

republicanism

Republicanism is a relatively new term in Islamic philosophical discourse. The idea of a representative government resembling what today is called a republic (*jumhūrīyya*) first appeared in 19th- and 20th-century Islamic thought. The term “republic” was first used to refer to a Muslim-majority country with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1922–23.

Muslim thinkers who argue in favor of republicanism as a preferred political system justify this relatively new idea with reference to classical Islamic sources and doctrines. The most important of these doctrines is the Qur’anic principle of *shūrā* (consultation). Sura 42 of the Qur’an, called al-Shura, encourages mutual consultation. Elsewhere in the Qur’an (3:159), Muhammad is urged to consult with the members of his community (in spite of their faults) when making important decisions. This principle of consultation has become a primary justification for the arguments of prerepublican Muslims.

Early proponents of republican government in Muslim-majority countries included the Young Ottomans, who operated in Turkey in the late 19th century. One of their most common strategies was to demonstrate support for more democratic forms of government in Islamic teaching by identifying parallels between Qur’anic teachings and the terms familiar to liberal political discourse. Namik Kemal (1840–88) was a member of the Young Ottomans who argued that the principle of *shūrā* could be used to justify representative forms of government. Another early supporter of republican principles was Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905), who argued that consultation is crucial for a just government, as it provides individual rulers with access to the greater intelligence that comes from the collective community. Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935) was more explicitly republican in his adoption of the principle of *shūrā*. Rida proposed a group of representatives of the general population to choose, consult with, and have the power to remove the ruler. Rida argued that this model was fully compatible with the traditional Islamic caliphate, as the caliph could benefit from consultation with community representatives and Muslim jurists, so long as their advice did not contradict Qur’anic teachings.

The rise of republican discourse among Muslim thinkers was also connected to Arab nationalist and Pan-Islamic movements. Afghani (1838–97), a major figure in the history of Pan-Islamism and of modern Islamic thought more generally, argued that Muslims could seek truth in both revelation and reason. Afghani argued that a revival of Islam, uniting all Muslims in one community, would include a revival of reason as a source of guidance and also of more representative forms of government. Rida also argued strongly in favor of a united Islamic community; the collective intelligence of the Muslim community as a whole would far outweigh any national grouping.

Many contemporary Islamic countries are called republics, including Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Indonesia, among others. In 1956, Pakistan was the first country to adopt the title of “Islamic

Republic,” which subsequently was used by many other nations including the Shi’i-dominated Islamic Republic of Iran, established in 1979, and the post-Taliban Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The legal structures of these countries are characterized by a high degree of variety, demonstrating the wide array of possibilities that can be captured by republicanism in the Islamic context.

See also ‘Abduh, Muhammad (1849–1905); al-Afghani, Jamal al-Din (1838–97); democracy; elections; Rida, Muhammad Rashid (1865–1935)

Further Reading

Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*, 2001; Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 1982; Sylvia G. Haim, ed., *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology*, 1962; Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida*, 1966.

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revival and reform

Revival and reform, *tajdīd* and *iṣlāh*, are terms widely disseminated across a range of genres in Muslim literature. They are found in commentaries of prophetic traditions, political discourses, debates about shari‘a, and the integrity of learning and scholarship. Often these key words are rhetorically invoked in exhortations of moral awakening in order to advance a Muslim social and political gospel. Over time, these terms have been used together to represent a concept that links newness and creativity (renewal/revival) to wholeness and integrity (*iṣlāh*, reform). Whether the “renewal and reform” is aimed at the collective or the individual or both, the discourse of revival and reform addresses stability and change, the mutable and immutable in Muslim thought. In this larger semantic framework, two things loom large: political theology and the integrity of the learned tradition. Renewal and revival (*tajdīd*) stem from the root *j-d-d*, to make new, to innovate, to refresh and resuscitate. One may think of reform as a discourse of improvement, recovery, and healing. Indeed, *iṣlāh* (repair) is derived from the Arabic root *ṣ-l-h*, which means to mend, restore, and improve.

Plain readings of the proof texts suggest that renewal will not only resuscitate the body politic of both community and society but also heal and restore the brokenness of the moral order. This restorative aspect made this conceptual category attractive and appealing to all kinds of public actors who advanced a political, spiritual, and intellectual agenda for the betterment of both individuals and society.

The key report attributed to the Prophet Muhammad on the question of renewal states, “Indeed, at the beginning of every century God dispatches to this confessional community (*umma*) a person who will renew its *dīn*—salvation practices (religion).” Another

report on the topic says, “God shows benevolence to the people who are part of His order of *dīn* at the beginning of every century by dispatching a man from my family who will clarify to them matters related to their salvation practices (*dīn*).”

