iran, in the context of opposition to Westernization and secularization. Indeed, one can readily expect the subsequent chain of events, with political figures like King Fuad in Egypt and Sharief Husayn in Arabia trying to restore the Caliphate, and each seeking nomination as Caliph of all Muslims.

As we have seen, the Egyptian socio-political scene was heading towards the creation of an independent modern democratic Egypt. It opposed the British occupation and, much to the King's dislike, the royal palace. In 1919 the success of revolutionary political power prompted all the parties to produce Egypt's first draft constitution. Eventually approved in 1923, it limited the authority of the King. This process also led to a heated debate on whether or not to include an article stating that Islam was the state religion. Apparently the committee, its Copt members included, decided that the article was harmless. However, as will transpire, it proved highly dangerous. The King of Egypt tried to use al-Azhar to get nominated Caliph of all Muslims. Liberal intellectuals, concerned about the political power this would convey on the King, opposed this move. It was the Egyptian Ali Abd al-Raziq (1888-1966), a follower of Abduh and an Azhari cleric and judge of the sharia court, who defended the abolishment of the Caliphate by proving that there existed no such specific political system capable of being labeled Islamic. He argued for the separation of Mosque and state on grounds inherent to traditional Quranic, prophetic and legal Islamic discourses and narratives. His book entitled 'Islam and the Principles of Political Authority', *Al-Islam wa usul al-Hukm* (Cairo 1925), sparked a major literary-religious scandal in both the Arab and Muslim Worlds, eventually leading to the author's expulsion from al-Azhar. His central argument was that "the Caliphate had no basis either in the Quran, or the Tradition, or the consensus." To prove each part of this argument he went into some detail on the major pieces of evidence normally drawn from the three sources to establish the mandatory status of the Caliphate. He rightly pointed out that "nowhere does the Quran mention the Caliphate in the specific sense of the political institution we know from history... Nor can any convincing proof be extracted from the sayings attributed to the prophet..." In disposing of consensus as the last conceivable sanction, Abd al-Raziq argued that, judging by concrete historical instances, consensus had never played any role in installing the Caliphs, whether in the sense of agreement by the Prophet's companions and their followers, or by the ulama of the Muslim community as a whole (Enayat 1982:62-3).

Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935), Abduh's pupil and editor of *al-Manar*, by contrast, defended the Caliphate as an authentic Islamic system that should be re-established. Failing that, Muslims would return to paganism, jahiliyya (Enayat

1982: 69-79). As previously noted, he unfolded the traditional, *salafi* elements of the reformation movement. If Qasim Amin, Ali Abd al-Raziq and his brother Mustafa, Taha Husayn, Khalid Muhammad Khalid, Amin al-Khuli and others represent the liberal aspect of Abduh's discourse, Rida represented the salafi aspect, preferring to follow the traditional school of thought (Abduh 1961: 211). Since he did not oppose Qasim Amin's liberal ideas while his teacher Abduh was still alive, his salafi attitude became manifest only in 1925, when Ali Abd al-Raziq's book was published (Amarah 1976: 141). Rashid Rida, therefore, played a crucial role in bringing down Abduh's progressive discourse. Gradually he would become one of Wahhabism's great supporters, particularly after it gained control of Hijaz. This is evident from his *al-Wahhabiyyun wal-Hijaz*, a collection of articles published in *al-Manar* and the daily newspaper *al-Ahram*, directly following the ending of the Caliphate.<sup>2</sup> Right up until his death in 1935 he repeatedly explained how and why his judgment of the Wahhabiyya had altered. As a young man influenced by Ottoman propaganda, he had regarded the Wahhabis as fanatical sectarians, but after arriving in Egypt, reading the chronicle of al-Jabarti and works by other authors, and thanks to direct information, he had come to understand that the Wahhabis, and not their opponents, were the defenders of true Islam – even if they tended to exaggerate. Parallel to this, Rida aimed at the rehabilitation of authors like Ibn Taymiya and his school.

Inspired by Rida's salafi discourse, a political response came with the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna (1906-1948). Modern political Islamist movements, which are usually labeled as fundamentalist in Western public discourse, are all offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood and they all denounced Abd al-Raziq and his book (Abu Zayd 1995). The Brotherhood aimed at re-establishing Islamic society in Egypt as an ideal example to be copied everywhere. This re-establishment should be done gradually, by small social, economic and political reforms directed against the Westernization of Egyptian society. As a reactionary movement, the Brotherhood placed re-establishment of the Caliphate on top of the agenda. In other words, it represented the making of the kingdom of the word of God with the Quran as its constitution, and *jihad* (struggle) as the means to make it happen. Like the Ikhwan of Najd, al-Banna simplified the Wahhabi dogma and made it more stringent to function as the ideological base for his powerful popular movement. Its essential message as expressed by the founder himself, can be summarized as follows:

- 1 Islam is an 'order', *nizam*, without equal, because it is revealed by God, who has a vocation to organize all aspects of human life; it is dogma and worship, fatherland and nationality, religion and state, spirituality and action, Quran and sword. This order is valid for all men of all time and all countries;
- 2 Muslims should return to the faith of the 'devout ancestors', *al-salaf*, of the Community, *Ummah*. The salafi faith, according to al-Banna, is that which is devoid of non-Quranic influences brought about in theology and philosophy, and thus impregnated with the Greek spirit. Greek philosophy is foreign to the



primitive Islam it had provoked in the past. In modern times it has encouraged divisions and sectarianism, both obstacles to the unity of all Muslims that is so indispensable in their struggle against foreign imperialists. The believer can know God only through the description, which He himself has given in the Quran, and through the words of His Prophet. Later on, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), the theoretician of militant fundamentalism, elaborated this notion of the 'absolute pure spring' of knowledge, the Quran, and made it the criterion by which any knowledge should be judged and evaluated. In his view, all philosophies, social sciences and political systems of the world are nothing more than different modes of paganism, jahiliyyah, whereas sovereignty is in the hands of man rather than God (Qutb 1982: 14-15; 142-148).

- 3 There is a need for re-islamization of life in Egypt in all fields infected by Western influence. This includes not just social habits, such as dress, greeting, the use of foreign languages, hours of work and rest, the calendar, recreation etc., but also educational, legal and political institutions, not to mention ideas and sentiments. Matters relating to the family and to the position of women are obviously also included. One of the main points in Ikhwan's program was the abolition of the Egyptian legal codes based on European codes, and the creation of legislation based on sharia. During their collaboration with Sadat's regime in the early 1970s, they were able to introduce a change to the second article of the Egyptian constitution whereby 'the principles of sharia would be *the main source* (rather than 'one of the sources') of legislation'. This was considered a preparatory step towards the final goal, i.e., to restore a single state embracing all Muslim nations, with a caliph at its head (Delanoue n.d.: 1069-1070).

#### 4.4 THE ISSUE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

We have seen how Reza Shah tried to create a secular state in Iran and how the *hijab* issue provoked the mullahs into turning against his regime. By 1941 the Allies had forced Reza Shah to resign. His son and successor to the Persian throne tried to continue his father's line. He was also an avid follower of the West – or at least of its technical advancement. However, during the first years of his reign, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's hold on power was precarious at best. Iran's actual leader was the Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, a man whose political fate would shape Iranians' opinion of the USA and of the West in general (Siavoshi 1990). In July 1951, Mossadeq nationalized Iranian oil. Until then, the British had claimed the lion's share of oil revenues, leaving only a paltry amount to the Iranians. Despite universal domestic backing for this move, the British government was oblivious to the demands of the people of Iran; all that mattered were British interests. An appeal by Britain to the International Court at The Hague produced a ruling in Iran's favor. Mohammed Mossadeq returned to Tehran in triumph, at the height of his power the darling of the masses.

Meanwhile, the British would not accept eviction so easily – hardly surprising since this was not a purely Iranian issue. The British controlled 80 per cent of the oil fields around the Persian Gulf and there was a risk of other nations following Iran’s lead. With this in mind they recruited support among the ruling family and members of parliament. When Mossadeq realized he was losing support, he stepped down from office in a dramatic gesture on 16 July 1952. The strategy worked: people rioted in the streets, chanting ‘Death or Mossadeq’. A large number were killed and anarchy loomed. The Shah was forced to ask Mossadeq to return to office. Faced with a new defeat, the British started an economic blockade and boycott of all Iranian oil products, persuading their allies – and even the Soviets – to join in. The idea was to bring Mossadeq to his knees with an economic crisis. Mossadeq, however, asked his fellow countrymen for money – and received it in abundance. He issued public loans and successfully moved to develop the Iranian economy by reducing dependence on oil and encouraging growth in other economic sectors. With their standard of living improving, so did the Iranians’ self-esteem. The British-Iranian dispute was the predominant political topic around the world between 1951 and 1953; a people’s tribune from a Third World country was challenging a global power. America’s *Time* Magazine made Mossadegh its ‘Man of the Year’ for 1952. Indeed, his growing popularity outside Iran presented an ever-greater problem for the British. Prime Minister Winston Churchill openly stated his intention of ‘getting rid’ of Mossadeq and sought American assistance to this end. On 18 August 1953, the CIA (American secret service) staged a coup that deposed Mossadeq, who was subsequently tried by court martial. Thereafter, the US controlled 40 per cent of Iran’s oilfields with the rest split among Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Iran.

The events of 1951 to 1953 would shape the Iranian mindset, not merely because of the humiliation or because the people’s tribune Mossadeq had been rendered powerless, but also because of its direct consequences: the Shah, who had gone to Rome to escape Mossadeq, was restored to the Peacock Throne by the USA. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi – ‘our policeman in the Gulf’, as American president Jimmy Carter called him in the 1970s – regained power by brute force, suppressing all opposition. The fact that the US supported this man, that he was allowed to do as he pleased, that he violated human rights, oppressed and exploited his people, was not easily forgiven. The coup against Mossadeq and its outcome made criticism of the USA one of the corner stones of the Islamic Revolution. It became a uniting force for all opposition groupings, whether middle class, leftist, or Islamist. When the people took to the streets in the 1978 revolution, they were also protesting against US policy. The revolution, and hence theocracy, might never come about had the Americans followed a different policy-line on Iran. As it was, the revolution took on a decidedly anti-American line whereby Iranians sought to end unjust governance that cared nothing for human rights or justice – but that enjoyed US support. The most popular song of the revolution was based on a saying by the Prophet Muhammad: “Exalted Prophet Muhammad, you have said that a country cannot exist without justice.” A simple sentence, one of the five Shia dogmas and thus known to every Shiite. This may explain why the

clergy were able to take the lead in the revolutionary movement. “The Shah is the Yazid of our times, the unjust ruler” said Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1989). Every Shiite knew and understood that Yazid had forced the Shia’s third Imam Husayn from power and killed him. ‘*Shah bayad beravad*,’ the Shah has to go, was one of Khomeini’s uncompromising demands.

Early on, Khomeini had been one of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s harshest critics, above all denouncing his new ‘non-Islamic’ laws and an increasingly Westernized – and in Khomeini’s view, vicious – lifestyle (Falaturi 1980: 51-75). But, above all, land reform started by the Shah’s government, plans to allow female suffrage, and US-friendly foreign policy – leading, among other things, to close diplomatic ties with Israel – were anathema to Khomeini (Lambton 1969: 112ff; Keddie 1981: 160; Riesebrodt 1990: 142; Digard 1996: 126). In 1963, after numerous warnings, Khomeini made another harshly critical speech attacking the Shah. This sparked vociferous public protests, and he was sent into exile (Botschaft Islamischen Republik Iran 1980: 5).<sup>3</sup>

The man who would probably become the best-known critic of Iran’s dependence on the West was one of many who were deeply impressed by Khomeini. In his seminal essay *Gharbzadegi*, Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969) described the feelings of many Iranian intellectuals when he wrote that Iranian society was ‘beaten by the West’, *gharbzade*. For Iranian intellectuals, as shown by Mehrzad Boroujerdi, Westernization was the decisive issue (Boroujerdi 1996). The title of Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s essay *Gharbzadegi* (translated into English as ‘*westoxication*’, ‘*west-struckness*’, or ‘*occidentosis*’) was the leading slogan in Iran during the 1960s (Boroujerdi 1992: 30-56; 53). The slogan of being ‘beaten by the West’ originated from the philosopher Ahmad Fardid (1912-1994) the follower of a radically anti-Western school of thought, whose ideas were popularized by Al-e Ahmad. Unlike Fardid, he considered Westernization much more a political than a philosophical problem. His criticism of the West was based on his opposition to the Shah and his supporters in the West. Like other intellectuals after him, Al-e Ahmad came from a religious family but had turned away from Islam as a young man. Later in life, he became convinced that Islam was the only antidote to Western hegemony since it was the constituent of Iranians’ – as opposed to Western – identity.

All in all, one has to accept Said Amir Arjomand’s view that the clergy were actually far less obsessed with the issue of the West and/or Westernization than were Iran’s intellectuals. As he puts it: “It should be pointed out that the clerical ideologues were not particularly tormented by ambivalence towards the West and were much more securely grounded in the Shi’i tradition they wanted to save” (Arjomand 2002: 719-731; 721). The West is interested only in its own profit and tries to subjugate the Islamic world by installing puppet rulers. This was also the central issue for sociologist Ali Shariati (1933-1977), who would become the revolution’s ideological mastermind. In the late 1950s, he had studied in France, where he met Frantz Fanon and translated his celebrated book *Les Damnés de la*

*terre* into Persian. Like Fanon, Shariati, was strongly influenced by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. He supported the Algerian independence movement and published a magazine in Persian called *Free Iran*, which gave Iranian students a platform for protest. He raised his voice against French colonialism in Algeria and developed his own ideas on whether Western ideologies such as Marxism could be useful to the Third World (Arjomand 2002: 719-731; Keddie 1981: 215ff; Dabashi 1993: 102; Rahnama 1998). It was his criticism of the West and attempts to find an own, third way, that would make Shariati the revolution's leading ideologue (Abrahamian 1982: 24-28; Bayat-Philipp 1980: 155-168). While intellectuals in many countries of the Arab world turned to socialism, Shariati regarded socialists and capitalists as equally bad.

In essence, Shariati's interpretation is that contemporary Muslim societies need to recover their own Islamic identity in their struggle for liberation from internal corruption and stagnation, Western economic domination and cultural influence. This reassertion of identity is essential in that ideological dependency only prolongs material dependency. Islam contains all the theoretical qualifications needed for a radical doctrine, while at the same time offering a sense of spiritual salvation that is non-existent in modern materialist ideologies. Shariati wanted Islamic countries to 'return to their roots' (Shariati 1980a and 1980b). He called this the Third Way, the way between communism and capitalism. He claimed that for this to be possible, Islam would have to regain its original, revolutionary strength. Above all, he accused the clerics of having turned the Shia into an old wives' religion. While he himself would never see the Islamic revolution, his ideological interpretation of Islam surely laid the groundwork for the Islamic movement's revolutionary vanguard.

As in Iran, the West had a substantial presence in Pakistan, which gained independence on 14 August 1947 as the home of Indian Muslims. Back in 1928, the philosopher and poet Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938) had delivered a series of six lectures at Indian universities, dealing with the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam. This was a very personal attempt at reconciling Muslim theology with European philosophy and science. Around this time Iqbal had started cooperating with the Muslim League, which was formed in 1906. He presented his famous statement on the need to form a separate Muslim state in Northwest India at their annual session in Allahabad in 1930. Its creation was seen as the logical outcome of the so-called two-nation theory, which argued that Indian Muslims (only around one-fifth of the total population of India) formed a distinct nation and had the right to a separate state on independence. However, the origins of Pakistan are generally seen as linked to the impact of British *Raj* (rule in India) on the relationship between the various communities that made up the population of the subcontinent.

Despite the usually cooperative relationship between the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, the outbreak of the Second World War brought a turning point. The leader of the League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) made very

sure that the British recognized his organization as representative of Muslim aspirations. Moreover, in the face of the Congress' Party's opposition to the way India was being dragged into the war, the Muslim League under Jinnah became an alternative organization through which to legitimize the war effort. Against this background, with increasing numbers listening to its message, the League issued its demand for a separate Muslim state or states in Lahore in March 1940. The precise thrust of this demand was left deliberately vague to keep options open. The party's main task was to persuade its co-religionists in the Muslim majority provinces that if Congress held central power, provincial autonomy would not protect their position. It gradually won over local landowning and religious elites, who also had considerable political influence. This success was reflected in striking gains made in the 1946 elections, where the League won an overwhelming majority of Muslim seats. Deadlock in negotiations with Congress, added to growing communal tension, resulted in a British plan to partition India. This included splitting the Punjab and Bengal, which the League had expected to receive in full. Though dissatisfied with the 'truncated' and 'moth-eaten' state that was offered, Jinnah's alternative would be to concede all power completely to Congress. The Muslim League eventually accepted the partition formula in the summer of 1947 (Ansari : 241ff).

In Indonesia, the organizations Muhammadiyah and NU stressed the role of education and knowledge. They thus played an important role in mainstreaming cultural Islam, based as it is on the rich heritage of the principles of Islamic civilization. This contrasts with ritual Islam which, in Indonesia, is limited to sharia and questions of *halal* (what is allowed) and *haram* (what is forbidden). In the early post-independence period after 1945, scholars of both organizations reached a 'solution' to the debate on whether Indonesia should or should not be an Islamic state. This involved the *Pancasila* or five 'pillars' of state ideology, which in turn succeeded in mainstreaming a moderate Islam in Indonesia. Put another way, the Muhammadiyah and NU both succeeded in playing a pivotal role in preserving cultural Islamic values, while insisting that Pancasila is the final form of state ideology for Indonesia. Both organizations would also contribute to the Islamic discourse in Indonesia on current issues such as human rights, the status of women and democratization.

The theme of a religious state not only emerged with the establishment of Pakistan, but also with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. As a Jewish state, or state for the Jews, its existence could be seen as a living state model – at least by the Arabs. Their long litany of defeats in 1948, 1956, 1976, 1982 (which dwarfed the victory over Israel in 1973), the ongoing, unsolved conflict over the status of Palestine in the wake of the Oslo agreements and Arab recognition of the state of Israel will not be discussed here. However, it is worth remembering that Israel's existence as a religious state continues to legitimize the radical Islamists' discourse; they can manipulate popular imagination towards support for the establishment of an Islamic state. What is also worth mentioning is that to many Muslims it was highly puzzling that secular Europe backed the establishment of

two religious states in one and the same year, one for Muslims and the other for Jews. This may well explain why the Muslim Brotherhood became more politically oriented after the Second World War.

#### 4.5 POLITICIZATION OF THE QURAN

Political concern was present in the exegesis of both Abduh and Ahmad Khan. It would thus be inappropriate to suggest that 'politically oriented' exegesis started with Abu Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979), the Pakistani author, journalist, interpreter of the Quran, ideologue and political activist. However, it was indeed al-Mawdudi who gave the movements of political Islam the Quranic grounding that would be copied by Sayyid Qutb. He, more than anyone else, shaped and influenced the further development of 'orthodox fundamentalism', also known as 'Islamism' (Ahmad 1967: 208-36; Tibi 2000: 42; Ramadan 1998; Slomp 2003: 239). The leaders of the Shiite revolution in Iran in 1979 cited the publications of their Egyptian Sunni 'Brethren' Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, together with the Pakistani Mawdudi, as their main sources of inspiration for shaping an Islamic state.

Self evidently, it was in the Indian context, under British occupation, that the relationship between Muslims and Hindus started to deteriorate. Mawdudi started his comprehensive study of the doctrine of jihad in the mid-1920s, in response to Hindu accusations that Islam was spread by the sword, following the assassination of a non-Muslim leader by a Muslim. This work, which was first serialized and then published under the title *al-jihad fi l-Islam*, presented the basic elements of Mawdudi's later thought. It was in 1932 that he began to formulate the ideology of political Islam, in the monthly journal *Tarjuman al-Quran*, the main vehicle for his ideas for the rest of his life. He set forth the objectives of his intellectual mission as follows:

"The plan of action I had in mind was that I should first break the hold which Western culture and ideas had come to acquire over the Muslim intelligentsia, and to instill into them the fact that Islam has a code of life of its own, its own culture, its own political and economic systems and a philosophy and an educational system which are all superior to anything that Western civilization could offer. I wanted to rid them of the wrong notion that they needed to borrow from others in the matter of culture and civilization" (Robinson n.d.: 872ff).

According to this ideology, where the West and Islam stand in dichotomy, complex human societies take on one of only two kinds: they are either 'Islamic' or 'Jahili'. In Mawdudi's Islamic view, as long as the universe is an 'organized state' and a 'totalitarian system,' in which all powers are vested in Allah, the only ruler, the state of Islam or the Islamic State should represent the earthly manifestation of the cosmos.

If both Abduh and Ahmad Khan tried, in different ways, to contextualize the Quran to open up its meaning by way of allegory and metaphor, Mawdudi also extended the literal meaning of the Quran to address the modern world. For example, the verses of chapter 5:42-50, now well known as the verses of *hakimiyya* (the absolute sovereignty of God), which addressed the people who rejected Islam during the time of the Prophet, were taken by Mawdudi to be addressing modern Muslims. Their meaning was not only to apply the rules prescribed by God but to establish a theocratic state.

In a detailed study of Mawdudi's book on jihad, Slomp rightly observes that his hermeneutics turns specific decisions taken in certain historical moments into eternal divine law. Given its importance, I shall quote it in full:

“On the basis of Mawdudi's own arguments and examples the reader concludes, that all statements on jihad in the Quran, Hadith and early Islamic history were established in actual situations, and that they were formulated on the basis of decisions concerning, for example, slaves, spoils of war, prisoners, the hypocrites, traitors, treatment of enemies, and minorities as part of a historical process. To declare the result of this process sacrosanct, as Mawdudi does, reveals that the Achilles heel of this Islamism is its way of dealing with history. For all the events in the life of the Prophet and his Companions are given the same authority as revelation. Added to this, Mawdudi's interpretation of this 'revelation *cum* history' is presented as authoritative for Islam in all eras” (Slomp 2003: 255).

#### 4.6 THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE: THE QURAN AS A LITERARY TEXT

Ali Abd al-Raziq's book addressed the political theory of Islam and concluded that in the absence of such a theory, Muslims have the possibility of choice. Taha Husayn (1889-1973), the shaykh who promptly left al-Azhar and joined the newly established National University, had another task to fulfill along the same lines as Abduh's thinking. The idea emphasized in Abduh's exegesis was that the Quran basically reflects the mentality of the pagan, 7th century Arabs. This notion was subsequently developed by Taha Husayn, Amin al-Khuli and Ahmad Khalafalla (all of whom were affiliated with the National University), until it reached a fundamental break with the traditional and long established concept of the nature of the Quran as the word of God, on one hand, and as a text on the other. It may be significant here to mention the hesitation by Abduh in his theological treatise *Risalat al-Tawhid* in adopting the rational Mutazili concept of the Quran as created. Abduh's choice was unclear; the first edition of his book (1897) adopted the Mutazi's doctrine, but in the second edition, published in *al-Manar*, he had switched to the Asharite's distinction between the 'Eternal' aspect of God's word and its created manifestation in our human act of 'recitation'. It is unclear whether this alteration reveals that Abduh changed his mind or whether the changes were made by Rashid Rida (Abduh 1977: 13 and 52).

Taha Husayn emphasized the peculiar and unique aesthetic dimension of the Quranic style, namely its *ijaz* (inimitability), by pointing to the literary nature that makes the Quran an independent literary genre in itself (Husayn 1995:20-6). Being an historian and critic of literature par excellence, he claimed that the Quran is neither poetry nor prose; it is, quite simply, the Quran. Secondly, Husayn considered the Quranic story of the arrival in Mecca of Abraham, his wife Hagar, and his son Ishmael, to be an oral narrative dating from long before the revelation of the Quran. This story, he said, was designed to ease tension between the pagan Arabs, the original inhabitants of Yathrib, and the Arab Jewish tribes who had settled in the city. Not only did the Quran use this story to locate Islam in the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but also to establish its priority as monotheistic religion. Husayn's point was to emphasize that this story should not be taken to convey any historical reality which dictated that assumptions on the linguistic situation in the Arabian Peninsula (Husayn 1995: 33-5). Needless to say, this advancing of Abduh's thesis was significantly influenced by Husayn's involvement in the orientalist's discourse on the narrative of the Quran and its relation to the Biblical narrative (Paret n.d.: 980-1).<sup>4</sup> Although this was only one point in his line of argument on the authenticity of the entire body of pre-Islamic poetry, it was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Husayn's book sparked a heated controversy, despite the fact that he considered the Quran as the most reliable and authentic source for understanding pre-Islamic social and religious life. The dispute eventually reached Egypt's parliament, together with allegations that it insulted Islam. Prior to being sent for trial, Husayn was questioned by the Public Prosecutor, who declared him innocent of any criminal intention against Islam.<sup>5</sup> Even so, he had to endure the removal of the specific passage for the second, enlarged edition of the book, which appeared under a new title *Fi l-Adab al-Jahili*.

It needs to be borne in mind here that the writings of Taha Husayn were part of an overall innovative intellectual movement associated with the newly established National University. The writings of Ahmad Amin (1886-1954) on the history of Islamic civilization, in his massive tome *Yawm l-Islam*, is a further example of this new trend of scholarship (Amin 1928). Reviewing the history of Islam and the life of the Prophet (*sirah*) from a critical perspective was among the essential concerns of this new movement, which was clearly influenced by the 19th century's fascination for history. It also influenced the Christian biographical approach to the Prophet. According to some Muslims, the biographies of the Prophet written by Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956) and Taha Husayn were "one of the reasons behind the tremendous changes in the level of discussion about the Prophet's life" (Amin 1937; Amin 1953). In this view, the discussion "shifted significantly from confrontation to dialogue" (Buaben 1996: 317). This shift is evident from a comparison between the hostile 18th- and 19th-century orientalist discourse about Muhammad and his life, and its less biased 20th-century versions. Taha Husayn's extensive written oeuvre on the early history of Islam included books such as *Ala Hamish Sirah* (1943), *al-Fitnah l-Kubra* (1974) and later *al-Shaykhan*.



The excommunication of Ali Abd al-Raziq as an alim by al-Azahr's inquisition committee, and the trial of Taha Husayn, illustrate the inflammatory political and social conflicts in Egypt. These occurred in almost every Muslim country, reflecting the tension between modernity and adherence to traditional Islamic values.

The winds of *tajdid* (renaissance) were permeating Egyptian life when Amin al-Khuli (1895-1966) started his career as professor at the Cairo University's faculty of letters. He applied the method of *tajdid* to the study of language (*nahw*), rhetoric (*balaghah*), Quranic interpretation (*tafsir*) and literature (*al-adab*) (al-Khuli 1961). Determining which of these four fields of scholarship presents the ideal model of al-Khuli's methodology of *tajdid* is no simple task. However, he took the view – backed by history – that innovation in arts and literature is the start of a renaissance (al-Khuli 1961: 219). Such innovation is vital in developing the intellectual and aesthetic awareness of the people of Egypt towards achieving a real and comprehensive national renaissance (al-Khuli 1961: 185; 195; 265). New and inspiring literature needs new literary methodology to elucidate its structure and explain its functioning. This entails a fresh study of language and rhetoric and hence the necessity of *tajdid* in both disciplines. As long as a renaissance and *tajdid* imply moving and awakening, the starting point should be a thorough and intensive study of the old tradition, in every field of knowledge. Al-Khuli's motto was: "the first step for any real innovation is to fully analyze tradition" (*awwalu tajdid qatlu l-qadimi bahthan*) (al-Khuli 1961: 82; 128; 180). Otherwise, the result will be loss rather than reconstruction (*tabdid la tajdid*) (al-Khuli 1961: 143). If in the past the study of literature, language and rhetoric served religious purposes, this should now change (al-Khuli 1961: 188).

Al-Khuli did not see the literary study of the Quran as a matter of choice. He made the point that acceptance of the Quran, and hence of Islam by the Arabs was based on recognizing its absolute supremacy to any human text. In other words, the Arabs accepted Islam on the basis of evaluating the Quran as a literary text (al-Khuli 1961: 97-8; 124-5). This means that the literary method should supersede any other approach, be it religio-theological, philosophical, ethical, mystical or judicial (Jansen 1974: 65-7). At this point, it is important to recall that 'romanticism', or more accurately its Arabic version, dominated literary theory at that time (al-Bahrawi 1993).<sup>6</sup> Working along this theory, al-Khuli developed the connection between the study of language, rhetoric and literature on one hand, and *tafsir* al-Quran on the other. If the classical theory of *ijaz* was based on the classical notion of *balaghah*, this notion should be replaced by the modern theory of *balaghah* which establishes a linkage with literary criticism. This link demands another connection to psychology, a relationship parallel to that between literary criticism and aesthetics (al-Khuli 1961: 144, 175, 182 and 189). The study of *balaghah* should then focus on the study of the literary style and its emotional impact on the recipient/reader (al-Khuli 1961: 185). Its objective should be to develop the aesthetic awareness of both the author and the reader; it should be renamed as *fann al-qawl* (the art of discourse). Only the literary approach to the Quran, through the modern theory of literature, could uncover

its *ijaz*, which is basically expressive and emotionally provocative (*ijaz nafsi*) (al-Khuli 1961: 203-4).

Ahmad Khalafallah (1916-1998) and Shukri Ayyad (1921-1999), two disciples from his group of students, as well as his wife Aisha Abd al-Rahman (known as *Bint al-Shati*) (1913-1998), would apply Khuli's literary method in Quranic studies and become famous. And Sayyid Qutb, the celebrated ideologist of recent Islamic fundamentalism, began his writings about the Quran by applying a similar, though rather more impressionistic literary method. This is clear from his *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi l-Quran* and *Mashahid l-Qiyamah fi l-Quran*, and the *Fi Zilal l-Quran* commentary. Khalafallah's masters thesis, *Jadal al-Quran* or the 'Polemics of the Quran', which was supervised by al-Khuli, automatically applied the principles of the literary method suggested in al-Khuli's commentary on the tafsir article in the Arabic translation of the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. To some extent, Khalafallah's Ph.D. thesis *al-Fann al-Qasasi fi l-Quran al-Karim* (The Art of Narrative in the Quran) further developed the method proposed by al-Khuli, although it followed the methodological steps suggested by his professor. The first step was to collect the Quranic stories, the second to rearrange these stories in chronological order (*tartib al-nuzul*). This should enable analysis according to their original context, i.e., the social environment, the emotional state of the Prophet, and the development of the Islamic message (Khalafallah 1972: 14). Such contextualization, Khalafallah affirms, would help uncover the original semantic level of the Quranic narration, the level also understood by the Arabs at the time of revelation (Khalafallah 1972: 15). It is worth noting here that Khalafallah does not apply the thematic study by compiling the fragments of the stories mentioned in various *suras*. Indeed, he considers every piece of narrative to be an independent story in itself. For example, the story of Moses is not one single story. Each of the stories where Moses is mentioned represents a narrative unit to be studied in its own right. A thematic analysis would violate the contextual dimension emphasized by Khalafallah.

It seems that Khalafallah was very preoccupied with what might happen to him personally, as a result of his approach. He stressed how difficult it was to accomplish his thesis, and how he put himself in jeopardy. However, he insisted that academic and scientific knowledge required him to take such risks (Khalafallah 1972: 17). He also referred to the difficulties experienced by commentators on the Quran, particularly the theologians (*al-mutakalimun*). These problems resulted either from imposing pre-established ideology on the Quran or from seeking to prove the historical authenticity of its narration. In both cases the textual meaning of the Quran is ignored (Khalafallah 1972: 2-5). On the other hand, the Orientalists' discourse on the Quran questions its historical authenticity on the grounds that its stories contradict, or at least fail to comply with historical facts (Khalafallah 1972: 6). Studying the Quranic stories as literary narrative – as suggested by the literary approach – makes historical authenticity either irrelevant or rather the wrong question to ask. Quoting some remarks from classical sources including al-Qadu Abd al-Jabbar, al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi, as well as

modern sources such as Abduh, Khalafallah emphasized that the stories of the Quran are allegories, *amthal*, not intended to convey historical fact. As *amthal* they belong to the category of *mutashabihat* or the ambiguous. The fact that classical commentators seek to explain their ambiguity overloads their books with data borrowed from previous Judeo-Christian traditions, *israiliyyat* in Arabic. In contrast, the literary approach requires no such data, since it differentiates between narrative structure, *jism al-qissah*, and the meaning of the story. This differentiation is based on both classical and modern explanations. The classical explanation deals with the stories as *amthal*, and in the structure of *amthal* it differentiates between the meaning, *al-mana*, and its implication, *luzum*, which are not necessarily identical (Khalafallah 1972: 56).<sup>7</sup> The modern explanation is taken from the literary narrative dealing with certain historical characters or historical incidents; an example is the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra, who appears in the narratives of Shakespeare, Shaw, Ahmad Shawqi and Sir Walter Scott (Khalafallah 1972: 57). The body of such stories may appear historical, but their meaning or message does not necessarily reflect history. Unlike the historian, the writer is entitled to poetic license in using history for literary composition.

In addition to the theoretical evidence set out above, we also have Quranic evidence proving the need to apply the literary approach. First, the Quran deliberately does not mention either the time or location of historical incidents in its stories, and it also omits some characters. Second, in dealing with several historical stories the Quran selects some events and leaves out others. Third, it changes the chronological order of events. Fourth, the Quran occasionally switches the characters performing given actions. Fifth, when the story is repeated in another chapter of the Quran, a character's dialogue may be different from that spoken in a previous context. Sixth, the Quran occasionally chronologically adds later incidents to the narrative. All this clearly indicates that the Quran exercises the same freedom as do literary stories when dealing with history (Khalafallah 1972: 60-3).

Apparently the major dilemma confronting Khalafallah and his professor was the state of schizophrenia into which the Muslim state of mind became entrapped when dealing with the modernization of Muslim societies' socio-political structures. This dilemma is not limited to historical authenticity; it also refers to the future of Islamic thought. It is remarkable that Khalafallah invariably used the phrase Islamic reason, *al-aql al-Islami*, in dealing with problems concerning the comprehension of the Quran. For example, he explains how *al-aql al-Islami*, being so concerned with the historical authenticity, is unable to recognize the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the Quranic stories. *Al-aql al-Islami* is also unable to explain why the story is repeated, or why the details differ when it is repeated (Khalafallah 1972: 37-40). More problematic are the apparent contradictions of historical and scientific knowledge in the Quranic stories (Khalafallah 1972: 40-1). Al-Khuli, in his introduction to the second edition of *al-Fann al-Qasasi* (Cairo 1957), mentions the case of Taha Husayn. He states very clearly that the literary approach to the Quran is the only possible way of saving Muslim intellectuals from schizophrenia. Muslims can truly

believe in Islam and the holy Quran without necessarily believing that the stories mentioned in the Quran are historically authentic (al-Khuli 1957). In such references, al-Khuli alludes to other cases reflecting a similar state of mind. As we have seen, there were also noted attacks against the writings of Qasim Amin, Ali Abd al-Raziq and Taha Husayn.

The literary approach is generally supposed to offer a solution. It frees the Muslim mentality from a position of stagnation. "The Quran is neither a book of science, nor of history, nor of political theory", is what the discourse of *tajdid* seeks to establish. The Quran is a spiritual and ethical book of guidance, in which the stories are used to fulfill this purpose. In other words, the Quranic stories are literary narratives employed to serve ethical, spiritual and religious purposes. It is, therefore, a fatal methodological error to deal with the narrative of the Quran as purely historical facts (al-Khuli 1957).

On 13 October 1947, after more than seven months of dispute in both press and parliament, the university decided not to accept Khalafallah's dissertation, and he was transferred to another job outside teaching. It also decided that his supervisor, al-Khuli, should no longer be allowed to teach or supervise Quranic Studies. This decision was based on the fact that al-Khuli had held the chair of Egyptian Literature since his appointment on 6 October 1946. Hence, he was not supposed to deal with Quranic studies (Safan 1994: 38).<sup>8</sup> All of al-Khuli's students of Quranic Studies were transferred to other supervisors. He himself continued as a university professor but was confined to teaching Arabic grammar, rhetoric and literature. A few years later, in 1954, al-Khuli would be among a group of about 40 university professors who were transferred to jobs outside teaching. Ironically enough, this decision was made by the new military regime of the Free Officers Movement (*Harakat Dubbat al-Ahrar*), supposedly to cleanse the university of corruption.