Paradox, however, lies at the heart of the renewal-reform concept. A countervailing concept, called illicit innovation (*bid'ā*), appears to ascribe dire consequences to expressions of newness and creativity. Generally, the prophetic statement “all innovation leads to misguidance” is understood to suggest that innovation in matters of *dīn* were forbidden. Thus alterations to normative standards of behavior (*sunna*) as well as those concepts associated with these normative practices were viewed as an egregious disruption of the paradigm of salvation. Even supplementing or altering the practices of *dīn*, without reference to the broader purposes of the Islamic ethics (*shari'a*), was frowned upon. Over time new paradigmatic shifts occurred that tolerated alteration to the practices of *dīn*, provided that they cohered with the overall goals of the *shari'a*. The tension generated by the enthusiasm to promote renewal-reform, on the one hand, and the proscription of illicit innovation in matters of *dīn*, on the other, required some explanation. The two conceptual categories were not polarities but rather mutually constitutive. Renewal and reform was a providential promise for the continued betterment of God's approved faith community. This forward-looking momentum was sustained by traditions attributed to the Prophet, which said, “The parable of my community is like that of rain. It is not known whether the best part is when it begins to rain or when it ends.” Twelver Shi'i Islam has a strong messianic dimension in the expectation of the return of the political-spiritual leadership of the imam who went into occultation, but it has no tradition of centennial renewal. Sunni Islam, however, rooted its notion of perpetual low-key messianism in the idea of centennial renewal. Coupled with the sentiment of a melancholic exilic framework (namely, “true” Islam's estrangement in the world), this cluster of concepts constituted Sunni Islam's political theology.

Political theology, in the words of contemporary theorist Jan Assmann, is the “ever-changing relationships between political community and religious order, in short, between power [or authority: *Herrschaft*] and salvation [*Heil*].” Muslim thinkers such as Mawardi articulated a similar idea somewhat differently through the prism of leadership and governance: “Leadership (*imāma*) was designed in order to succeed the role of prophecy by protecting the order of salvation (*dīn*) and managing the affairs of the world.” There was a conjunction of the religious order and the political order for these Muslim thinkers, too. But what made Muslim political theology so different from its counterpart in Christianity was that the political-theological in Islam was intimately related to the idea of prophecy. With the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the responsibility of his mission passed on to those who were designated as the guardians of the knowledge produced by prophecy, namely revelation. Since salvation was a core idea of Islam, the knowledge of practices was integral to the order of revelation. The

semi-sacrosanct character of the discursive tradition, in turn, elevated the status and power of the scholars ('*ulama'*), the mediators of the learned tradition. The learned in Islam were seen as the true heirs of prophetic charisma. Statements attributed to the Prophet suggested that the learned “were analogous to the prophets among the Israelites.” Given the equivalence between the learned and the prophets of yore, the power and authority of tradition was inseparable from Muslim political theology. And given this rather elevated status of the learned, the tradition that they managed and interpreted also acquired a certain semi-sacrosanct status.

Another way of putting this was that the Prophet in Islam had two bodies that paralleled his two primary earthly roles. The first was the Prophet's political body in his capacity as God's messenger, who established a political order that favored the transcendent good. The second was his moral body in his role as teacher of wisdom and the transcendent good (*yu'allimuhum al-kitāb wa-l-ḥikma*), whose embodied life (*sunna*) became the reference point of imitation. After Muhammad's death, the political body was continuously articulated through the concept of stewardship (*khilāfa* in Sunnism or imamate in Shi'ism), and the body of knowledge provided by the Prophet lived on in the Islamic knowledge tradition.

Reform and the Meaning of Tradition

The concept of reform was put to different uses by a range of Muslim actors and social movements. One can thus pose several questions: What do Muslims mean by revival and reform across time? What are the goals of revival and reform? Did revival and reform resonate differently over time and serve different functions at distinct periods of Muslim history?

Any conception of Muslim reform was intimately connected to tradition. To reform a tradition was to recover it, in order to rehabilitate it to its original form. If one understood tradition as a continuing moral argument that authoritatively connected a community's memory of the past to its present and future, then reform was the process of restoring that tradition, of sustaining the promise of its continued repetition and also inventing it simultaneously. Reform in Islam, therefore, did not have a singular meaning or trajectory. Modernist presumptions about reform imagined it to be progressive and incremental. To the contrary, apart from some recent modernist discourses, reform in Islam was usually mobilized to “re-form” what was already in place, to restore the original form of a practice or an idea to shield it from the specter of change and newness. Any attempt to restore an original form, however, was always vulnerable to the possibility of creating something new instead of restoring the original. Therefore reform, even when it ostensibly sought to resist change, could not escape the inherent dynamism of creativity and change.