It took some 30 years before Ayyad, Al-Khuli's other student, decided to publish his masters dissertation *Yawm Din wa l-Hisab fi l-Quran* (the Day of Judgment in the Quran), a work he had accomplished under al-Khuli's supervision around the same period as Khalafallah's thesis. In its introduction he explained his reluctance to publish the dissertation earlier, citing academic difficulties due to misunderstandings by the public and narrow-minded reactions to the literary approach to the Quran during the 1940s. He argued that, at the time, only very few readers were able to cope with the method of employing linguistics and literary criticism enriched with a knowledge of both sociology and psychology. While these difficulties had discouraged him from publicizing his thesis, the encouragement of colleagues and friends later convinced him that the time was right to publish it as a book (Ayyad 1980: 5). What Ayyad did not mention is that after he had finished his masters degree, he had to face the consequences of the heated debate around Khalafallah's thesis. He could either choose to go ahead with Quranic studies under the supervision of another professor, or continue studying with Amin al-Khuli, which would take him outside the discipline of

Quranic studies. Like most of al-Khuli's students, Ayyad was so attached to his professor that he preferred the second option.<sup>9</sup> With all these difficulties and threats of persecution, Quranic Studies based on the principles of the literary approach continued to flourish outside academia. Possibly the most important result of this would be the continuation of the principle of re-contextualization.

#### 4.7 CASE 1: CULTURAL ISLAM IN INDONESIA: DEMOCRACY, FREETHINKING AND HUMAN RIGHTS

It was Nurcholis Madjid (1939-2005) who initiated the theological renewal movement in Indonesia along the lines of Afghani and Abduh, attributing the decadence of Islamic thought to the failure of Muslims properly to understand Islam. He offered the straightforward observation that Indonesian Muslims suffered from a stagnation of religious thinking and had lost the 'psychological striking force' in their struggle (Madjid 1970: 1-12). As Madjid observed, an important indicator of this deficiency in Indonesian Islam was the inability of the vast majority of Indonesian Muslims to differentiate between transcendental and temporal values. He also pointed out that the hierarchy of values is often the reverse; transcendental values are conceived to be temporal and vice versa. Everything is likely to be perceived as transcendental and, therefore, without exception, valued as divine. The result of this mode of religiosity is that "Islam is viewed as equal in value to tradition; and becoming Islamic is comparable to being traditionalist" (Madjid 1970: 4). In responding to such problems, Madjid focused on three interrelated intellectual stages, 1. secularization, 2. intellectual freedom, and 3. progress and an attitude of open-mindedness. He identified secularization as a process rather than as a worldview or a belief system. This involved transforming beliefs and practices in two directions; the first is downward, involving the secularization of something that was previously regarded as sacred. The second is upward, involving the sanctification of something truly transcendent, eternal and sacred (Madjid 1985: 165-170). This understanding of secularization aims at renewing the majority of Muslim understanding of the Islamic tradition, which is interpreted as being as sacred as the religious sources. Islamic literature used in the Pesantrens (the Islamic boarding schools that formed the oldest Islamic education system in Indonesia) is mainly understood to be sacred. That in turn leads to stagnation. Madjid feels it necessary to restore the original status to this literary tradition. The third step involves creating the intellectual freedom to campaign against any restriction by human authorities. Since the closed gate of *ijtihad* is out of date, it should be opened through intellectual freedom. This step towards progress and open-mindedness refers to the psychological attitude that emerges from reopening the gate of *ijtihad*.

As a graduate of Chicago University, where he became deeply familiar with the intellectual tradition of the west, Madjid developed into a rational freethinker with ideas radically different from those of other Indonesian religious scholars. Given that the political Islam of Indonesia's two main organizations clashed with the authoritarianism of Suharto's New Order, Madjid believed that only the

cultural approach would present an appropriate understanding of Islam to the Indonesian community (Syamsudin 1995: 47-68). Under Suharto's regime, political Islam would always be pushed into a marginal position and would not be able to provide the Muslim community with a sufficient impetus to raise living standards. Hence, against a background of poverty, lack of education and a rigid understanding of Islam, Madjid promoted a renewal (tajdid) of Islamic thought via cultural Islam.

Abdurrahman Wahid (b. 1940), the former chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama, is another propagator of cultural Islam, installing it in the pesantrens. Apart from addressing pesantren issues, his writings basically deal with the complex issues involved in responding to the challenges of modernity. Wahid's understanding of Islam is directed towards humanitarianism. Throughout his articles in the Indonesian media he expresses a conviction that the true expression of Islam is only achieved when priority is given to the spirit of law, the inner truth. This conviction is closely connected with two other major themes in Wahid's thought: a profound rationality and a conviction that with ongoing rational endeavor, Islam is more than able to meet the challenges of modernity. Moreover, Wahid is convinced that the fundamental humanitarian concern of Islam, its teachings on tolerance and concern for social harmony, all show that Muslims should not fear the plural nature of modern society but rather respond to it positively (Wahid 1979: 52).

In Indonesia, the rural community, as the basis for pesantren, has to face the problem of modernity and social change. Unlike Madjid, who uses the catchword 'renewal', Wahid adopts the word 'dynamization' in campaigning for change in the pesantren community. This entails two processes: the revitalization of available positive values, and the replacement of certain imperfect values with perfect ones (Wahid 1979: 54-55). Wahid was also able to campaign for democratization by using the concept of 'cultural Islam'. He founded the Forum Demokrasi (Forum for Democracy) in the early 1990s, in collaboration with the military and the ruling party, the *Golongan Karya*. This led to a number of obscure distinctions between the so-called democratic and dictatorial state. Although the country is formally a democracy, the Indonesian military is still a major power in politics. The struggle for democratization initiated by Wahid and others cannot be isolated from the interpretation of religious texts. As Wahid argued, there exists no 'distance' between Islam and democracy. Democratization is essentially an ongoing process that leads to a better society; it is paralleled by an innovative religion, *din al-islah* (Wahid 1999: 87-88).

Wahid's ideas also include the issue of human rights. This is because the struggle for democratization is also a struggle for respect for human rights. Based on his knowledge of many religious texts, Wahid concludes that there are three aspects of human dignity, namely, 1. individual dignity, *karama fardiyya*, 2. collective dignity, *karama ijtimaiyya*, and 3. political dignity, *karama siyasiyya* (Wahid 1983: 94). Islam provides the right to human life in a physical as well as a mental

sense, and also guarantees equality among the races, as well as their rights to express themselves politically.

Other Indonesian scholars, among them Nurcholis Madjid and Syafii Maarif, now the chair of the Muhammadiyah, support Wahid's reading. Maarif believes that elements of democracy are explicitly embodied in the principles of Islamic teaching, such as justice, *adalah*, egalitarianism, *musawah*, 'agreement on differences', shura and respect for pluralism. Among the sources for an understanding of the principle of justice are the verses of the Quran in 4:135 and 5:8. The second verse, which is an appellative, namely, "be just: that is next to piety", is the spirit of justice from an Islamic perspective. Some Indonesian Muslim thinkers consider this to be a basis for the principle of democracy. The duty of helping the needy is seen as an example of dispensing social justice. Meanwhile, the principle of egalitarianism in Islam, *musawah*, is believed to be based on 49:13.

In the Indonesian context, where Muslims as the largest religious group have a relatively long history of peaceful coexistence with Protestants, Roman Catholics, Hindus and Buddhists, Muslim scholars attach great importance to religious pluralism as a pillar of democracy. As a result, Islam's development in Indonesia is quite different from that of other Muslim or even Islamic countries. Scholars such as Nurcholis Madjid and others use 30:22 to argue that differences among humankind are the starting point for positive competition. In their view, the Quran expresses that pluralism must be taken for granted (Madjid 1992: 58). It provides for a plausible hermeneutic effort in which the religious text is used as a basis for interpreting the norm of modern democracy.

The ideas and observations of Ahmad Wahib (1942-1974) are equally important for the discourse on Islamic renewal. His 1981 publication *Pergolakan Pemikiran Islam: Catatan Harian Ahmad Wahib* (the Dynamics of Islamic Thought: the Diary of Ahmad Wahib) shows three main concepts of renewal. The first one is freedom of thought. For Wahib, freethinking is not just a right but also a duty. An Islam that limits freedom is not the Islam he wants to embrace: "...until now I keep thinking that God does not restrict my freedom; He will be proud of my insistence on raising questions about Him. I believe that God is fresh and alive; He does not want to be frozen" (Wahib 1981: 45; Barton 1995: 35). As a free-thinker par excellence, he argues that modernity is a necessity that cannot be avoided. Modernity as a social process requires a positive response, and one that cannot do without religious renewal. He sees in the personality of the Prophet Muhammad a model of renewal, reform and innovation, since the essence of the Prophet's 'management' lies in the way he changed the social and intellectual world of his time. Wahib thus asks: "what is the Prophet's contribution to the modernization of thinking? Muhammad succeeded in eradicating a feudal mentality and constructing a democratic attitude, all people have the same potential; they have to rely on themselves and not necessarily be dependent on the elite (Wahib 1981: 117-118; Barton 1995: 41)". This renewal is only possible in Islamic thought through *ijtihad*. By stating that Muhammad is the initiator of an ongoing

process of reform, Wahib sees it as a duty to follow in his footsteps, even in a different context. He thus disagrees with the stagnant understanding of the scripture that is so characteristic of his own generation. They interpret the Quran in a strict and rigid manner, thereby closing off the possibility of rational understanding (Wahib 1981: 26).

Munawir Sadzali (b. 1925), a former minister of religious affairs in the late 1980s, propagated a 'renewal' of Islam by 're-actualization'. The central point in his argument is to encourage Muslims to take up religious *ijtihad* honestly, to make Islam more responsive to the needs of Indonesia's local and temporal circumstances. In this regard, one of his most frequently discussed topics is the principle of Islamic inheritance. On this matter, the Quran stipulates that sons inherit twice as much as daughters. Drawing also from his own personal experience, he concludes that in some circumstances this particular regulation appears contradictory to the very notion of justice. According to Sadzali, many *ulama* have realized this, but they are unwilling to resolve the matter conclusively. Instead, like many other Muslims, they prefer to take pre-emptive moves by substantially reducing the amount of the assets to be inherited. By and large, these practices involve property being distributed (*hibah*) to their children, on their own terms, before their deaths (Sadzali 1988: 1-11).

The significance of Sadzali's re-actualization approach goes beyond the rhetoric of the inheritance issue. A closer look at the framework of his theological thought seems to suggest that he is inclined to argue that there are some Quranic stipulations – particularly those associated with societal, non-ritual matters – which are no longer compatible with the demands of the present era (e.g., inheritance law, slavery, etc.). In the case of inheritance, the religious text should be interpreted in accordance with the social circumstance in Indonesia, i.e., women should inherit the same as men. In this respect he mainly (although not exclusively) relies on the practices and examples of the second Caliph, Umar b. al-Khattab, who, due to changing social circumstances is said to have applied policies which did not fully comply with the stipulations laid out by the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet.

Hermeneutically speaking, Sadzali has carried out a 'humanization' of religious text on the basis of cultural and social change. He is also aware that a number of classical Muslim scholars have done the same, albeit possibly for different considerations. His quest stipulates a new horizon for understanding the religious text within the context of Indonesia. For instance, his ideas on the equality of inheritance for men and women have generated serious debate among Indonesian scholars. Opponents have rejected his proposal, arguing that it violates the words of the Quran. They have emphasized that despite cultural and social changes in human history, applying what the Quran says is compulsory. For instance, Rifal Kabah, Supreme Court of Justice and lecturer of law, has criticized Sadzali for being unable to appreciate the reluctance of many classical scholars to interpret the Quran according to pure reason, and also for failing to



understand their adherence to the traditions related to the Prophet, the Sunna (Kabah 1988: 60-61).

Sadzali also acquired a reputation by emphasizing that the Pancasila should be considered the final Indonesian state constitution, and that the discussion on a possible Islamic state in Indonesia should be closed. In Sadzali's view, the most important thing is that Muslims should not lose their grip on the demands of modernity. Rather, they should be able to conduct a productive and intelligent dialogue between the universality of Islamic teachings and the necessity of Indonesia's particularities, including the characteristics of the archipelago's socio-religious structures and its political orientations. These ideas on the relationship between Islam and the state are expressed in his work *Islam dan Tata Negara* (Islam and the Administration of the State), where he examines the stipulations of the Quran and Sunna to see whether Islam does indeed specify a particular form of state. Quoting a large number of Muslim thinkers from the classical era, including al-Farabi al-Mawirdi, in addition to modern reformists such as Afghani, Abduh and Ali Abd al-Raziq, he concludes that Islam has no profound interest in regulating issues pertinent to the affairs of the state. Nothing in the Quran indicates any concept of *dawla* in the political sense. He further elaborates that the concept of 'Islamic state' is a product of the encounter with Western colonialism, and that a formal declaration of an Islamic state was never made during the period of classical or medieval Islam (Effendiy 1995: 112-113). Abd al-Raziq's ideas on the form of the state have had a remarkable echo in the Indonesian discourse. Many Indonesian thinkers hold the view that there is no clear evidence that the Quran and the Sunna oblige Muslims to establish an Islamic state. They argue that Muhammad's political experimentation did not include the proclamation of an Islamic state. Hence they also argue that Islam does not contain a set of socio-political principles.

The reformative ideas promoted by al-Afghani and Abduh were promulgated in Indonesia through the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN), an academic institution administered by the Department of Religious Affairs. The IAIN has played an important role since it was founded in 1953. From the start, it has been a medium for intellectual transformation. Madjid studied at the Pesantren and the IAIN before going on to complete his doctorate in Chicago. He and other scholars such as Wahib, Wahid, Maarif and Sadzali all provide religious interpretations which, while using different catchwords, provide a social setting that is inseparable from the impact of modernization. Their reaction is a positive one, i.e., they try to make the religious message compatible with modern values by presenting a liberal interpretation. Their efforts at dynamization and re-actualization, the two catchwords of Islamic renewal, were also to some degree influenced by the neo-modernism of Fazlu Rahman (1911-1989). Madjid and Ma'arif were both pupils of Rahman during their doctoral studies at Chicago University. Meanwhile, Wahid and Sadzali, though not his direct students, also came into contact with Rahman's ideas (Barton 1995: 6).<sup>10</sup>

## 4.8 CASE 2: THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAN

The Islamic revolution (1978-9) was the event par excellence that gave a boost to the self-confidence of many Muslims across the Islamic world. At last, Islam stood not just for 'the sick man on the Bosphorus', for an empire in decline. The revolution demonstrated what an Islamic movement could really do: it could overthrow the most heavily armed regime of the entire Near East. "Neither East nor West – just Islam" was the slogan Khomeini almost inevitably proclaimed after the Islamic Republic was founded in 1979. And for years to come, there would be a complete stalemate in relations between Iran and the West – and most of all between Iran and the US. There were fewer problems between the Soviet Union and Iran in day-to-day politics, despite Khomeini's publicly expressed view that the USSR would soon disintegrate because of its a-religiosity. In his *Historical Epistle* to Mikhail Gorbachev, the then chair of the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet, Khomeini wrote that: "It is clear to anybody that one will have to look for Communism in museums of political history because Marxism has not been able to satisfy even one of humankind's germane needs" (Khomeini 1991: 95-100; 96).

Even so, the relationship between the two states was generally founded on pragmatism, particularly when compared with American-Iranian relations. Following the hostage taking of US diplomatic personnel by students for 444 days in 1979, the Islamic Republic became evil incarnate in the eyes of Washington. Meanwhile, Khomeini saw the US as the Great Satan whose sole desire was to defeat Islam and with it the Islamic Republic. From the Iranian government's point of view, even in the years that followed the fall of the Shah, the US did indeed do everything necessary to become the perfect enemy that would strengthen Iranian identity. The Americans supported Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran; announced a budget for the overthrow of the Iranian government; shot down an Iranian passenger aircraft and gave a medal to the man responsible; and lastly, they supported the Taliban in Afghanistan. There was really no better way of diverting attention from domestic mistakes than pointing to the long list of American misdeeds.

Many Iranian leaders viewed the Islamic Republic as decidedly anti-Western, both politically and culturally. As a counterweight, they presented an independent Islamic identity. In the mid-1990s, Mir Salim, minister of Islamic Guidance at the time, was quite forthright: "The title of a book on Western culture must contain the words 'the decadent Western culture'" (Golshiri 1997: 7). Meanwhile, the conservatives in power, fearing a so-called Western cultural invasion, have now issued bans on satellite dishes and Western radio programs, and tried to control the use of internet. Their proclaimed political goal is isolation from the West's corrupting influence. Unlike many conservative clerics, however, the Iranian reading public, secular and religious alike, soaks up Western culture. Proof of this is the tremendous number of Western publications translated into Persian in the last decades, especially on philosophy, political science and litera-

ture. A foreigner would be quite surprised at the number of Western writers whose works have been translated into Persian. Indeed, to take one example, the bibliographies of the Theological University of Qum indicate just how widely Western works are read in Iran – even books on Christian theology and Western Orientalism. However, this does not stop the Islamic Republic’s officials from branding any call for greater freedom and state legitimacy as ‘Westernization’ and useless cravings of decadent intellectuals.

The West is bound to fall – at least this is what some conservative theorists never tire of repeating. They say the West is actually in a major crisis, is bound to decline and will ultimately fall, whereupon Islam will triumph. This is also the view of a scholar such as Reza Davari Ardakani (b. 1935), professor of philosophy and influential editor of the *Name-ye Farhang* magazine, who has dedicated numerous books to the issue (Davari 1980). Like Davari, numerous thinkers of the post-revolutionary generation have adopted the criticism of Modernism propounded by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. They argue that only by going back to one’s roots can one escape crisis. However, their critics, including Javad Tabatabai (b. 1945), argue that Iran’s Heideggerians don’t really understand Heidegger. Tabatabai observes that the issues on which Heidegger focuses are not relevant to Iran: “How can you talk about Post-Modernism when you don’t even know where you stand and if you’ve passed through Modernism?” (Tabatabai 1999: 18-24) He accuses Davari of trying to answer questions – as did Al-e Ahmad and Shariati before him – which are relevant to the West, but not to Iranians. Tabatabai aims for constructive engagement with the West and its values, especially given that the dominant interpretation of Islam has failed to solve the problems of Iranian society.

This is why the well-known philosopher Abdolkarim Sorouch (b. 1942) also demands a new interpretation of Islam. His modernist theories on the compatibility of Islam and democracy make him one of the most controversial contemporary Iranian thinkers. In October 1995, Sorouch attracted heavy media coverage in the West, following death threats by Islamist hooligans (Amirpur 1996: 465-481). He quickly became everyone’s favorite dissident; some even called him an Islamic Luther – a misleading and hazardous comparison (Wright 1995). Even so, Sorouch certainly belongs to the avant-garde of Iranian modernist thinkers. His work also deals with Iran’s relationship with the West. He argues that one should follow the West’s lead in the sciences, not just in technology but also in philosophy and other social sciences. Science is not the exclusive prerogative of the West; it does not recognize a cultural ‘copyright’. Sorouch’s argumentation here thus contradicts many Islamic ideologues who claim the Islamic world is merely taking back what it has given to the West at the height of its own scientific development. Western medicine, they say, is based on the work of the Iranian Ibn Sina (known as Avicenna in the Western world), and Greek philosophy was preserved only because it had been translated into Arabic (Sorouch 1993: 105-130; 126, 128).

Reza Davari has become Sorouch's strongest opponent in this debate. In his view, Sorouch practices conceptual eclecticism and disregards the fact that Western thought is the product of a development as yet not undergone by Iran. Davari claims that adopting Western philosophical concepts requires the corresponding intellectual and historical context (Davari 1986: 12-14; Boroujerdi 1994: 236-259; 239ff). Sorouch in turn accuses Davari of taking an a-historical tenor, since Western influence is nothing new. Moreover, it is incorrect to claim that Western progress does not fit in with Iranian culture, since Iranian culture has always been a melting pot of three cultural influences, namely Arabic, indigenous Iranian and Western. Sorouch also refutes the radical condemnation of the West expressed in the slogan 'Westoxication'. He would rather make choices informed by a critical mind, capable of differentiating between what should, and should not be adopted. He wants to plant the best of other cultures inside that mind, in the same way that Greek philosophy was further developed by Muslims. He does not see gharbzadegi as a disease but as an historical fact: "We would not have developed further if the West hadn't come. We would have died, probably" (Sorouch 1993: 112). In his view, the first encounter with the West, through translating the Greek philosophers, was beneficial to Islam and Iran alike; and future exchanges between the two cultures could be just as beneficial. Nor does Sorouch see much sense in Shariati's slogan advocating a return to one's roots: "What our heart and mind are willing to accept, belongs to us." "Were this not so, one would also have to refuse Islam as something foreign. After all, it is not Iranian in origin" (Sorouch 1993: 121).

Sorouch is the leading Iranian theoretician on 'Islam and Modernity'. His aim is to develop a political theory of governance which is Islamic as much as democratic. He makes use mainly of Western sciences, but he transports these arguments into a religious system of reference. He has studied in Great Britain, knows the modern hermeneutic theoreticians by heart, and is also versed in German philosophy, especially the work of Karl Popper. Following Popper, he argues in favor of an open society, and goes on to adapt Popper's theory of Understanding. Sorouch's point of departure is that Understanding contains the possibility of unlimited growth, and that it will never be more than an approximation. Humans can never really know what God expects from them. A human will never know what God's law is, nor what are God's intentions; these are beyond human understanding. One can but grasp and know God's end, nothing else. And the end of religion could, naturally enough, not be adverse to humane concepts. Like any other text, the Quranic text is an 'open' text inviting interpretation. A rigid interpretation of faith, Sorouch argues, is a phenomenon of modernity; previously, it was always assumed that religious insight is changeable. This changeability opens up space for new interpretations – and this is why Islam and human rights are compatible.

The leading Iranian theologian Mortaza Motahhari (1920-1979) once said that for a reform to have lasting effect in Iran, it would have to come from theologians and scholars of Islamic studies. Gibb advances a similar argument for Sunni

theologians (Gibb in: Wielandt 1971: 168). On the other hand, Wielandt pointed out that in the Sunni dominion, theologians deliberately refrain from becoming involved with modern interpretations. Things are different in Iran. Suggestions for new interpretations of faith offered by theologians are both numerous and daring. One of these theologians is Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari (b. 1939), whose thinking owes much to hermeneutics and Christian theology. It is certainly remarkable and also influential that a theologian, of all people, should present modernist thought. As a cleric, Shabestari finds an audience among his fellow theologians more readily than might other modernist thinkers. While many clerics of the older generation reject Sorouch and have excluded him from any inner-theological discourse because he never attended a theological university, Shabestari does influence their discourse. He propagates a modern interpretation of Islam, and in hermeneutics he has founded a science that offers a new view on Islamic thought. By introducing hermeneutic principles to Quranic exegesis, all problems of modernity can be solved, he argues. A fluent speaker of German, he wants to present this science in Iran. His book *Hermeneutik, ketab va sonnat* (Hermeneutics, the Book [the Quran], and the Sunna) devotes considerable space to this endeavor. He explains Gadamer and his hermeneutic circle, and also refers to Dilthey (Shabestari 1996: 23). In addition, he explains in detail the term ‘epistemological interest’, the most important concept of hermeneutics, which deals in great detail with how one can come close to objectivity when reading texts – or, in Habermas’s words, “how dependable cognizance is possible” (Habermas 1991: 11). His conclusion is that one can never really understand texts, a conclusion which he also extends to the Quran. Shabestari also applies Habermas’s theories on epistemological interest to Quranic exegesis that all interpreters have particular epistemological interests when reading a text, and their hypotheses will be based on these interests. He gives the example of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr’s (1935-1980) ‘Islamic economy’ (Shabestari 1996: 135; Mallat 1993: 145-165). According to Shabestari, Baqir al-Sadr found an Islamic economy in the Quran only because he so wished. The text answers only those questions put to it, and everyone finds in the Quran the answers he seeks. This is also what allows for a democratic interpretation of Islam (Shabestari 1996: 38). Shabestari’s *Hermeneutik* not only refers to Western theoreticians of hermeneutics and the avant-garde of the hermeneutic method in the Arab world, it also presents Amin al-Khuli. As we have seen, he was the first modern scholar to try and interpret the Quran with philological methods.

Alongside Western hermeneutics, Shabestari has been influenced by modern Christian theology. In it, he looks for solutions to all of modern man’s problems concerning religion. From Christian theology, he wants to learn “how to speak about faith in the modern world at all” (Shabestari 1997: 106ff). Modernizing the Islamic sciences means working on the issues of modernity and not “putting the Quran on CD ROM and thinking that by this, one has opened up to modernity.”<sup>11</sup> Theology has to deal with modernity because “in the new intellectual atmosphere, there is no scientific or philosophical certainty, and the efforts of our ancestors towards obtaining certainty have become useless. In all spheres, uncer-

tainty dominates human thinking” (Shabestari 1993: 9). New theories have to be developed whereby humans can nonetheless find faith. Shabestari says that the decisive factor here is the communication of new experiences of faith. He cites Luther as one great example of the ability to do this, and the Pakistani thinker and poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) as another (Boroujerdi 1996: 253).<sup>12</sup> In his view, the reform movements of the last 150 years from Muhammad Abduh to Ali Shariati were not true attempts at reform in the field of religion. They merely represented the foundations for movements towards political and social change that employed religion as a means to an end and a vehicle for their ideas (Haeri 2004: 116-128; Keddie 1983).<sup>13</sup> Shabestari insists on taking a different road, because “a revitalization of religion can only be a revitalization of faith” (Shabestari 1997: 117ff). This is why he works with the Christian concept of Revelation and the stand taken by Christian theology on the relation between God and Ratio. He discusses at length Thomas Aquino, Luther, and Schleiermacher – three thinkers who have been influential in shaping the concepts of Ratio and Revelation. In addition, he mentions the atheist criticism of religion by Feuerbach and Marx, explains the modern dialectical theological trends of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, and analyzes their idea of God as the ‘totally Other’. Thus, the Iranian discourse is introduced to their refutation of Schleiermacher’s theology, which starts from the human being’s devout self-confidence and takes faith as a solely human position. He also deals with critical voices on dialectical theology, among whom Paul Tillich and his Third Way between dialectical and liberal theology, and Wolfhard Pannenberg and his criticism of Bultmann’s theology of existence.

Notwithstanding their differences or even their opposing positions, Thomas Aquino, Luther, and Schleiermacher have one thing in common, which Shabestari considers crucial: each have formulated new definitions and functions of religion and theology. Their writings show that the understanding of ‘religion’ changes over time. He is optimistic about the future of Shiite theology because Iran’s universities teach Western philosophy, sociology, methodology, philosophy of science, and similar subjects, and they have many scientific links with the Western world. Simply to admit Christian theology will not be enough for Shiite theology to solve its paradoxical confrontation in the modern world. Theologians must allow criticism of religious thought, i.e., thought about religion within specific periods. Such thought is not identical to religion, but rather to ‘the believers’ faith’, in the sense of the ideas and convictions that have been mixed with strong human emotions and convictions. Given that religious thought is always linked to a person, community or period, it differs from what was sent down by God via the prophet.

Shabestari is convinced that a religious community will always profit from the criticism of religious thought because, when all is said and done, it is not religion itself, but human cognizance. Therefore, criticism ought to be supported and facilitated by an open atmosphere (Shabestari 1994: 19). Even atheists such as Marx and Feuerbach have a right to speak. All ideologies and forms of faith are free to compete for human followers. Indeed, he stresses that one should even be

allowed to write books against faith, ‘without a stop sign’ (Shabestari 1997: 82). Shabestari himself seems to have done some intensive reading of nonreligious criticism of religion, taking in books that are hardly standard reading matter for a Shiite cleric, such as Feuerbach’s *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841), which he also quotes, and *Das Wesen der Religion* (1851).

How does Shabestari picture such a faith that initially emerges in an atmosphere of freedom and is accepted by humans, even in the face of many competing concepts? How will it solve the paradoxes between Revelation and modern Ratio, whilst still constantly facing the test of criticism, even from the theologians themselves? Will it be a faith that has ceased to be *aqida* (dogma) and is merely *iman* (faith)? Shabestari draws upon his intellectual father Iqbal for answers. Iqbal thought that religious experience formed the basis of religious cognizance, the living awareness of an incomparable experience. According to Shabestari, contemporary Islamic thinking has come closer to fulfilling Iqbal’s plea for modernization. Islam’s politicization in many parts of the Muslim World shows that Islam is not perceived as separated from daily life. Islam is turning worldly. While Shabestari does not regard this as the real reformation, he considers it positive that the altered conditions of modernity have elicited a response. This leads him to define a clear task and a clear goal for modern Shiite theology: “The new spirit of Islamic theology, which is just now being born, will have to dedicate itself specifically to ‘religious experience’ and found its theology on this.”

Shabestari’s critics accuse him of having spent too much time in the West, and of being too fond of historical criticism of the Bible and of modern Christian theology. They claim he ends up without religion. Meanwhile, he himself stresses his integrity as a critic: there is a great difference between criticism from the *outside* and criticism from the *inside*. Atheists like Marx, Feuerbach and Freud have criticized religion from the outside. By contrast, he argues from a religious point of view. Unlike atheist thinkers, he does not aim to uproot religious belief, but rather – via his criticism – to strengthen the fundamentals of religion, since there is one dogma that will never be abolished, namely that of God’s One-ness, *tawhid*.

Twenty-five years after the Revolution, Iranian open-mindedness vis-à-vis the West and Western literature, ideas, and values, is by no means limited to non-conformist, intellectual groupings. Seyyed Muhammad Khatami (b. 1943), the former President of Iran also favors constructive engagement with the West and with one’s own culture. He studied the Shiite’s dogma and traditions in Qum while at the same time studying philosophy at Tehran University. In the immediate run-up to the revolution he was director of the Islamic Centre in Hamburg, Germany. After the victory of the revolution he returned home and became a member of parliament. In 1989, he was appointed Minister of Culture, a post he resigned in 1992. In the years prior to becoming President, Khatami was Director of the National Library. His scientific endeavors concentrated on the ancient and modern theory of politics, as well as reform movements in the Islamic World. His book *From the City as a World to the World as a City*, speaks out in favor of a

healthy middle way between the West's good and bad characteristics; liberalism and democracy are worthy of adoption from the West, but not its lack of spirituality (Khatami 1996: 281ff). Khatami also counters Huntington's theory of 'The Clash of Civilizations' by calling for a spirit of constructive engagement with the West and dialogue among Christians, Muslims and members of other religions. It was thanks to his initiative that 2000 was declared the year of intercultural dialogue.

As demonstrated, Iran in 1979 saw the construction of a system explicitly defining itself as non-Western. This explains why Iran and the Iranians so vehemently debate the gains and values commonly associated with the West, i.e., human rights, democracy and reformed Islam. Interestingly, within this reputedly fundamentalist theocracy this debate has reached quite an advanced level. Indeed, this may well be a logical consequence of everyday Islamism. Unlike in other parts of the Muslim World, where 'Islam is the solution' was merely a slogan chanted by some Islamists in the streets, in Iran this was put into practice.

The opinions of Ayatollah Khomeini, founder of the theocracy, still prevail. In his worldview, only God has rights. Contrary to Western views, humans have no rights, "merely because they are humans." They have duties towards God, but God alone has rights. God – or his representative on Earth – may grant rights to humans, but equally may take them away again as rights are not inherently human. In addition, Khomeini demands that every human must defer to the common good – or, to be precise, to the Islamic community's good. This anti-liberal worldview allows for individual rights to be violated for the sake of the greater good, because the community always comes first. When the well-being of the ummah, the Islamic community, so demands, censorship, oppression and violations of human rights are justified: "He who governs Muslims must at all times keep the community's interests in mind and refrain from personal emotions. Hence, Islam gives precedence to the community's collective interests over individual ones, and has annihilated numerous groups which were sources of corruption and damage to the human community." By this, Khomeini denies liberalist assumptions that humans have individual rights towards the state. Rather, human rights are the Devil's own works whose sole interest it is to halt Islam's march for victory.

These arguments still dominate the current Iranian debate on human rights. Iranian scholars and theologians often argue that societies marked by drug abuse and unemployment rather than universal happiness, also suffer from a problematic human rights situation. Against demands for the universal validity of human rights they insist that comparisons of different systems should take account of differences in cultural, historical and social developments. Such an approach, they argue, would allow for the fact that Muslims prefer honoring God's rights to human rights, whereas the West has developed its own, anthropocentric system of human rights.



Today, many Iranians think that Islam is not the solution, least of all the Islam preached by the conservatives in power, namely an Islam that violates human rights and defines itself explicitly as undemocratic. In the Iranian system, the people's will is of no importance – it is God's will that is carried out. And God's will is determined by the interpretation of the Supreme Jurist-consultant who is also the head of state. According to its self-definition and inherent logic, the Iranian system applies non-democratic means, but its ultimate aims are democratic since, by carrying out God's will, it does what is good for humans.

Over the last several years, many people in Iran have criticized this interpretation of the relationship between humans, God and Islam, among them also Shirin Ebadi (b. 1947), the woman who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003. The Iranian reform movement is unanimous that there is no incompatibility between Islam and human rights. Among Iranian theologians, the restrictive interpretation of Islam has met with a counter-current. This is paralleled by social forces seeking reform, and their influence is spreading beyond Iran's borders towards other parts of the Islamic world. As Shirin Ebadi argues, "There is no church, no clergy in Islam." Therefore, "As Muslims, we alone are responsible for our actions. We have to justify ourselves on Judgment Day and to God alone." Her words are a blunt reproach to the ruling group of conservatives who try to lay down every last detail of how Iranians live their faith. Not surprisingly, conservatives were not happy about Ebadi's winning the Nobel Peace Prize. First and foremost, she was confronting them as a critic. Moreover, she is a woman demanding equal rights for women and respect for human rights. For the conservatives, human rights are "a collection of corrupt norms which the Zionists have thought up to destroy all true religions", to quote the definition of Khomeini, the theocracy's founder. Moreover, Ebadi constantly challenges the monopoly on the inimitable true interpretation of Islam which the conservatives, as interpreters of God's will, have claimed for themselves. "We need a different interpretation of Islam, an interpretation which leaves room for human rights and women's rights" (Amirpur 2004). She repeats this core sentence time and time again when questioned by the Western media about the apparent incompatibility of Islam and human rights.

Shirin Ebadi is not alone in her fight to defend human rights with the Quran in her hand. Many take their cue from Abdolkarim Sorouch and Mohammad Mojta-hed Shabestari, the most important theoreticians and masterminds of the so-called 'new theology'. Sorouch's main scientific theory proposes the changeability of religious insight: since human insight is changeable, human understanding of religion changes because insight is always dependent upon the times and the state-of-the-art of science. Sorouch argues that new interpretations of religion develop with time; they adapt to the circumstances in which the interpreters live. This argumentation also easily adapts to women's rights. Even though Sorouch has never made himself heard on the issue of women's rights and is assumed to have a rather conservative worldview on this issue, he has a very marked influence on the Iranian women's movement. To put forward a genuine interpretation

of the Quran, they adopt his differentiation between changeable and unchangeable parts of faith. As the Iranist Ziba Mir-Hosseini (b. 1952) once put it, Sorouch has thus made it possible for deeply religious women to reconcile their faith and their feminism, since “his understanding of Islam has opened the space for radically rethinking gender relations” (Mir-Hosseini 1999: 217).