In order for a project of reform to authorize itself, it had to identify an object of reform, a fractured object that was available and in need of healing, mending, and improvement. In that sense, reform was integral to the story of Islam from its very beginnings. Reform was in many ways at the heart of Prophet Muhammad's career.

Moreover, the divine revelation transmitted through the Prophet told a particular story of moral fracture, disintegration, and chaos about the place and time in which it was revealed. The seventh-century Arabic context, so the story went, was enveloped by the corruptions of unbelief, polytheism, and idolatry. People valorized ancestral authority over divine command, tribal customs over divinely sanctioned law. The revelation of the Qur'an, as embodied in the figure of the Prophet, intervened to mend, resolve, and reform that disorder.

The philosopher/historian Quentin Skinner wrote that certain modes of inquiry rest on what he called "a question and answer space." Skinner maintained that a proposition was only properly understood if the question that elicited an answer was properly identified and articulated. The meaning of a proposition, in other words, was relative to the question it answered and could not, as a consequence, be discovered by lifting it out of the discursive process or milieu of which it was a constitutive part. In order to conceptualize the narrative plot of Muslim reformist discourses, one must examine the nature of the questions the reformists imagined alongside the answers they provided. More precisely, the moral argument for submitting to the absolute sovereignty of the divine represented an answer to a society crippled by polytheism and idolatry. This original story of contestation between those who affirmed and detracted from divine sovereignty served as the paradigmatic narrative plot that haunted almost all subsequent moments of Muslim reform, in both the premodern and modern periods.

Indeed, the authority of any project of reform depended on its ability to establish the relevance of its own question and answer space within the context of the Prophet's time. Reform then emerged as the trope of reenacting the narrative drama of prophetic time in a new context or present. Such instances of narrative "translation" populate the intellectual history of premodern Islam.

Ibn Khaldun: History and Change

In his magnum opus, the *Muqaddima* (Prolegomena), the historian and polymath Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) demonstrated that apocalyptic narratives in the prophetic traditions were by and large not reliable. Often the predictions made about the end times in the prophetic traditions were of a political character. Reports predicted the political fate of pious and impious rulers and the rise and fall of dynasties with great specificity and detail. Ibn Khaldun treated many of these reports as spurious. He used his skills as a historiographer of the hadith literature to show that some of the material recorded in the books of prognostications (*malāḥim*) were either weak reports or tied to the sectarian conflicts endemic to early Islam.

Acutely aware that many of these discourses were constructed, Ibn Khaldun then examined some of the narratives that explained the messianic coming of the guide or Mahdi before the apocalypse. Often these narratives, he stated, were deeply coded with political agendas that gave power to those who wielded them: "The time, the person, place, everything is indicated in these many spurious and arbitrary proofs. Then the time passes without a trace of the

predictions coming true. Then they fabricate another narrative replete with linguistic equivocations, along with imaginary and astrological claims!" The idea of the imminent advent of a person who would renew both the moral values of the faith community (*aḥkām al-milla*) and the principles of truth (*marāsim al-ḥaqq*) was prevalent among his Sufi contemporaries, Ibn Khaldun wrote. He claimed to have been in touch with relatives of some saintly figures who expected the arrival of such a renewer at the beginning of the eighth Islamic century, corresponding to the 14th century on the Gregorian calendar. Ibn Khaldun did not cite any authority, such as a prophetic report about the centennial renewer from the collection of Abu Dawud, a collection with which he was familiar. Rather, Ibn Khaldun implied that such activities of renewal were part of the practice of the Sufis. He reminded his readers that charismatic authority on its own was insufficient to gain power. One needed something more fundamental in order to institutionalize change: hegemonic power. He explicitly stated, "No religious or political propaganda can be successful, unless hegemonic power (*shawka 'aṣabiyya*) prevail in order to support such religious and political aspirations and to defend them against adversaries until God's will materializes in these matters." Central to Ibn Khaldun's theory for any religious or political transformation to successfully occur was the need to be in a position to wield what he called group solidarity (*'aṣabiyya*): in other words, the acquisition of hegemonic power was necessary in order to make things happen. Any religious call or political mission had to be backed up by a form of social solidarity that became the basis and vehicle for the transmission of ideas.

Religion, in Ibn Khaldun's view, played a central role in leavening the hegemonic political power he regarded as fundamental to social organization. Political authority, what he called royal authority, needed some kind of compelling appeal that was provided by religion, which held people together. In fact, one might say that Ibn Khaldun used the notion of religion in the sense of an ideology. Arabs in their state of nature were uncontrollable, he said, and their traits were tailor-made for anarchy and the ruin of civilization. Then something transformative happened that rendered them capable of governance. That elixir, in his view, was *dīn*, a set of practices and behaviors central to salvation, which transformed the community that adopted it. He described the way *dīn* shaped both the individual subject and the community attached to it. Inspired by a Qur'anic expression of *sibghat Allāh* (the color of God), Ibn Khaldun freely used the expression *sibgha dīniyya* (religious coloration) to describe the deep transforming experience a people derived from prophecy or from their engagement with religion. "Arabs are by nature remote from political leadership," he said. "They attain power only once their nature has undergone a complete transformation under the influence of some religious coloring that wipes out all such [negative qualities] and causes the Arabs to have a restraining influence on themselves."

Even though Ibn Khaldun did not give much weight to prophetic materials, he was aware of the potential and limits of social reform based on religion. He was aware of reform initiatives taken

by figures in North Africa whose theopolitical platform was to propagate the truth and reestablish the prophetic traditions. Ideally, such changes required the moral correction of humanity (*iṣlāḥ al-khalq*), but often such efforts, he claimed, resulted in superficial changes. The rhetorical keystone of the reform initiatives was to connect people to the sunna of the Prophet Muhammad and to instruct them to desist from living a life of sin, he said. The rate of successful change in some of the folk he had observed, he admitted, was limited. Some merely desisted from a life of highway robbery and brigandage without really changing their conduct when they adopted a religious ethic. While such cessation of sin was by all accounts noteworthy, Ibn Khaldun's larger point was that internalizing a religious ethic required additional education. Merely raising the standard of the sunna and rooting out the wrongs were not sufficient.

Premodern Imaginaries of Reform

The sunna played a key role in the earliest discourses on renewal and the healing of the faith community. A report in the book of Abu Dawud stated, "Indeed, God deposes to this faith community (*umma*) at the beginning of every century one who will renew its salvific practices (*dīn*)." This pithy statement captured the redemptive utopia of Islam and also structured its sense of history. Not only did providence play an important role in the self-understanding of the faith community, human agency was explicitly affirmed in the renewal process. Furthermore, temporality and human agency were inseparable, while Islam as a faith was equipped with a reformist gospel. In other words, Islam as a discursive project was a human-God partnership or covenant. In order to keep the faith community vibrant and to render it temporally relevant, it would require a regular process of renewal—but the nature of this process and the spheres in which it would take place were points of contention among Muslims.

Given that the idea of revival and reform animated the Muslim moral and political imagination from a very early period, it also produced an illustrious genealogy of actors and players who had occupied the role of "renewer(s) of the age." The career of the jurist and eponymous founder of the Shafi'i school of Sunni law, Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafi'i (d. 820), was one such example. Shafi'i's project of reform was animated by his desire to fashion the model of the Prophet into a coherent, universal, and consistent object of knowledge. Shafi'i's offer of a system and a method to retrieve the epistemological body of the Prophet—namely, the sunna—catapulted him into prominence as a centennial renewer (*mujaddid*). His principal intervention was to introduce a hermeneutical understanding to the prophetic reports (hadith) and to end the reign of crass literalism perpetrated by the partisans of hadith. Moreover, he sought to counter the unbridled rational opinion advanced by the advocates of rationality—namely, the Hanafi scholars of Iraq. Shafi'i's dissatisfaction was directed at what he perceived to be the potential ethical chaos that might result from a plurality of models or bodies of the Prophet. The central dilemma that Shafi'i sought to address was this: how must a community

affirm and embody the memory of the Prophet's model in a world that was becoming more and more distant from that prophetic past? Fashioning an answer to this question was central to multiple projects of reform, revival, and ethics in Islam. Moreover, with the movement of time, this question became increasingly pressing, and it engaged several Muslim scholars in the generation following the foundational architects of Islamic law and moral reasoning such as Shafi'i. Among the Shafi'is, Ibn al-Surayj (d. 918), Juwayni (d. 1085), and Ghazali (d. 1111) all became known as centennial renewers for their labors in recasting the body of knowledge in the Muslim tradition.

An excellent illustration of this trend can be found in the reformist project of Ibrahim al-Shatibi (d. 1388), the 14th-century Andalusian jurist aligned with the Maliki School of law. If Shafi'i's signature achievement was to systematize the knowledge of prophetic norms, then for Shatibi it was the elucidation of the underlying objectives that sustained the philosophical and doctrinal dimensions of Islamic law. Shatibi's most meticulous treatment of this project was found in his well-known magnum opus *al-Muwafaqat* (Concordances), although almost all his works were inspired by this central theme in some way.