Sorouch has based his position on the concept of ‘cultural relativity’. However, his line of thought differs from the school of Quranic interpretation founded on democratic ideals, which likewise concludes that the Quran is compatible with human rights and democracy. This kind of interpretation, which is still widely practiced in Iran and many parts of the Islamic world, tries to interpret the Quran in its unique context. The Iranian cleric Hassan Youssefi Eshkewari (b. 1950), for example, uses this method in his reading of sura 2, verse 193. The verse reads as follows: “And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for God. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrong-doers.” This verse may be interpreted to mean that Muslims have a duty to fight infidels forever and ever, and to convert them all to Islam. Eshkewari’s reading, however, is that the verse refers to a specific historical event, namely the battle of Hudaibiya. In 630, the Prophet Muhammad broke a truce he himself had made two years earlier, and invaded Mecca. According to Eshkewari, the verse only refers to this one particular political situation: the infidel Meccans should be resisted because they have sinned against the prophet’s community. This does not mean that all humans should be confronted until eternity, or until they pay homage to the one True God.

Eshkewari applies an old method here. An entire branch of theology is devoted to the study of the so-called ‘reasons for Revelation’. Classical Islamic science also proposed a dialectical connection between text and recipient. The long history of this science demonstrates how irrational many radical Islamists are in arguing that every Quranic statement should be taken literally, and that every single one of these is valid now and forever more. Eshkewari’s reading is proof of yet another point, namely that the statement that such and such is written in the Quran does not actually lead very far.<sup>14</sup> Without an understanding of its exegesis and of the history of Quranic interpretations, merely reading such a text does not get us much further. As Ali, fourth caliph and the first Imam of the Shia already commented regarding Quranic interpretation, “The Quran is a manuscript between two covers which does not talk. It is humans who express it.” Quranic interpretation has been practiced for centuries, and still is. There are mystic, philosophical and rationalistic commentaries, all of which arrive at different conclusions. It is a modern phenomenon that groups or individuals try to monopolize the one true interpretation of the Quranic text.

Sorouch, however, has moved beyond the question of whether or not Islam and human rights are compatible. He sees human rights as nothing less than a demand of the human ratio; they cannot possibly be contrary to religion, since something irrational cannot be the will of God. For Sorouch, the fact that the

concept of human rights has been developed in an extra-religious context is no obstacle to its potential in an Islamic state system. True, human rights have been conceived by humans; but since they do not contradict religion, God's rights remain intact. Sorouch's line of argument is the first step towards a system of secular hermeneutics. Its logical outcome is that numerous decrees inside Islamic law no longer need to be applied – such as amputating a hand as a punishment for stealing. Sorouch goes on to state that it is not absolutely necessary to follow all Islamic laws down to the last detail. He bases this argumentation on a differentiation between values of the first and of the second degree: values of the second degree refer specifically to decrees on the details of faith, which differ among religions. Values of the first degree, such as justice, are the ones that really count, and this is why different religions and the human ratio all agree on their importance. Hence, justice is a religious value – but also a universal one.

What, then, is the point of religion if not as a basis for values? Sorouch's answer to this question is pragmatic: important values such as freedom, justice and human rights may be inherently independent of religion, but religion helps transmit these to the common people. The important values are those of the first degree, upon which there is unanimity among Muslims and followers of other religions. Details like the Islamic penal law, or dress codes are less important. They are no more than the 'skin' which holds religion together on the outside, but which are not part of its essence. Sorouch argues that everybody is a Shiite in the traditional sense of the word who believes in the five unchangeable Shiite dogmas: the Oneness of God, Prophethood, the twelve Imams, Resurrection, and God's Justice. Concerning human rights he adopts the stance usually only taken by secularists; he assumes that humans *do* have extra-religious rights simply because they are humans. No one can take away these natural rights; nor may they be subjected to what Khomeini saw as 'the collective interests of society'. Moreover, Sorouch believes in the idea that human rights can best be realized in a democratic state system.

The importance of Sorouch's arguments for religious reformers stems from the fact that they are always motivated by religion. His faith is precious to him. That is why 25 years of experience with 'everyday Islamism' have led him to conclude that state and religion must be separated: "Free societies, be they religious or a-religious, are divine *and* human at the same time. In totalitarian societies, neither humanity nor divinity is left." But Sorouch goes even further: crucially, he sees democracy as the state system which protects religion, i.e. the rights of God, better than any other system. After all, it is a characteristic of democratic systems that they protect against abuse of power. Sorouch wants to protect religion from being abused by 'so-called Men of God' for motives that are contrary to the will of the Creator. Only a democracy can prevent the abuse of religion since it controls the extent to which human rights are realized. And as long as human rights are respected, religion cannot be abused. For Sorouch, a democratic system of governance, combined with a liberal economic system, provides the best safeguards for fulfilling primary human needs. In the long run, it is the surest way of

fulfilling religion's intent, since "an empty stomach knows no religion."<sup>15</sup> The ideal government, according to Sorouch, is not only democratic, but also religious in that it creates the conditions whereby humans can live their faith. Ultimately, then, such a government is much more religious than a government of Islamic law which 'merely' carries out the sharia – the decrees of Islamic law in society. It follows that the religious government has no set, unchangeable structure but takes on a different form in each period. In this concept, freedom of religion is the precondition for a truly religious society, and thus is an argument for the superiority of a democratic system. True religiosity can only thrive in a democratic society, where faith is based on the freedom to choose, i.e. on free will. Forced religiosity, by contrast, contradicts the will of the Creator. The prophets, too, understood their mission in this way: "The prophets came to win human hearts with the magic of their words, and not to dominate their bodies", was how Sorouch put it in a lecture given in London in 1996.<sup>16</sup> Since humans cannot know what God really expects of them, governments should not favor one particular religion, or a particular interpretation of religion, over others. All they should do is protect those rights which are universally applicable. Anything else would be presumptuous.

A concept like this does not stop at any one particular interpretation of the Quran; instead it takes the Creator's ultimate will as its point of reference. Thus, it differs fundamentally from the liberal Islamic discourse in which, in an apologetic manner of argumentation, attempts are made to show just how tolerant Islam has been towards other religions throughout its history. Encroachments on apostates are played down with the argument that these have rarely occurred, and were usually motivated by political rather than truly religious reasons. Sorouch, on the other hand, does not pay attention to whether Islam was historically tolerant or intolerant. He does not mention the much-loved argument that Spanish Muslim rulers granted Jews more freedom than the Christian conquerors. Neither does he try to embellish higher taxes and lower blood money for non-Muslims. These interpretations are irrelevant to Sorouch's line of argument because he is trying to adapt his understanding of religion to *modern* concept of human rights.

While Sorouch does interpret certain Quranic passages, he insists that he interprets a given verse the way he does because he *wants to*, and he establishes his interpretation by drawing on the dogma of religion's rationality. Hence, right from the start he makes it quite clear that his lecture and his reading of the Quran are informed by a specific cognitive interest which he considers legitimate and in keeping with the spirit of religion. His interpretation of the verse '*La ikraha fi din*', 2:256, (There is no compulsion in religion) is a case in point. Sorouch points out that this verse can be understood to mean two different things: either "Do not force humans into religion", or "Even if you have forced humans, and they have superficially adopted a creed, this is not faith." He deduces from both interpretations that a religious government has to create an environment in which everybody can adopt a creed without being forced to do so. In addition, everyone

should be able to live his religion and faith without fear of repression. A government fulfils the Creator's assignment to protect faith in this way, and not by forcing citizens to comply with the religious law: "Faith is faith only when based on freedom and courage. And a society is religious when it is based on such a faith."

This argumentation is deeply influenced by its specific historical-political context, by the experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where more and more people turn away from Islam because of rampant corruption, mismanagement and nepotism – all of which they blame on Islam. Sorouch tries to present a different Islam. Moreover, as a hermeneutic and Quranic exegete, Sorouch knows full well just how diverse the multitude of Quranic interpretations really are. What is more, in the 1960s and 1970s, he had first-hand experience of how the Quran was used as a basis for ideology; he saw how, in its name, people were sent to the killing fields of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s and how, in its name, thousands of innocents were executed. This knowledge and these experiences have led him to conclude that over the past several decades the Quran has been defiled, and that it is time to put the book back on the *tachtsche*. In Persian, the term *tachtsche* denotes the place where the Quran is kept; it must be the highest place available in the house, such as the top shelf of a bookcase.

In the 1970s, Ali Shariati, the ideologue of the Islamic Revolution, lamented that the Quran had lost its relevance for Muslim's daily life, and was only taken down from the *tachtsche* on festive occasions. He wanted the Quran to be present in everyday Muslim life, so that it would once more become the beacon of the political and social actions of Muslims. That was the slogan of the Islamic movement – once also the ideological home base of Abdolkarim Sorouch. Over the years, Sorouch has grown convinced that the Quran belongs back on the *tachtsche* where, at the very least, it would be safe from defilement. This shows in a nutshell what a change in convictions many advocates of state Islamization in Iran have undergone. On the *tachtsche*, the Quran could remain what it has always been throughout Islamic history: an inspiration for the arts and sciences, and the personal link between humans and their God.

Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari has likewise been formed by the experience of 'everyday Islamism'. Today, after 25 years of experience with a non-secular state, he demands the installation of a democratic system. He bases this on his theology – a vital point in Iranian discourse, since it provides the only defense 'religious enlighteners' can deploy against accusations of being Westernized and agents of foreign powers. Shabestari argues that the Quran calls for a socio-political system that is just, and only that. But it is not feasible to derive a state philosophy from its general ethical principles, as the ruling conservatives claim to be doing. Therefore, his plea for a separation of state and religion also excludes the argument that the Prophet himself was at once both the religious and political leader. This fact, he says, is indeed a part of the Islamic history of salvation, but it is not an instruction for the future. Here, we see Shabestari rejecting not only the argumentation of Islamic fundamentalists, but also that of Western observers who, by pointing

to an earlier Islamic era, also claim that Islam inalterably prescribes the unity of state and religion.

Shabestari claims that the Quran only prescribes *principles* and not any specific *form* of governance. His most important proof for this is the so-called *ahd*, the instruction on governance sent by Imam Ali to his governor in Egypt, Malik al-Ashtar, in the 7th century. The religiously authorized leader Ali explicitly hands over governance of Egypt to a secular leader and not a religious one. And in the *ahd*, Ali issues ethical instructions to his governor but does not require him to establish an Islamic state system. The new state is Islamic, and pleasing to God, if neither oppression nor tyranny reign there. "Oh *Malik*, be just to God, and to the people", the instruction reads, "do not oppress the masses. Whoever oppresses God's creatures will incur God's enmity as much as the hostility of those he has oppressed." Since the Quran has not prescribed a specific system, it follows for Shabestari that humans are free to choose the system under which they wish to live. Shabestari's main argument in favor of democracy is religious: only a faith adopted by free choice is a true and god-pleasing faith; and the principle of freedom is best realized in a democratic system.

The cleric Mohsen Kadiwar (b. 1959), another prominent member of the 'religious enlightenment' movement, goes even further regarding the compatibility of Islam and human rights. After a clear analysis he comes to a radical conclusion: important points of Islamic law cannot be reconciled with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, since modern man's priority is to live according to rationalist and humanist principles, "a spiritual Islam has to crystallize from the hardened legalistic crust of historical Islam" (Nirumand 2003). This is the kind of Islam with which Shirin Ebadi identifies, and along with her the Iranian Reform movement, and large sections of the Iranian population that voted in favor of the reformers in three consecutive elections between 1997 and 2001.

Ironically enough, it appears that this currently even applies to the closest relatives of Khomeini, the founder of the state. His granddaughter, Zahra Eshraqi, (whose husband is the brother of Iran's president and leader of the Islamic Iran Participation Party) waited for Shirin Ebadi with a bouquet of white roses upon her return to Tehran airport, to congratulate her for winning the Noble Peace Prize. This gesture – and the opinion it expressed – may well have cost Khomeini's granddaughter her place as a candidate for parliament. In January 2004, the conservative-dominated Council of Guardians turned down more than a third of all candidates, including over 80 members of the then current parliament. This sparked the greatest constitutional crisis ever faced by the Islamic Republic – and this on its 25th anniversary. In most cases, the reason given for the refusals was that candidates did not believe in the Islamic foundations of the state. That may well be true, but it may also be due to the dominant role of the conservatives in interpreting Islam.

The discourse on Islam and modernity is not confined to exclusive intellectual circles. Until it was banned, *Kiyan* magazine, the mouthpiece of Abdolkarim Sorouch, sold well for a number of years, mainly to a student readership. Publications by the ‘religious enlighteners’ are also read in Iran’s theological universities. And these educational centers, which are supposed to supply the regime with the next generation of executives, are today the scene of progressive debates. Alongside their classical education in Quranic sciences, the students can also draw on a broad range of knowledge of the modern sciences including European hermeneutics and criticism of literary texts – things they have mainly learned from the publications of religious reformers. Drawing upon these methods, the young mullahs discuss such questions as Islam and human rights, Islam and the role of the state, and the role of women in Islam. Rather than buying the restrictive interpretation of the Quran propagated by the official side, these young mullahs have developed alternative readings.

Other religious enlighteners have also gained increasing influence in contemporary politics. For the past two years Sorouch’s student, the sociologist Akbar Ganji (b. 1952) has been an investigative journalist, revealing the machinations of leading Iranian conservatives. He coined the term ‘religious fascism’, which was also adopted by Iran’s President, Mohammad Khatami. As Ganji puts it, the religious fascism of those that rule Iran does not accept “a humane understanding of religion, sees humans as slaves of rulers, separates religion and ratio, is aggressive, fanatical, and bigoted.”<sup>17</sup>

Being so earnest can be hazardous in the Islamic Republic. Ganji has been in prison since April 2000. On several occasions, Sorouch’s lectures were disrupted by hired hooligans, and he himself has received death threats. Mohsen Kadiwar went to prison for 18 months – and emerged as the hero of Iranian students. Wherever this cleric appears in public, be it as a member of the audience at a public debate, he is immediately greeted with frantic applause. The reformers’ names and ideas are well known among the population, especially among young people. This comes as no surprise, since they do not mince words in their lectures and sermons. “You cannot force people to accept a creed”, the reformer Hojjaoleslam Abdallah Nuri (b. 1949) told an audience of thousands of enthusiastic students at Tehran University. “If you force them, it is no longer religion.”<sup>18</sup> At Qum, Iran’s theological capital, another audience of thousands heard him call for pluralism in religion and politics while stating that Europe sets an example to be followed by the Islamic Republic: “In the Europe of the Middle Ages, their clergy did everything possible to inhibit freedom of opinion. But today it is the European democrats who continue the Islamic traditions of pluralism and democracy.”<sup>19</sup>

The Iranian debate is in Persian, making it difficult for Arabs to follow. The reverse is true of the incoming flow of information, since most Iranian intellectuals who study Islam know Arabic. Moreover, the arguments of Iran’s Shiite religious reformers are often not adaptable to a Sunnite context. Even so, the Iranian

debate on Islam and modernity has a worldwide Islamic audience. Ever since the revolution, the Islamic world has looked to Iran. Several reformers have had their books translated into Arabic and intellectuals meet and share ideas at conferences. At the same time, one can speculate on whether these debates on Islam and modernity actually reach big audiences in the Arab world. Since everyone in the Islamic Republic of Iran has experienced Islamism, it is there that the problem of reconciling Islam and modernity is more pressing and the debate is certainly the liveliest. This debate shows that there are innumerable ways of interpreting Islam in a modern context. Islam and modernity are not by definition irreconcilable. Indeed, the Iranian debate serves as a useful example of how to counter the rather thoughtless argument of Muslims and many of Islam's critics that 'the Quran prescribes it that way'. When modern interpretations of Islam come from a theocracy generally perceived as 'fundamentalist', it surely also makes sense to develop these in other environments – and why not start with European Muslims? After all, they live under the best conditions to become leading voices in the development of a liberal Islam. The Iranian debate is a fine showcase for the diversity of opinion that Islam can harbor. Indeed, this may well have been one of the reasons behind the decision of the Nobel Prize Committee to select an Iranian woman. It is also possible that they were looking to boost the Iranian reform movement. The elections of February 2004 and June 2005 have shown that the Iranian political reform movement has ground to a halt. Reformist politicians failed to realize their aims in the face of entrenched conservative power. Loss of hope in the reform movement kept many people away from the ballot box. But intellectuals like Shirin Ebadi are still optimistic, for even if the political reform movement has failed, the reform movement in society has not. Iranian society has changed a lot over the last 25 years. People want democracy, and they are aware that human rights and gender equality are necessities – irrespective of whether these are Islamic values.

#### 4.9 CONCLUSION

It has been shown how the West has always been, and still is present in the debate on 'Islam and modernity' in Egypt, Turkey, Indonesia, India and Iran – everywhere. While the cultural West has stimulated and encouraged the adoption of modern values, the political West has generated a reluctance of accepting these values. Indeed, it has actually sparked a vociferous resistance to modernization, which is seen as a Westernization that perpetuates Western hegemony. The case of Iran is the most obvious example of the successful implementation of Islamism and the establishment of a theocratic state. Even so, at the height of their anti-Western political stance, Iranian intellectuals have been active in translating and publishing celebrated philosophical texts from the West, thereby paving the way for a strong and lively intellectual debate. The fact that Muslims in Iran have tasted Islamism enables them to criticize their own experience and to fight for a democratic and liberal state where human rights can be preserved and protected. At the same time, one also has to bear in mind that the success of the revolution was the basis for the establishment not of a caliphate or imamate, but



of a Republic, a Western political system. Parliamentary and presidential elections – albeit within the limits of Islamic law – were thus part and parcel of the model of statehood adopted by Iran. And these democratic tools meant that Iranian people could vote for liberals who wanted to change Iran’s religious ideology. But the political West, the United States, interrupted this positive development when Mr. Bush declared Iran part of the ‘Axis of Evil’, alongside Iraq and North Korea. This made the criticism of conservative Iranian ideology the equivalent of collaborating with the enemy; the concept of constructive engagement with the West that was advocated by most liberal thinkers, including Iran’s president Khatami, became anathema. Even Shirin Ebadi’s Nobel Peace Prize was only celebrated by the liberals while traditionalists condemned it. Indeed, the political defeat of the liberals in the June 2005 elections due to the decision of the Council of Guardians, can be taken as a collateral effect of Western meddling.