Shatibi's conception of reform was driven by his attempt to align the practical implementation of law to its moral foundations. He argued that divine law could not be divorced from a larger program of ethics. For Shatibi, divine revelation was not a composite of haphazard discourses that lacked any cause or intentionality. On the contrary, revelation and the order that it generated were grounded in certain indispensable deeper objectives (*maqāṣid*), such as the safeguarding of life, property, salvational potentiality, intellect, and lineage. When law became separated from these objectives, Shatibi argued, it ceased to serve the welfare of the people for whom it was intended. In that situation, law no longer performed its primary purpose, to serve human interests in both this life and the next. Shatibi elaborated on this principle in his work that is now known as the discourse on the "objective-driven understanding of law and jurisprudence" (*al-fiqh al-maqāṣidī*). At the heart of Shatibi's legal reform, as exemplified in the category "objectives of the law," was his desire to establish a correlation between the values attached to particular practices and the higher ethical objectives that those values were supposed to foster and fulfill. Shatibi perhaps most emphatically articulated the foundational premise that informed his understanding of reform in Islam when he wrote, "[Divinely revealed] laws have all been established to preserve human beings' interests both in this life and the life to come." He further elaborated this principle when he said, "Normative rulings are intended to realize the welfare [of a community] and to repel harm and corruption. These, then [i.e., the realization of welfare and the repelling of harm], are the desired effects of normativity." To be engaged in reform signified, for Shatibi, the labor of preserving the synchronicity between the normative limits of the law and the ethical objectives that those limits were intended to secure. In other words, Shatibi sought to protect the marriage between law and ethics in Islam from separation or divorce.

But what kind of narrative about the past's relationship to the present (and the future) enabled the urgency of such agendas of moral reform? Shatibi provided some clues in his highly poignant introduction to his most extensive work on the concept of heretical innovation (*bid'a*), *al-I'tisam* (The adhering). Here Shatibi told a particular story about the tension produced by the polarities of normativity versus heresy in Islam through a narrative about becoming estranged from the world. Shatibi's prophetic report has a melancholic mood. "Islam began as a stranger and will return as a stranger like it began, so blessed were the strangers." Shatibi narrated his own struggles against the heretical innovations prevalent in his time, such as offering a benediction (*du'a*) after formal prayers, and his resultant marginalization from the mainstream of his society. His suffering was unmistakably similar to the Prophet Muhammad's estrangement from society in the early years of his mission as God's messenger. In confronting heresy and adhering to the sanctioned path, according to Shatibi, one also became estranged from the sinful society.

In his political and theological writings in the 14th century, Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) used the hadith about the coming of a centennial renewer as a sign of the promised awakening and renewal of the *dīn* in two slightly different contexts. In a letter to the Crusader leader of Cyprus, he explained the virtues of Islam and commented on a number of practices and recent experiences of the Muslims. The Mamluk sultans, he explained, routed the Mongols, who had declared their loyalty to Islam but then reneged in their conduct and obstinate pagan beliefs. In terms of the providential promise, Ibn Taymiyya stated, God sent the "armies of God" in the shape of the Mamluks in order to protect the community of Muslims from sure destruction. In this instance he invoked the hadith about awakening and renewal after the Muslim political entity was saved from destruction at the hands of enemies. In another citation of the same hadith, Ibn Taymiyya talked about messianic times, when Islam would become estranged from the world for some time until it was announced again to the world. Under such conditions, according to the authority of another hadith report, the true people of faith would stand up for the truth, fearless of the consequences and suffering they might endure at the hands of their adversaries. Ibn Taymiyya then cited the hadith that promised the revival of Islam in every century, creating an association between the estrangement of Islam and the parallel awakening and renewal. In other words, the symbolism of the rise and fall or the decline and renewal of Islam as a faith community was not absent from the historical narrative of Muslim thinkers themselves.

The tradition of renewal was connected to one of the central functions of prophecy: to share divine wisdom with humanity. Often the prophetic report about renewal of religion was connected to the traditions of learning and the discursive practices of Islam. Hence the learned of Islamdom were on par, in terms of function and service rendered, with the prophets of the children of Israel.

All commentaries on the centennial renewal report insisted that the primary function of the act of renewal was to ensure that the

sunna displaced the heretical innovations (*bid'a*) that had superseded it in social practices and customs. Semantically, the concept of sunna was a continuation of the pre-Islamic sensibility or custom. After the advent of Islam, all customs pointed toward monotheism. Yet the sunna was a serious element of continuity in the Muslim community, for whatever was true and just was embodied in the sunna. As Ignaz Goldziher described the sunna in relation to the Arabs, "The sunna was their law and their sacra." Sunna could be understood as tradition, provided the latter also signified a strong sense of obligation. So when the sunna was tied to the person and identity of the Prophet Muhammad as the lawgiver and moral exemplar for Muslims, it also signified the completion of an ideal. As an ideal, the sunna represented how Muslims felt about the Prophet Muhammad. Imitating Muhammad was thus an essential part of proper Islamic living to simulate the representative feelings for the charismatic authority. Since the sunna became the accepted model of proper living, displacing the sunna was a sure sign of delinquency and signaled an intent to disavow the life practices ushered in by Islam.

Yet Muslim jurist-theologians quickly realized that idealizing the sunna as a cultural phenomenon was not practical. The sunna had to be sifted from the amalgam of reports gathered over time, then understood, rationalized, and turned into an interpretive logic as well as a charismatic reference point. One outcome was *fiqh*, literally the task of understanding the statements of the sunna and the Qur'an to constitute the core teachings of Muslim practice. Simultaneously, Islam's scriptural statements had to be understood in the light of changing times. This became one of the most challenging tasks for Muslims over the centuries and became especially acute in the rapidly changing historical period of modernity.

Reform in Modernity

It is now well accepted among scholars of Islam that tradition and modernity are not inherently opposed. Instead of approaching tradition as a field of discourses, types of knowledge, and norms that became irrelevant or outdated in the wake of modernity, it is more accurate to approach tradition as a continuing moral argument that has undergone particular shifts and transformations in new political and institutional conditions. Indeed, it might be most accurate to think of modernity also as a particular kind of tradition with its own expectations, sensibilities, and dreams of a good life. Some characteristics of modernity include the valorization of a "rational" subject unencumbered by the burden of myth and superstition, a renewed emphasis on the capacity of the individual to attain knowledge, and the articulation of a political theology that resists hierarchies and that champions the promise of a radically egalitarian ethos. Western colonialism transformed the discursive terrain in which Muslim actors and discourses could advance their projects of reform. Indeed, the career of the Muslim reform tradition also transformed in dramatic ways while it confronted the new conceptual and discursive terrain of Western colonial modernity. Most significantly, the modern episode in the tradition of Muslim reform took place in a postimperial context, when Muslim political

power in various parts of the world, from the late 18th century onward, either had collapsed or was steadily dwindling. But ironically, this loss of political power served as a major catalyst for the intensification of intellectual activity among reform-minded Muslim scholars. Contrary to a rise-and-fall model of history that equated political loss to intellectual decline, the reformist tradition in Islam showcased a remarkable degree of intellectual fermentation during periods of political decline. Various reformist movements in such regions as Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia attest to this trend.

A hallmark of the Muslim reform tradition in the modern era was a renewed emphasis on protecting the absoluteness of divine sovereignty not only as an incontrovertible theological dogma but also as a moral imperative in everyday life. Several devotional practices, such as seeking the intercession of the Prophet and saints, visiting shrines of deceased saints in order to seek redemptive intercession, and attending birth and death ceremonies of charismatic pious figures, all emerged as objects of intense polemics and contestations. The legitimacy of these practices had been debated before the modern period: even in the premodern era, the problem of how a community should guard divine sovereignty from all potential human competitors produced much debate and differences among Muslim scholars. The political and institutional conditions in which these battles were fought in modern times, however, had almost entirely changed. There were two main traditions or thought styles that most decisively shaped the contours of Muslim reformist thought in the modern era. Broadly conceived, these traditions can be called Muslim modernism and Muslim maximalism, or what is generally known as the Salafi tradition. Although the sources of knowledge that informed these two traditions were different, the recipe for religious and social reform offered by the custodians of these traditions shared certain key ingredients.

Perhaps most significantly, each placed a renewed emphasis on the Qur'an and the sunna as the only authentic sources of religious practice. They offered a scathing critique of devotional and popular practices that threatened divine sovereignty. There were perhaps two defining features of Muslim reformist thought in modernity. Remarkably, on these two foundational points, Muslim modernist and Salafi thinkers seem to be in total agreement. The famous 20th-century Indian poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1939) was unambiguous in his chastisement of a worldview that placed antinomian mysticism above a commitment to treating the social and moral ills of this world. Iqbal reminded his readers in his classic *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* that, after having received ultimate proximity with the divine during his famous ascension, the Prophet chose to return to this world. What the modern Muslim needed, Iqbal pleaded, was precisely this spirit of return to the world in order to address its challenges. Such a spirit was only possible, Iqbal argued, with an attitude that was inspired by the revolutionary ethos of the Qur'an. The reinvigoration of the self, the elevation of the self, required a renewed emphasis on the primacy of the Qur'an as the foundational source of Islamic practice. If such a project of reform required that certain nonessential rituals

and customary conventions be jettisoned in order to serve moral and social change, then Iqbal was prepared to sacrifice them. "This one prostration which you consider to be a burden, relieves a person of a thousand other prostrations," Iqbal famously wrote. Iqbal's view, shared by several other Muslim modernists of his generation, emphasized transcendence articulated in a rationally grounded idiom. The way to confront the crisis of meaning caused by Western modernity, colonialism, and the larger processes of industrial capitalism was to recover that spirit of submission to a transcendent authority that had enabled Islam to emerge as a revolutionary ideological force at its beginnings.