However, this political setback is strongly linked to the advanced level of an intellectual debate that currently touches on so many issues previously considered taboo. This ongoing debate on democracy, human rights, freedom of religion, the secular state and individualism has meant more than a rethinking of tradition or of the meaning of the Quran; it has led to humanizing the Quran by formulating a liberal theology, as well as establishing a new methodology of interpretation. In Western philosophy, this methodology is called hermeneutics.

## NOTES

- 1 Alfian describes the Muhammadiyah as a movement opposed to the establishment and hence against colonization. It was not so much a political organization as a religious reform movement. Its widespread educational activities help explain why, in practice, the Muhammadiyah adopted an attitude of moderation and collaboration with the colonial regime.
- 2 *Al-Manar*, vol 5, 157; 8, 303; 15, 138; 21, 226; 25, 539, 593, 673; 26, 394, 454; 27, 1, 167, 463, 791; 28, 54, 293; 29, 162; 30, 153, 225 – Cairo 1925-8. Some of these articles and others published in *Al-Ahram* newspaper between 1925–1928 were compiled in a book of the same title.
- 3 The Iranian Constitution gives the year as 1963 – the moment at which public protest started and Khomeini gave his speech – as the year the revolution began.
- 4 It was C. Snouck Hurgronje who initially examined all the Quranic verses in their chronological order in which Ibrahim was mentioned. He concluded that Muhammad, on the occasion of his controversy with the Jews, pronounced the Old Testament patriarch as a *hanafi* and the first Muslim. So, it was not until after the Hijra that the Quran maintained that Ibrahim and Ismail were the ancestors of the Arabs, built the *Kaba* and introduced the ceremonies of the pilgrimage. Ibrahim – still according to Snouck Hurgronje – only became the most important forerunner of the Arabian Prophet at this juncture because as the religion of pure monotheism already propagated by Abraham, Islam was able to claim precedence over both Judaism and Christianity. Hurgronje’s theory was criticized by Edmund Beck on the ground that the three suras attributed to the third Meccan period (14:35-41; 16:120-3; 6:79, 161) already anticipate the role of Abraham, and this is characteristic of the Medinan period. This thesis by Snouck Hurgronje became more widely known through a supplement, added by A.J. Wensinck to the article ‘Ibrahim’ in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. It provoked contradiction and denial, particularly from Muslims after publication of the first volume of the Arabic translation. Self evidently, diverging opinions among Muslims and non-Muslims in regard to Quranic stories in general and the figure of Ibrahim in particular, are destined to remain unsolved. “The former consider that Abraham actually was in Mecca and, together with Ishmael, built the *Kaba*, and spread the pure monotheistic faith. Non-Muslims regard this as merely a religious legend. At the present stage of the dialogue there can be no reconciliation of the two points of view.”
- 5 A complete version of the trial report is reprinted in a special issue of the monthly magazine *al-Qahirah* (1996: 450-62).
- 6 al-Bahrawi’s book deals extensively and critically with four major influential books, i.e., *al-Diwan* (1920), *Fi Shir l-Jahili* (1926), *Muqaddimat Prometheus Taliqqan* (the Introduction to the Arabic translation of Shelly’s ‘Prometheus’) (1946) and *fi Thaqaifah l-Misriyyah* (Beirut 1955.)
- 7 The classical reference is al-Qazwini’s *Sharh al-Talkhis*.
- 8 The decision was made in response to a question by a member of parliament to the Prime Minister concerning the case and the position of the university.
- 9 His Ph.D. thesis was about ‘Aristotle’s Poetics and its influence on Arabic rheto-

ric' (*Kitab Shir li Aristu wa Atharuhu fi l-Balaghah al-Arabiyyah*).

- 10 Rahman first visited Indonesia in 1974 and since that time he was in regular contact with a number of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals.
- 11 In an interview in Tehran on 4 December 1994.
- 12 Boroujerdi even expresses the opinion that Shabestari advocates a 'philosophically informed Islamic Protestantism'.
- 13 In Western Orientalism, this thesis is presented by N. Keddie. Abdul-Hadi Haeri counters her argumentation.
- 14 Hence, it is less than helpful that many Germans today turn to the Quran to find out what 'Islam' has to say about human rights, terrorism, and women. German booksellers report that two days after 11 September the Quran had been completely sold out.
- 15 Personal communication with Katajun Amirpur in november 1997.
- 16 Sorouch spoke in a private lecture. A more sophisticated discussion of the issue is to be found in Sorouch 2000: 37, 64.
- 17 Manuscript of the speech, given to Katajun Amirpur, the author of this section, in February 1998.
- 18 Manuscript of the speech, given to Katajun Amirpur by the author in February 1999.
- 19 Manuscript of the speech, given to Katajun Amirpur by the author in February 1999.



## 5 SELECTED THINKERS ON ISLAM, SHARIA, DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

As noted in chapter 4, the second half of the 20th century brought wide-ranging discussions on the issues of sharia, democracy and human rights throughout the Muslim World, but particularly in Egypt, Indonesia and Iran. We have encountered many thinkers who seek to divest Islam of traditionalistic and legalistic interpretation by stressing their own versions of ‘cultural Islam’, ‘enlightened Islam’, and ‘individualistic faith’. For these thinkers the dogmatic Islam established by the conservatives and supported by traditionalists and totalitarian political regimes is outdated; it should be removed and replaced by the ‘real’ spiritual and ethical Islam. In their view, political Islam is nothing but a deviation from the essential existential Islam presented in the Quran and taught by the Prophet. To reach the real humanistic and democratic meaning of Islam, one needs to consider fresh insights and apply modern methodologies. These, in turn, need to be learned, accepted and applied without any constraints and from any available source of knowledge, whether it be Eastern or Western. In the words of the Iranian Abdolkarim Sorouch, knowledge has neither nationality nor copyright. This last chapter aims to follow up on the debate on sharia, democracy and human rights – including also personal autonomy and equality between men and women, that is currently conducted by selected Muslim scholars such as Muhammad Arkoun, Abdullah An-Naim and Tariq Ramadan. Many of them are based outside the Muslim World, in Europe and the USA.

### 5.2 MUHAMMED ARKOUN: RETHINKING ISLAM

To date, *rethinking* has been applied to particular fields of Islamic tradition, which in turn has led to the process of rethinking the meaning of the Quran. In the Iranian context, we saw a shift from ‘rethinking the meaning’ to ‘rethinking the status of the actual Quran’, as reflected in the *tachtsche* metaphor. This moved Quranic studies from exegesis to hermeneutics, or from theology to philosophy. The Algerian-born Muhammaed Arkoun (b. 1928) is emeritus professor at the Sorbonne, Paris, and director of *Arabica: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*. He is very active in applying a modern interdisciplinary approach to the critical study of Islamic culture, tradition and scriptures. His chief concern is the deconstruction of the ‘unthought’ and the ‘unthinkable’ in classical and modern Islamic thought, leading to an unprecedented shift from ‘rethinking tradition’ or even ‘rethinking the Quran’ to ‘rethinking Islam’. Several of his books in English and French reflect this preoccupation, such as *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* and also *Rethinking Islam, Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*. By analyzing their historical, cultural, social, psychological and linguistic backgrounds, Arkoun seeks to liberate the issues of ‘unthought’ and/or the ‘unthinkable’ – such as the rule of law and civil society – from their traditional

and dogmatic yoke, and to show the way towards “a radical re-construction of mind and society in the contemporary Muslim world” (Arkoun 1994: 1). Issues such as revelation, the nature of the Quran, secularism, and individualism are all unthought and unthinkable, due to the dominant position of orthodoxy in the history of Islamic culture. Reluctant to talk about ‘culture’ or ‘Islamic society’, Arkoun prefers to use ‘Muslim cultures and societies’ in the plural.

Critique of Islamic reason is a key concept in Arkoun’s project. Its starting point is the need to leave the practice of classical *ijtihad*, which is limited and confined to the epistemological framework established by jurists in the 8th to 9th centuries, and to move towards a modern critical analysis of the structure of Islamic reason (Arkoun 1992: 17). This move implies the bypassing of both the methodology of traditional Islamic studies practiced by Muslims, and the orientalist’s historical-philological analysis. Arkoun identifies the latter as classical Islamology, which – once it has deconstructed Islamic thought – leaves nothing but ruins behind (Arkoun 1992: 56). He complains that if traditional Islamic studies just repeat the classical approach and offer no innovation, classical Islamology will remain indifferent towards the burning issues in contemporary Muslim societies which are also the problems and concerns of today’s Muslims. With his critique of Islamic reason Arkoun aims to establish an ‘applied Islamology’ that deals seriously with modern issues from a genuinely engaged Islamic perspective and that benefits from the achievements of historical philology without being confined to its shortcomings (Arkoun 2002: 10).<sup>1</sup>

Why are ‘critique of Islamic reason’ and ‘applied Islamology’ so strongly linked? Arkoun rightly points out that in debating contemporary burning issues, today’s political islamists always refer to Islam’s spectacular emergence as its glorious legal and ethical moment. They also often cite its historical golden age as the ideal departure point for Islamic civilization. Arkoun believes that the failure of both traditional and classical Islamology approaches to cope with the burning issues of modernity left a vacuum that was filled by political scientists and active islamists. As he explains, during the 1980s and 1990s:

“Political scientists focused on political Islam, and in particular, fundamentalist movements, to such an extent that they succeeded in marginalizing classical Islamology, ignoring the methodological breakthrough offered by **Applied Islamology**. This situation applies both to classical Islamicists, long confined to the philological, historicist application of the most ‘representative’ classical texts, and to the new wave of Islamicists who have had no philological training in the main Islamic languages (Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu) and who have confined their research to socio-political issues considered from a short-term perspective. **Applied Islamology** insists on the need to practise a **progressive-regressive** method, combining the long-term historical perspective with the short-term perspective, because all of the contemporary discourse emerging in Islamic context, inevitably refers to the emerging period of Islam, and the ‘Golden Age’ of its

civilization used as mythological references to creative ‘values’ – ethical and legal paradigms – which need to be reassessed according to what I call a *Critique of Islamic Reason*” (Arkoun 2002: 10-11).

Therefore, defining whether the ‘critique of Islamic reason’ or ‘applied Islamology’ comes first, seems impossible when both are so closely interlinked. The objective of studying such a complex approach is to examine the mechanisms of meaning-production in the societies of the scripture, whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. This entails multidisciplinary analysis employing socio-historical psychology, cultural anthropology, semiotics, semantics, and hermeneutics.

An essential component of this project is the redefinition of the Quran. According to Arkoun, the Quranic fact is the originally oral prophetic speech, which Muhammad and his audience believed to be the revelation by God. Hence, Arkoun distinguishes between this ‘fact’ and what he calls ‘the closed official corpus’, which is the written text of the Uthmanic recension of the Quran, i.e., the *mushaf* (the volume of the Quran). The oral Quran – the discourse – was performed in a language and in textual genres tied to a specific historical situation, and in mythical and symbolic modes of expression. It already contains a theological interpretation of its own nature and must be subjected to an analysis of its structure. The whole exegetical tradition is a process of appropriation of this ‘fact’ by the various factions of the Muslim community. The text as such is open to a potentially infinite range of ever-new interpretations for as long as history continues, although the advocates of orthodoxy insist on making an absolute truth of a particular interpretation established at an early stage of this process. Any scientific study of the Quran and of the exegetical tradition referring to it, has to keep in mind that religious truth, insofar as it can be understood by Muslims and by adherents of other ‘book religions’, becomes effective, providing it exists in a dialectical relation between the revealed text and history.

Contemporary scholars must use the instruments of historical semiotics and socio-linguistics to distinguish particular traditional interpretations of the Quranic text from the normative meaning which this text may have for the present-day reader (Vielandt 2002: 137). As Arkoun complains: “It is unfortunate that philosophical critique of sacred text continues to be ignored, and erudite Muslims do not dare draw upon such research even though it would serve to strengthen the scientific foundation of the history of the *mushaf* and of the theology of revelation” (Arkoun 1994: 35). Arkoun’s thought is thus far removed from any apologetic explanation that tends to show the compatibility of modernity with Islamic sources; rather, he confines himself to analytical and critical exposition of the issue discussed, and refers to possibilities and directions. Taking as an example the issue of the status of women according to the Quran, he prefers “to shift the analysis and questions toward heretofore neglected domains.” He then goes on to analyze issues that could not be modified at the moment the Quran appeared in history, namely the elementary kinship structure

and control of sexuality. The anthropological study of cultures reveals that certain cultural norms could be sacralized and transcended, and this explains the emergence of Islamic law. Finally, he excuses himself “for not having undertaken a detailed analysis of numerous verses [of the Quran] that for centuries fixed the status of women. Such work has not yet been done in the context of critique of Islamic reason” (Arkoun 1994: 60-63).

However, in other studies, particularly his *Lectures du Coran* and in *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* – specifically chapter 2 ‘the cognitive status and normative function of revelation: the example of the Quran’ – Arkoun provides a thorough analysis of certain Quranic passages and chapters to show how, through exegesis, Islamic orthodoxy was established by means of selecting and canonizing a given reading (vocalization) over another more textually and linguistically accepted vocalization. These selective tactics enabled the jurists to sacralize certain traditional practices regarding the position of women and of religious minorities in Muslim societies. To analyze the position of women he takes the case of the inheritance of a deceased Muslim without male heirs. According to Arkoun’s analysis, the relevant Quranic verses (2: 180, 182, 240; 4: 12, 176) were deliberately misappropriated by applying a vocalization to limit the female share of inheritance; without this, such women would be entitled to everything (Arkoun 1992: 25-76).

The significance of such an analysis is far-reaching, opening both short and long-term historical perspectives. If the short-term perspective is taken as dealing with women’s issues, the longer-term perspective is first and foremost to uncover the dynamic mechanism of ‘meaning production’ employed by classical Islamic reason, and hence, establish the consensus leading to establishment of orthodoxy. The second step is to reconstruct an anthropological theology of revelation out of the remaining deconstructed elements. This is the above-mentioned progressive-regressive method of ‘applied Islamology’, which combines the long-term historical perspective with the short-term perspective.

The great significance of Arkoun’s work lies in its concern for the methodological questions that are virtually absent in Muslim scholarship of Islam in general, and of the Quran specifically. This has made his endeavors greatly appreciated by Muslim modernist intellectuals seeking to apply modern methodology. His influence on thinkers across the Muslim World is evidenced by the translation of his works into Farsi, Turkish and Indonesian, in addition to Arabic (Abu Zayd 1999: 193-212).

### 5.3 ABDULLAH AN-NAIM: SHARIA AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Originally from the Sudan, Abdullah An-Naim (b. 1946) is a human rights activist and professor of law at Emory University (Atlanta, Georgia, US). He propagates the reconstruction of sharia to comply with international law and



human rights. An-Naim is a student of Mahmud Muhammad Taha (a fellow countryman), who was executed in 1984 after having been condemned as an apostate and heretic by the legal system of the Numari regime. At that point, An-Naim went into exile, and from there continued with his teacher's basic arguments on the 'Second Message of Islam', which better reflected the 20th century.

Taha's basic argument for invoking this second message follows from his own interpretation of two of the classical sciences of the Quran, i.e. the distinction between revelations made in Mecca and in Medina, and the concept of abrogation whereby in the event of a conflict, the later revelation could abrogate the earlier revelation. Taha's own interpretation is that the Mecca message, which is basically spiritualistic, accommodating justice, freedom, and equality, was replaced by the Medina message emphasizing law, order and obedience. This was done because the Arabs were unable to appreciate the Mecca message in the context of 7th century Arabia. However, it is both possible and indeed imperative to return to the Mecca message and abrogate the Medina message that was designed to fit in with the social and cultural confines experienced by the Arabs in the 7th century. An-Naim's starting point is Taha's message that 7th century sharia does not fit in with our 20th century (Taha 1987). By applying the concept of abrogation to the Medina message, the Mecca message (which had been abrogated by the Medina message) is reactivated and re-empowered. An-Naim's aim is thus basically to reconstruct sharia so that it complies with civil liberties, human rights and international law. Although these concepts are the product of modernity, he does not appear to accept their secular foundations. By keeping the domain of Islamic reformation separate from the domain of modernity, he tries to Islamize these concepts by presenting a fresh rereading and new reinterpretation of its sources in order to reconstruct sharia.

To understand An-Naim's position clearly, we need to bear in mind that he belonged to the elite of Taha's Republican Brotherhood Party, *Al-Ihkwan al-Jumhuriyyun*, and that he has not yet been able to shake off the cloak of his teacher.<sup>2</sup> Being highly critical of socialism and capitalism alike as Western ideologies, and presenting Islam as a substitute order combining the benefits of both systems, Taha sought not merely to reform but to transform the meaning of Islam in the direction set out above. An-Naim also supports the dichotomies of Western versus Islamic, and secular versus religious. In his introduction to the translation of Taha's book, he presents two separate worldviews, or more precisely two ideologies:

"To seek secular answers is simply to abandon the field to the fundamentalists, who will succeed in carrying the vast majority of the population with them by citing religious authority for their policies and theories. Intelligent and enlightened Muslims are therefore best advised to remain within the religious framework and endeavor to achieve the reform that makes Islam [a] viable modern ideology" (Taha 1987: 28).

Seeking an ‘Islamic ideology’ that can address the majority of the population and gain their support is certainly a legitimate objective – but more for a political party than for scholarship. An Islamic ideology should, therefore, be distinctive from all current world ideologies, thus creating a dichotomy between Western and Islamic reformations. In this dichotomy, the West and Islam should each be defined as a universal entity, with no internal variations. The Muslim World is one unified *umma*, variations are limited and sharia, therefore, has certain universal aspects, with scope for variation. As An-Naim puts it: “there is a limit to local variation and specificity, or else we would have to speak of a different religion or a different legal system” (An-Naim 1990: xiv). Thus, for him, the project of reforming Islamic law or reconstructing sharia, is limited to rethinking the sources and reinterpreting these in a modern context. He is clearly unaware that the Muslim World’s modern context is simultaneously determined and constructed by an even wider, general, modern world context. The fact that many parts of the Muslim World have been irrevocably transformed in an economic, social, cultural and political sense, while others are still in the midst of such a transformation, does not seem to impinge on his project of reformation. His project mainly aims to Islamize the secular concepts of civil liberties, human rights and international law, in recognition of the Muslim right to self-determination. Put differently, whereas he refutes the secular answers that the political Islamists vehemently reject, he merely covers these same answers with an Islamic cloak.