Similarly, the famous 19th-century Egyptian reformer Muhammad 'Abduh's (d. 1905) conception of reform focused on retrieving an egalitarian ethos of a transcendent authority that for him had become corrupted by an overweening degree of dependence on hierarchies of human authority. As he stated most clearly in his well-known work *Risalat al-Tawhid* (The epistle on unity), his primary objective was "freeing the minds of Muslims from the chains of belief in authority because God has not created humankind in order to be led by a halter." 'Abduh's primary target was the principle of conforming to canonical authority (*taqlid*), which, in his view, had vitiated the capacity of the ordinary believer to apply his reason and intellect in interpreting the foundational sources of religion. Unlike Iqbal, 'Abduh was trained in the traditional canonical sources of law at the prestigious Azhar University in Cairo. Despite, or perhaps because of, his traditional training, however, 'Abduh was convinced that in order to challenge the looming threat of Westernization (*taghrīb*) and colonialism with any integrity, it was imperative to reject any practice that did not value rational inquiry over dogmatic following, egalitarianism over submission to authority.

The Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi (d. 1973), building on the intellectual threads spun by Afghani, 'Abduh, and Iqbal, offered a critique of both Salafist and modernist reform projects. Bennabi lamented that the drive of Salafist reformism adopted a retrograde character, directing its intellectual energies to the past and providing imprints and templates that were "incompatible with the exigencies of the present and the future." The modernist reformers, he complained, uncritically adopted European ideas; they were obsessed with how they could be acquired but lacked the curiosity to know "how they were created." What Bennabi found lacking in all Muslim reformist thought was the absence of a doctrine of culture. Without developing a sense of culture, he believed that all "Iṣlāḥism [reformism] propagates a complacent symbolism that dreams of transforming the condition of life by communicating, above all, the taste for 'Muslim things' and Arab 'belles-lettres.'" The reformist movement did not know how to "transform the Muslim soul or to translate into reality the 'social function' of the religion." However, reformists were successful, he wrote, in making Muslims realize their position in the world, what he called the "secular drama." He argued that only by posing the problem of culture generally could the Islamic renaissance emerge from its embryonic state.

Apart from South Asia and the Middle East, a similar trajectory of Muslim modernist reform is found in Soviet Central Asia. In the 19th century, a small number of intellectual elites in such urban centers as Bukhara, Tashkent, and Samarqand established what came to be known as the Jadid (new) movement. At the heart of this movement was an attempt to establish the compatibility of scientific rationality and the foundational sources of Islam, mainly the Qur'an and sunna. Moreover, in ways similar to their modernist counterparts in South Asia and the Middle East, the Jadids sought to eradicate the influence of local customs, conventions, and rituals that in their view lacked a precedent in the Qur'an and sunna. Again, reform for them involved the separation of "local culture" from "authentic religion." The most crucial variable in enabling such a process of reform, for the Jadids, was education of both the religious and secular varieties. Therefore, prominent 19th- and 20th-century Jadid thinkers such as Munawwar Qari (d. 1933) and Mahmud Behbudi (d. 1919) were defiant in their call to adopt "new methods" of education in both secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. Their vision for Central Asian Muslims was unabashedly modern; the cultivation of a new civil society required discarding old myths, rituals, and superstitions and the need to embrace a rationally sound subjectivity. The enlightenment project of relegating older traditions to irrelevance seemed very real and possible to Jadid scholars like Qari and Behbudi. Their project of reform not only took place in the shadow of Soviet hegemony but also was heavily inspired by the Marxist-Communist narrative of progress and modernization in society. But they differed from the Soviet model in their belief that Islam was inherently compatible with scientific rationality. Hence they resisted the Soviet drive to completely eradicate religion from the public sphere.