An-Naim argues that the sharia that is proposed by the Islamists is fraught with problematic issues, such as the position of religious minorities and women, freedom of belief, expression and association. Indeed, this sharia repudiates the basis of modern international law:

“The only way to reconcile these competing imperatives for change in the public law of Muslim countries is to develop a version of Islamic public law which is compatible with modern standards of constitutionalism, criminal justice, international law, and human rights” (An-Naim 1990: 9).

Just how far does An-Naim’s project differ from the efforts referred to earlier, or from attempts at the Islamization of law, culture, philosophy or human sciences? To the extent that secular civil law and human rights provide his frames of reference, his reformation project presents a continuation of other efforts that claim to seek a de-politicization of Islam but end in yet another form of politicization. If this is indeed the case, it is hard to agree in full with John Voll’s statement in the foreword to An-Naim’s book, namely that it

“Is neither an attempt to integrate Western and traditional Islamic thought (as is usually the case with modernist positions) nor a fundamentalist effort to return to the pristine principles. [He] is attempting to transform the understanding of the very foundations of traditional Islamic law, not to reform them” (An-Naim 1990: x).

This book in particular, and his writings in general, are actually an attempt to integrate Western thought and Islamic norms by way of Islamizing the former and reinterpreting the latter within a highly confused and confusing hermeneutical circle. Judging from his own definition of reformation (islah), this concept does not apply to his work. As he himself has argued, ‘reformation’ is a Western concept that “evokes images of Europe in the period of 17th to 18th century: of a civil society where the authority of the Church was challenged and separation between church and state was being instituted” (An-Naim 1994: 7). However, the islah-concept that he is comfortable with is not that of revivalism by way of returning to an assumed and allegedly pure Islamic state or community:

“Neither of these notions – either of retreat from religion as in the Western sense, or a retreat into a more reassuring but idealized past, as with many who are identified with today’s movement for Islamic resurgence – is adequate for our needs. We do not want to go back, nor can we. Nor do we want a repetition or to engage in any mimicking of the European Christian experience. Rather, we need and must have *our own indigenous and authentic approach* (my italics). It is something that we can actually have, provided that we are capable of meeting in the spirit and best traditions of our faith the intellectual challenge that it poses to us” (An-Naim 1994: 8).

It is this plea for authenticity that clings to tradition, albeit with varying degrees of modern interpretation of its sources and norms, that bring together all approaches of reformism, whether presented by individuals or institutions. Here one could list a large number of institutions and organizations involved in human rights in general, or more specifically women’s and children’s rights. One example is the Gender Study Institution, which was recently established in many Muslim countries. Some are NGOs financed by European aid institutions, others have been established by national governments. All seek to instill these rights from within the domain of Islamic culture. Most take as their motto ‘change from below rather than from above’. The ISIM’s ‘Rights at Home’ project presents a model for such efforts.<sup>3</sup> This was started in 2001 under the directorship of An-Naim, with the present writer acting as resource person for two years and subsequently as external advisor. Against the background of American pressure for political, social and educational reformation in the Arab and Muslim World, and the US administration’s parade of power in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as its threat to both Iran and Syria, several Muslim countries have established ministries for Human Rights, headed by women. This demonstration of a willingness to comply contrasts with the intellectual, rhetorical rejection of enforced reformation as expressed in the conferences and seminars across the Arab and Muslim World.

#### 5.4 RIFFAT HASSAN AND OTHERS: FEMINIST HERMENEUTICS

As previously demonstrated, the issue of female emancipation started to emerge at the close of the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. It began with men like Tahtawi, Abduh and Qasim Amin in Egypt, who sought to open up public education for women and to find a scope for their social participa-

tion. Egypt's first feminist union was established in 1909. Basically, its members demanded equal rights with men in public life and the ending of inequality in the family domain. They submitted these demands to the House of Legislation, asking for a limitation of men's rights on issues such as polygamy, marriage and divorce on the basis of the Quran and the Sunna. Women also took part in this debate. Among them were prominent figures such as Egypt's Malak Hifni Nasif and Syria's Nazira Zayn al-Din, who in 1929 wrote against polygamy and the wearing of the veil, quoting Quranic verses and prophetic traditions. The Egyptian national movement of 1919 witnessed the revolutionary emancipation of women; Huda Sharawi and others removed the veil on return from an international women's conference. These claims for equal rights not only evoked religious sources and sentiments but also nationalist feelings that resisted the British occupation of Egypt.

In 1930, the Tunisian al-Tahir al-Haddad (1899-1956) was, to my mind, the first to challenge the historicity of the Quranic stipulation, especially in the field of women's rights. He thus developed the views on the compatibility between tradition and modern values expressed by pioneers such as Tahtawi, Abduh and Qasim Amin. In his view, the Quranic stipulations represent an advanced move from pre-Islamic social norms towards more equal rights. However, these equal rights are not ends in themselves. Rather than simply applying these stipulations regardless of ever-changing human conditions, Muslims should learn the 'Quranic strategy' (al-Hadad 1992: 31). This strategy encourages development and change in accordance with changing realities, as in the example of abrogation. Thus, it is essential to differentiate between what Islam brings about and presents, on the one hand, and the accidental human conditions of pre-Islamic Arabia on the other. The essential values that Islam brought about are monotheism, superior moral ethics, establishing justice and equality, etc. By contrast, pre-Islamic Arabia's human conditions, such as slavery and polygamy, which Islam had to deal with, are not essentially Islamic. If we apply the Quranic strategy, we realize that they are subject to change (al-Hadad 1992: 12-13).

It would be no exaggeration to claim that it was al-Tahir al-Haddad who first paved the way for the feminist Quranic hermeneutics movement that arose in the 1990s. In two entries in the *Encyclopedia of the Quran*, vol. 2, Brill, Leiden 2002 (Feminism, pp. 199-203, and Gender pp. 288-292), Margot Badran explains the difference between Islamic feminism and the earlier women's rights movements. Whereas the latter focused on rights, Islamic feminism takes a somewhat wider view by focusing on gender equality and social justice as basic and intersecting principles enshrined in the Quran, and by disputing men's exclusive authority to define Islam. For them, it is an essential and radical principle that there are certain fundamental Quranic ideas that cannot be contradicted by any of its parts. Such a principle is not new; it echoes Tahir Haddad's differentiation mentioned above, or the earlier concept of *maqasid* (essential divine intention) constituted by the jurists. But more important than the essential principle is to see how it unfolds in the hermeneutic procedure. According to Badran, the feminist approach consists

of three steps: first, reviewing verses quoted by males to establish inequality; secondly, citing verses that clearly enunciate the equality; and lastly, deconstructing verses attentive to male and female dissimilarities.

The Quranic story of Adam and Eve is the main subject that needs to be reviewed. Both Pakistani born Riffat Hassan (b. 1943), who studied in the UK and subsequently moved to the US, and the African-American scholar Amina Wadud (b. 1952) emphasize that, unlike the Bible, the Quran does not inflict any responsibility on Eve for Adam's sin. The Quran says that both ate from the forbidden fruit and both were brought down to earth (Quran, 39:13). The established irrevocable verse is 4:11, where *taqwa* (fear of God) is the norm for differentiation among humans.

As for verses that clearly enunciate equality, feminist hermeneutics cites all of the verses also cited by the reformists since the early 20th century, without providing any additional insight. It stresses that the Quran addresses humankind, and not merely men, and that there are also verses which address both men and women as equal. As Riffat Hassan invariably proclaims, "equals in God's eye; unequal in society." However, the result of this approach is that feminist hermeneutics hardly touches upon inequality in cases of inheritance and giving testimony in court, since it is unable to go beyond existing male hermeneutics (Abu Zayd 2000a; 1998b). For the lawyer Aziza al-Hibri for example, equality of men and women is constituted in the essential doctrine of Islam, *tawhid*, and hence understood not as monotheism but as unity and equality. In order to reinforce her argument she provokes the doctrine of *khilafa*, which was developed by exegetes around the 4th/11th century and later employed by all of the reformists to emphasize the central position of the Islamic man as the vice-regent of God (Abu Zayd 1988: 111-133). Al-Hibri thus argues that the *khilafa* is the position of all humankind, irrespective of gender.

The third approach, namely deconstruction of verses focusing on male and female differences, is applied to verses referring to polygamy, divorce, male superiority, (*qiwama*) and disobedience or rebellion, *nushuz*. The way these issues are solved in feminist hermeneutics is neither new nor original. Like the reformist approach to the Quran, feminist hermeneutics faces the problem that as long as the Quran is dealt with only as a text – implying a concept of author (i.e. God as divine author) – one is forced to find a focal point of gravity to which all variations should be linked. This automatically implies that the Quran is at the mercy of the ideology of its interpreter. For a communist, the Quran would thus reveal communism, for a fundamentalist it would be a highly fundamentalist text, for a feminist it would be a feminist text, and so on.

## 5.5 TARIQ RAMADAN: EUROPEAN ISLAM

All the modes of discourse analyzed above were produced in the West, by engaged Muslim scholars. Among them, Tariq Ramadan (b.1962), the Geneva-

based author and university lecturer, is the only one to propose the concept of European Islam, or European Muslim citizenship. Ramadan's grandfather, Hasan al-Banna, founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928. His father, al-Banna's son-in-law and closest assistant, had to flee Egypt after the brotherhood was banned and all its members were either imprisoned or executed. Ramadan identifies himself as a European who does not deny his Muslim roots but wants to develop an identity that combines Islam with Europeanness. With some 15 million Muslims in Europe, he feels it is time to abandon the dichotomy in Muslim thought that defines Islam in opposition to the West. This is possible if one separates Islamic principles from their culture of origin and anchors them in the cultural reality of Western Europe. Ramadan says: "I am a European who has grown up here. I don't deny my Muslim roots, but I don't vilify Europe either. I can incorporate everything that's not opposed to my religion into my identity" (Ramadan in: Quesne n.d.). Islam is not the only candidate for redefinition in the European context; Europe also needs redefining. "If the presence of Muslims leads Europeans to think about who they are and what they believe in, that has to be positive." Being a European Muslim, Ramadan distances himself from Arabic culture and the homeland of Islam: "We've got to get away from the idea that scholars in the Islamic world can do our thinking for us. We need to start thinking for ourselves" (Ramadan in Quesne n.d.).

Is Ramadan indeed, as some would like to call him, 'a Muslim Martin Luther'? His call for a rereading of Muslim texts because of the many misconceptions within the Islamic communities, to some extent resembles Luther's claim to return to the supposedly 'pure text', freed from its many accumulated misconceptions. However, while Luther's rereading liberated Christian scripture from the Church's monopoly and opened an avenue for its translation into all European languages, Ramadan's rereading apparently does not go beyond long-established norms. There is nothing new in his distinction between the universal and eternal aspects of Islam on the one hand, and the temporal and specific aspects on the other. The example used to illustrate this distinction, i.e. the difference between *ibadat*, worship and *muamlat* or social affairs, is a classic one, and has existed from the very beginning.

Preaching against 'otherness' or 'us-versus-them' is important and valuable, but it has to be instilled in the sources – the Quran and the Sunna. Ramadan is unable to do this, because there is some Quranic justification for the concept of differentiation by building borders between Muslims and non-Muslims. Although Arkoun has dealt with this issue in his thorough analysis of chapter 9 of the Quran, it seems that Ramadan is unaware of this work of his fellow European (Arkoun 2002: 99-113). What concerns Ramadan most is the jurist's elaboration of the concepts of *dar al-islam*, the territory or house of Islam, and *dar al-harb*, the territory or house of the enemy. Without deconstructing the textual basis of this distinction, no real reformation is likely to occur. Adopting the Hanafi's law school definition of the territory of Islam as opposed to that of other schools, would render Ramadan a *mujtahid* in the classical sense, i.e., an individual favor-

ing one legal position over other possible positions; it does not even make him a liberal thinker. In this context, he proposes replacing the dichotomy of the territory of Islam and of dar al-harb with the new concept of ‘house of testimony’. However, while this concept would bring together all believers – Muslims and non-Muslims alike, including Christians and Jews – that share certain values, it does not ‘solve’ the problem of non-believers.

Returning to the European Muslim, which identity comes first then, that of the citizen or the faith? Put another way, are we talking about a Swiss Muslim or a Muslim Swiss? Here Ramadan distinguishes between ‘nationality’ and ‘philosophy’. His nationality is Swiss; he is a Swiss citizen, but his philosophy – his worldview – could be Islamic:

“When I speak about citizenship I am a Swiss with [a] Muslim background. But when I speak of philosophy, my perception of life, I am a Muslim with a Swiss nationality. In France, we have the problem of which word comes first: *Français musulman ou musulman français*? French Muslim or Muslim Frenchman? And we make a big problem out of this formulation or phrase. It is an artificial dilemma: when we are speaking of philosophy, and you ask me which comes first, I am a Muslim. If you ask about my civic and political involvement, I am a Swiss. It is as simple as that” (Donnelly n.d.).

Quite obviously, with the exception of Arkoun, Tariq Ramadan and the other thinkers discussed above are all still trapped in the unsolved question of identity. This directs the Islamic reformist movement into one of only two directions, namely polemic or apologetic.

## 5.6 NASR ABU ZAYD: RETHINKING SHARIA, DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN

Let me start by briefly setting out my own scholarly view concerning the status and position of the foundational scripture, namely the Quran. Studying the history and methodology of classical exegesis, I became aware of the fact that there is neither an objective, nor an innocent interpretation. Theologians have long established a hermeneutical principle deduced from a specific verse of the Quran (3:7) that divided the Quran into ‘ambiguous’ or ‘revocable’ (*mutashabih*) verses on the one hand, and ‘clear’ or ‘irrevocable’ (*muhkam*) verses on the other. Hence, they logically agreed that the irrevocable should be the norms to interpret, or rather to disambiguate, the revocable. Hermeneutically they agreed, but when it came to the implementation of this principle they disagreed. Every group decided according to their own theological position what was revocable and what was irrevocable. In the end, what was considered revocable by a given group was considered irrevocable by their opponents and vice versa. And so, the Quran became a battlefield for the adversaries to situate their political, social and theological positions.

The jurists, who were basically concerned with legal issues and needed a methodology of verification which the construction of law demanded, were puzzled by the occasional diversity and contradictoriness of the Quranic legal stipulation regarding such issues as women, marriage, divorce and custody, dietary issues, etc. In order to establish the legal rules, they developed the doctrine of 'abrogation' again deduced from certain Quranic verses (16: 99; 2:106) – according to which they considered the historically later revelation to be the final rule, while the earlier one was considered abrogated. Again, the jurists achieved no consensus on what was abrogated, simply because the actual chronological order of the Quran had always been, and still is, disputed and debated.

The epistemology of constructing law was established on the basis of deduction and induction from the foundational scripture after the prophetic tradition, the Sunna, was canonized as a revelation equal to the Quran in its legal authority. In addition to these two sources, ijma (consensus), especially of the first generation, was annexed as a third source. Some jurists rejected it but it was accepted by the majority. The fourth source was ijihad in the form of syllogisms or analogy; this was not commonly accepted. Ijtihad was practically restricted to the application of the technique of 'analogy', qiyas, which is to reach a solution of a certain problem solely by comparing its position to a similar problem previously solved by any of the other three sources, i.e. the Quran, the Sunna, or the consensus. The whole body of sharia literature, as expressed in the four major Sunni schools, at least, is based on the aforementioned principles. This means that sharia is a man-made production and there is nothing divine about it. Nor can one claim its validity regardless of time and space.

To return to the status and the position of the Quran in this sharia-oriented paradigm, one could mention that those Quranic verses which seem to contain legal connotations, and which are considered the basis of sharia, comprise some 500 verses according to the traditional sources. Upon these verses, which in total amount to one-sixth, or 16 per cent of the entire Quran, the jurists built their epistemological system of induction and deduction. What has happened to the remaining 84 per cent of the Quran, if a mere 16 per cent was highlighted or underlined? In fact, nothing was ignored or abandoned; the rest of the Quran simply played an auxiliary role as support for the legal system of sharia. All in all, the jurist-consultants have had to develop Quranic focal objectives known as the utmost objectives of sharia (*al-maqasid al-kulliyya li l-sharia*). These, they grouped into five major objectives:

- 1 preservation of the soul;
- 2 protection of progeny;
- 3 protection of property;
- 4 preservation of sanity;
- 5 preservation of religion.

Explaining that these five objectives mainly derive from the penal code of Islam presents no difficulties. The first is deduced from the penal code dealing with



illegal killing. Retaliation, according to the Quran, is actually maintaining life itself (Quran, 2: 178-179.) The second objective is mainly taken from the punishment for committing adultery or fornication, whether it is the 80 lashes mentioned in the Quran, and which is later explained as exclusively for the unmarried, or the stoning for the married (which has no Quranic ground). The third objective is nothing more than the penalty of amputating the hands of a thief. The fourth objective has to do with the prohibition of alcohol consumption, for which the Quran did not set out a penalty. It was introduced later, after the death of the Prophet. Preservation of religion is an objective that seems to have been deduced from the death penalty for an apostate. It was developed later by jurists; the Quran itself does not mention any worldly punishment for those who – after having accepted Islam – turn their back on it. What the Quran does mention is punishment in the afterlife: “Those who reject faith after they have accepted it, and then go on adding to their defiance of faith, never will their repentance be accepted; for they are those who have gone astray” (Quran, 3: 90 and 4:137). Later still, the death penalty was introduced, mainly for political reasons; protecting political authorities was identified with protecting Islam.

If one contextually examines the majority of the Quranic legal stipulations known as *hudud* (plural of *hadd*, for example the penalty for fornication, *zina*, robbery, *sariqah*, or causing social disorder, *hirabah*, as well as killing, *qatl*), it is reasonable to ask: were these stipulations basically initiated by Islam and thus Islamic? The answer must be a definite ‘no’; all were generally pre-Islamic. Some penalties originated from Roman law and were adopted from the Jewish tradition, while others belong to an even older tradition. In our modern times of human rights and respect for the integrity of the human body, the amputation of body parts or execution cannot be considered divinely sanctioned religious punishments. Other aspects of sharia, such as those dealing with the rights of religious minorities, women’s rights and human rights in general, also need to be revised and reconsidered. Contextualization of the Quranic stipulation and examination of its linguistic and stylistic structure – as discourse – would reveal that the jurists’ work was basically to unfold the meaning of such stipulation and to re-encode this meaning in various social contexts. The Quran is not in itself a book of law; as we have already seen, legal stipulations are expressed in discourse style, and these reveal a context of engagement with human needs in specific times. This, in turn, opens up the appropriation of the intended ‘meaning’ into every paradigm of meaning. As a discourse, the Quran provides multiple options and a variety of solutions, as well as an open gate of understanding.

In conclusion, to claim that the body of sharia literature is binding for all Muslim communities, notwithstanding time and space, is simply to ascribe divinity to the human historical production of thought. If this is the case, there is no obligation to establish a theocratic state claimed as Islamic. Such a demand is nothing but an ideological call to establish an unquestionable theo-political authority; this would recreate a devilish dictatorial regime at the expense of the spiritual and ethical dimension of Islam.

The issue of sharia and the call by political Islamist movements for its immediate implementation has sparked many debates and disputes across the Muslim World. These debates peaked after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran and the efforts by many governments in Muslim-majority countries to compete with the Islamists' claims to Islam by amending existing legislation. As for the issue of democracy, the sharia-oriented discourse of the Islamists has reduced this to the classical concept of shura (consultation). The Quran has emerged in a traditional environment, and this is reflected in many of its features. Today, people in Europe, the Middle East and many other Islamic societies live in modern or modernizing environments that are very different from that of the time of the Quran's emergence. Their societies are characterized by a diversity of outlooks, identities and interests. How to cope with pluralism in the political sphere is one of the key problems of the modern world. Some Quranic verses state that the head of the community should consult with the community (42: 38). Now, in a traditional environment, this implies something very specific, namely consulting vertically, from the top down, but not too far down. Obviously, such consultation is not democratically structured; it forms part of an authoritarian or autocratic setup. So what does shura mean in the present environment – in a pluralistic world faced with the problems of mass political participation and of broad-based consultation? What sort of shura are we actually talking about? How does one bridge the gap between old concepts and a modern, pluralist and politicized world?

My point is that shura was a practice pre-dating Islam and Islamic society. It was an instrument of social ethics that involved discussion among tribal elders regarding actions in a given situation. Moreover, although the Quran tells us that the Prophet holds consultations on specific matters, this practice was not introduced by Islam. It is a historical phenomenon, and I would leave it as a historical practice. And what I would observe in contextualizing the Quran in this instance would be that in the pre-Islamic context the heads of tribes used to meet in specific places called *dar al-Nadwa*, places of congress. They might meet on several occasions to discuss the problems of the new Prophet. There is now a shura council in Saudi Arabia. It was set up some years ago, and members are all royal appointees. However, shura cannot be developed into something democratic because it is traditional. More generally, political theory should be based on the fact that in Islam, in the Quran, there is no political theory; there are no political principles, not even for traditional society. What is mentioned about traditional society is rather descriptive. It does not tell Muslims what they should do and so there is no political system in the Quran; nor is anything mentioned about the state or its governance. Hence, it is open to Muslims to choose whatever they wish, and thus it is not Islam that stands against democracy, progress or modernity.

At this point, I should address the issue of social and political stagnation in Muslim societies. It is not Islam that is unable to accept modernization, but the contemporary Muslim. The real obstacle to modernization is Muslim thinking,

in particular the way Muslims have been taught to think over a long period of time. They are frightened. They think that modernization will erode their religion and identity because, in the past, identity has been exclusively linked to religion. This brings me to the modern history of the Islamic world and its relationship with Europe. Having repeatedly mentioned 'contextualization' and 're-contextualization' as methodological processes, or rather procedures, to differentiate between the historical and the universal, the accidental and the essential in the message of the Quran, and accordingly also in the content of Islam, it is now appropriate to show the reader how I have developed Quranic hermeneutics so far. Initially, I started out as a proponent of the Quran as a text that should be subjected to textual analysis. In my book *Mafhum al-Nass* (The Concept of the Text, first published 1990) I introduced the historical and linguistic dimensions of the Quran by critically rereading the classical sciences of the Quran (*ulum al-Quran*), concluding that the Quran was a cultural production, in the sense that pre-Islamic culture and concepts are re-articulated via the specific language structure. I stressed that, although the Quran became the producer of a new culture, any genuine hermeneutics has to take into consideration the pre-Islamic culture as the key context without which ideological interpretation will always prevail.

In my inaugural lecture of the year 2000 for the Cleveringa rotating Chair of Law, Freedom and Responsibility at the University of Leiden, I added the human dimension to the historical and cultural dimensions of the Quran. In so doing, I presented the concept of the Quran as a space of Divine and Human communication. Under the title *The Quran: God and Man in Communication*, I attempted an elaboration of my rereading, and therefore a re-interpretation of 'the sciences of the Quran', particularly those sciences dealing with the nature of the Quran and its history and structure. In this enterprise, I employed a number of methodological approaches, including semantics and semiotics, in addition to historical criticism and hermeneutics, which are neither generally applied nor appreciated in the traditional Quranic studies in the Muslim World. I focused on the *vertical* dimension of revelation, *wahy* in Arabic, i.e. the communicative process between God and the Prophet Muhammad which produced the Quran. This vertical communication, which took more than 20 years, produced a multiplicity of discourses (in the form of verses, paragraphs and short chapters). These discourses originally had a chronological order, which disappeared in the process of canonization whereby the canonized scripture emerged as mushaf (Uthmanic recension of the Quran). In fact, it was replaced by what is now known as the 'recitation order', or as Arkoun puts it, the 'official closed corpus'. According to the orthodox view, the Quran was perfectly preserved in oral form from the beginning and was written down during Muhammad's lifetime or shortly thereafter when it was 'collected' and arranged for the first time by his Companions. The complete consonantal text is believed to have been established during the reign of the third caliph, Uthman (644-56), and the final vocalized text was fixed in the early 10th century. Even if we uncritically adopt the orthodox view, it is important to realize another human dimension which is present in this process of

canonization, namely the early rearrangement and later application of signs of vocalization to the consonantal script (Abu Zayd 2000b).

Being so deeply involved in the debate around the present hot issues of modernization of Islamic thought and/or Islamization of modernity, I started to realize that, just like the classical theologians, both the modernists and their opponents are trying to situate their position in the Quran by implicitly or explicitly claiming its status as a text. As a text, it should be free of contradiction, given that God is the author. Whatever the interpreter wanted to prove, historical background was always employed in verification or justification; after all, history is also open to miscellaneous readings. Like the classical theologians and classical jurists, the proponents of modern hermeneutics endeavor to articulate their positions by creating a focal point of gravity that can be claimed as universal – the irrevocable and the eternal truth. The anti-modernist would merely shift the focal point of gravity to claim the opposite.

As I said earlier in my critical commentary of feminist hermeneutics, as long as the Quran is dealt with as a text only (which implies the concept of author – a divine author, which is God), the only way is to find a focal point of gravity to which all these variations should be linked. However, this means that the Quran is at the mercy of the ideology of its interpreter; for a communist, the Quran would reveal communism, for a fundamentalist the Quran would be a highly fundamentalist text and for a feminist it would be a feminist text. In my inaugural lecture for the Ibn Rushd Chair for Islam and Humanism at the University of Humanistics in Utrecht (27 May 2004) I therefore developed my thesis on the human aspect of the Quran one step further, moving from the vertical to the *horizontal* dimension of the Quran. By the horizontal dimension I mean something more than the canonization, or what some scholars identify as the act of the Prophet's gradual propagation of the message of the Quran, after he had received it – or what Arkoun calls the spreading of the message through the 'interpretive corpus'. What I mean is the dimension that is embedded in the structure of the Quran and which was manifest during the actual process of communication. Realization of this horizontal dimension is only feasible if we shift our conceptual framework from the Quran as 'text' to the Quran as 'discourse' (Abu Zayd 2004a).

For Muslim scholars, the Quran was always a text from the moment of its canonization until the present moment. Yet, if we pay close attention to the Quran as discourse or discourses, it is no longer sufficient to re-contextualize one or more passages in the fight against literalism and fundamentalism, or against a specific historical practice that seems inappropriate for our modern context. Similarly, it is not enough to invoke modern hermeneutics to justify the historicity and hence the relativity of every mode of understanding, while in the meantime claiming that our modern interpretation is more appropriate and more valid. What these inadequate approaches produce is either polemic or apologetic hermeneutics. Without rethinking the Quran and without re-invoking its living status as a

‘discourse’, whether in academia or in everyday life, democratic and open hermeneutics cannot be achieved.

But why should hermeneutics be democratic and open? Because it is about the meaning of life. If we are serious about freeing religious thought from power manipulation, whether political, social, or religious, and want to empower the community of believers to formulate ‘meaning’, we need to construct open democratic hermeneutics. The empirical diversity of religious meaning is part of human diversity around the meaning of life in general, which is supposed to be a positive value in the context of modern life. To reconnect the question of the meaning of the Quran to that of the meaning of life, it is now imperative to note that the Quran was the outcome of dialogue, debate, augment, acceptance and rejection, both with pre-Islamic norms, practices and culture, and with its own previous assessments, presuppositions and assertions.

**NOTES**

- 1 Arkoun explicitly admits that in coining such terms as ‘applied Islamology’ he followed the example set by a group of anthropologists who began the practice of applied anthropology.
- 2 Taha’s severe criticism of the Sudanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood for their alliance with the political regime is behind his adoption of the name ‘Jumhuriyyun’ for his group. This is the political ideological context of the emergence of the group, hardly to be considered a party.
- 3 The international Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) in Leiden. The project details, aims, structure and activities are to be found at [www.isim.nl](http://www.isim.nl).

## EPILOGUE

Is there a genuine possibility of achieving real reformation without constantly clinging to tradition, especially religious tradition, to justify and appropriate the acceptance of reformation? It seems that the paradigm of ambiguity towards modernity, the paradoxical image of modernity as a Western product and the equation of modernization with Westernization still prevails. It has become a more dominant concern since the events of 11 September 2001, after which it was propagated incessantly in the global media. Without a shift away from the paradigm of two independent worldviews, one Western, the other Islamic, the logjam will remain in place. As I argued at the opening of my inaugural lecture for the Ibn Rushd Chair:

“The world has already become, whether for good or for bad, one small village in which no independent closed culture, if there is any, can survive. Cultures have to negotiate, to give and take, to borrow and deliver, a phenomenon that is not new or invented in the modern context of globalization. The history of the world culture tells us that the wave of civilization was probably born somewhere around the basin of rivers, probably in black Africa, Egypt or Iraq, before it moved to Greece, then returned to the Middle East in the form of Hellenism. With the advent of Islam, a new culture emerged absorbing and reconstructing the Hellenistic as well as the Indian and Iranian cultural elements before it was handed to the Western New World via Spain and Sicily. Shall I mention here the name of the Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd, known as Averroes in the Latin milieu and the importance of his writings in constructing a synthesis of both the Aristotelian and the Islamic legacies, thus, transfusing new intellectual light to the European dark ages?” (Abu Zayd 2004b: 7).

My conclusion was the open question, with which I would also like to conclude this book:

“Are Muslims ready to rethink the Quran or not? Is it possible to consider the open options presented in the Quranic discourse and reconsider the fixed meaning presented by the classical *ulama*? In other words, how far is the reformation of Islamic thought going to develop? This question duly brings the relationship of the West and the Muslim World into the discussion. How does this relationship affect the way Muslims ‘rethink’ their own tradition to modernize their lives without relinquishing their spiritual power? I am afraid the answer is not positive, particularly in view of America’s new colonizing policy. Both the new imperial and colonial project of the United States of America and the building of ghettos in the Middle East are likely to support the most exclusive and isolating type of discourse in contemporary Islamic thought. These colonial projects give the people no option but to adapt to the hermeneutics of Islam as an ideology of resistance; the hermeneutics of the Pakistani Mawdudi, which divide the world only into two adversaries echoed in Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’. We have to be alert and to join our efforts to fight both claims and their consequences by all possible democratic means” (Abu Zayd 2004b: 62-63).





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## GLOSSARY

<b>Al-adab</b>	literature
<b>Adala</b>	justice
<b>Ahd</b>	literally ‘covenant’; in Shii terminology, it refers to the instruction on governance sent by Imam Ali to the governor of Egypt Malik al-Ashtar, in the 7th century
<b>Ahl al-hall wa al-aqd</b>	literally ‘the authority of those who have the right to make decisions, to bind and untie’; the elite <i>ulama</i>
<b>Ahl-i-Hadith</b>	a movement in India, that adhered uncritically to the full authenticity and the legal authority of <i>hadith</i> as the second divine source
<b>Ahl-i-Quran</b>	a movement in India, that opposed Ahl-i-Hadith and emphasized that the Quran is the exclusive authentic divine source while <i>hadith</i> is an auxiliary source subject to historical criticism
<b>Al-aql al-Islami</b>	Islamic reason
<b>Al-ijaz al-ilmi</b>	the belief that the Quran anticipated modern scientific theories
<b>Alim</b>	a scholar of religious knowledge
<b>Amthal</b>	allegories
<b>Aqida</b>	creed
<b>Balaghah</b>	rhetoric
<b>Batin</b>	esoteric, hidden
<b>Baya</b>	oath of mutual loyalty
<b>Dar al-harb</b>	the territory of the enemy
<b>Dar al-islam</b>	the territory of Islam
<b>Dar al-Nadwa</b>	the name of the place of congress in Mecca before Islam
<b>Din al-islah</b>	religion of reformation/innovation
<b>Fann al-qawl</b>	the art of discourse
<b>Faqih (pl. fuqaha)</b>	jurist, legal scholar
<b>Fiqh</b>	Islamic law
<b>Gharbzade</b>	beaten by the West
<b>Golongan Karya</b>	literally: functional groups; Indonesian political party
<b>Hadd (pl. hudud)</b>	Quranic penalty for fornication, robbery, causing social disorder, or killing
<b>Halal</b>	allowed, legal
<b>Haqiqah</b>	Truth attained by spiritual exercise leading to the vision of reality
<b>Haram</b>	forbidden, illegal
<b>Haramayn</b>	the two sanctuaries, Kaba in Mecca and the Prophet’s shrine in Medina
<b>Hibah</b>	bequest given by the owner as a gift to some of his legal heirs
<b>Hirabah</b>	social disorder
<b>Hudud</b>	see: hadd
<b>Ibadat</b>	obligatory religious rites such as the five prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, pilgrimage to Mecca, etc.
<b>Ihya</b>	revivalism
<b>Ijaz</b>	inimitability



<b>Ijma</b>	consensus
<b>Ijtihad</b>	personal effort in deciding a point of law
<b>Ikhwan of Najd</b>	organized militant Wahhabi movement
<b>Ilm al-kalam</b>	Islamic theology
<b>Imam</b>	leader of prayer
<b>Iman</b>	faith
<b>Islah</b>	reformation
<b>Isma</b>	freedom from sin and errors
<b>Jahiliyya</b>	paganism
<b>Jihad</b>	exerting the utmost effort intellectually (ijtihad) or physically (fighting the enemy)
<b>Jism al-qissah</b>	narrative structure
<b>Karama fardiyyah</b>	individual dignity
<b>Karama ijtimaiyyah</b>	collective and social dignity
<b>Karama siyasiyah</b>	political dignity
<b>Khilafa</b>	Caliphate
<b>Kuffar</b>	infidels
<b>Luzum</b>	implication
<b>Mahram</b>	a relative (husband, brother, father, etc.)
<b>Majlis</b>	assembly
<b>Al-Mana</b>	the meaning
<b>Maqasid</b>	essential divine intention
<b>Mashruta</b>	name given to denote 'constitution' in the early 20th century
<b>Mihna</b>	inquisition
<b>Muamlat</b>	social affairs
<b>Mubhamat</b>	unmentioned, vague elements
<b>Mufti</b>	religious councillor
<b>Musawah</b>	egalitarianism, equality
<b>Mushaf</b>	the volume of the Quran
<b>Mutashabihat</b>	the ambiguous
<b>Nahw</b>	grammar
<b>Nizam</b>	order
<b>Nushuz</b>	disobedience or rebellion
<b>Pancasila</b>	Indonesian state ideology based on five pillars
<b>Pesantren</b>	Islamic boarding school
<b>Qatl</b>	killing
<b>Qiwama</b>	male responsibility towards females (understood as superiority)
<b>Qiyas</b>	the application of rational syllogisms, inferring a rule for a given case not mentioned in the Quran or the Sunna via an analogy with a similar established rule
<b>Raj</b>	rule (in India)
<b>Sahaba</b>	companions of the Prophet
<b>Al-Salaf</b>	devout ancestors
<b>Salafiyya</b>	traditionalism
<b>Sariqah</b>	robbery
<b>Shafii</b>	adherent of the principle of the school of law initiated by the Imam

<b>Sharia</b>	Islamic law
<b>Shirk</b>	polytheism
<b>Shara</b>	consultation, agreement on differences
<b>Sirah</b>	life of the Prophet
<b>Sufi</b>	mystic, mystical
<b>Sufism</b>	mysticism
<b>Sunna</b>	verbal and practical traditions related to the Prophet
<b>Tafsir</b>	Quranic interpretation
<b>Tajdid</b>	renaissance
<b>Taqlid</b>	uncritical adherence to opinions of the ulama of the classical schools of law
<b>Taqwa</b>	fear of God
<b>Tawhid</b>	pure islamic monotheism, God's oneness
<b>Ulama</b>	community of scholars
<b>Ulum al-Quran</b>	the classical sciences of the Quran
<b>Ummah</b>	community of all muslims
<b>Usul al-fiqh</b>	jurisprudence
<b>Wahy</b>	the communicative process between God and the Prophet Muhammad
<b>Zahir</b>	exoteric, apparent, as compared to esoteric or hidden
<b>Zina</b>	fornication