Apart from these modernist discourses that emerged either as a response to or in the shadow of Western colonialism, another major trend of Muslim reform in the modern period was the maximalist or puritanical tradition, usually called Salafism. Literally, the term "Salafism" referred to the argument that only the body of norms that originated during the patristic community of the Prophet could be regarded as authoritative in Islam. In a move not all that different from Muslim modernist thinkers, puritanical reformers such as the well-known Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1787) in Arabia and the lesser-known Shah Isma'il (d. 1831) in India also argued for a return to the Qur'an and the sunna as the exclusive reservoirs for an authentic religious normativity. What distinguished these puritanical reformers from their modernist counterparts was the degree to which they conceived of reform as equivalent to guarding the absoluteness of divine sovereignty. A mindset of constant rivalry between human and divine norms was central to their social imaginaries (norms regulating social existence), much more pronounced than in modernist thinkers like Iqbal or 'Abduh. A significant part of the reform project advanced by thinkers like Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Shah Isma'il centered on such issues as the limits of prophetic intercession, the legitimacy of visiting shrines of dead saints, and the capacity of the Prophet to know the unknown, among other doctrines.

On each of these issues, their position was informed by a political theology that amplified divine sovereignty, even if that meant casting the humanity of the Prophet as a fallible subject. Theirs was a larger program to perpetuate social egalitarianism. They downplayed the Prophet's miraculous qualities and emphasized that his prophetic authority was enabled by the perfection of his humanity. Similarly, the authority of saints and other pious figures to perform such acts as interceding on behalf of sinners also had to be restrained in order to preserve a radical difference between divine and human authority. The zeal of such thinkers to guard the absoluteness of divine sovereignty not only inspired a number of important movements within Muslim reformist thought but also generated a great deal of controversy, polemics, and a fair number of rebuttals.

One of the more interesting developments was the emergence of traditionalist reform-minded scholars who inhabited seemingly antithetical genealogies of Islamic thought. On the face of it, it appeared as certain reform-minded scholars were bringing together new hybrid traditions and incommensurable discourses. Among them is Ibrahim b. al-Hasan al-Kurani, but one can also include Shah Waliullah of Delhi and also later Indian traditional scholars such as Anwar Shah Kashmiri, among others, who were strong admirers of Ibn Taymiyya and also liberally drew on, and defended, the teachings and insights of Ibn al-'Arabi. Ibn Taymiyya's salafist-nominalism combined with Ibn al-'Arabi's dizzying immanentist metaphysics would appear to be strange bedfellows. But some reform-minded scholars including the Ghumari brothers ('Abdullah and Ahmad Ghumari) of North Africa combined their reverence for the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) with their Sunni traditionalism. All this suggests that multiple logics (heterologies) were at play in certain reformist strains of thought that might be antithetical to more systematic thinkers of reform. But it might well be that these contradictions are the product of a larger modernist template in which things that appear to be antithetical can have perfect synchrony in practice.

Contemporary Debates on Reform

In late 20th-century India, the rector of the Darul Uloom of Deoband, Qari Muhammad Tayyab (d. 1988), offered a narrative of revival and reform that represented a traditional perspective of the 'ulama'. Tayyab argued that there were two means by which the path of *dīn* was providentially protected. The first was through powerful personalities who represented the preservation of *dīn*. The second was through the inner spirit of *dīn*, which naturally shielded it from any subversive threat.

Tayyab argued that human mentality changed over the duration of a century and that significant intergenerational changes had occurred. As a result, he wrote, new modes of thinking and new experiences unfolded in a progressive manner. In every generation, therefore, was a risk and a legitimate fear that the next generation of the Muslim community might jettison the imprint of the previous generation. The primary concern, Tayyab explained, was to prevent the original and traditional imprint from becoming anachronistic for

the new generation. For this reason the teachings of the faith had to be continuously explained and interpreted in the light of the new and altered mentality, and for this reason individuals were providentially deputed to the world to serve as centennial renewers.

Anwar al-Jundi (d. 2002), a prominent Egyptian advocate of revival and reform in the tradition of major reformers such as Ibn Hazm, Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn Khaldun, described each of these figures as “correctors of concepts and renewers of Islamic thought.” Each one had made a specific methodological intervention to the intellectual tradition that gave integrity to the teachings of Islam in terms of the challenges of their respective times. Ibn Hazm, said Jundi, combated the distortion produced by the overuse of analogy and paved the way back to the straightforward and plain meaning of the Qur’an. The prevalent predisposition toward blind imitation of authority (*taqlīd*) was another distortion that Ibn Hazm opposed. Ghazali chose to work in the area of education and culture, Jundi explained, and brought the spiritual and legal into a meaningful integration. At the same time, Ghazali also combated the excessive claims of philosophy and the Muslim philosophers. Ibn Taymiyya, in turn, evaluated all Islamic thought on the touchstone of the truth of the Qur’an. Whatever could not sustain the scrutiny of the Qur’an and the sunna could be discarded, according to Jundi’s reading of Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Khaldun turned against the empty verbal polemics of his day that contributed to the lack of originality in Islamic thought. Ibn Khaldun’s intervention was to give empirical observation a respectable place in the epistemological framework of religious thought, Jundi argued.

For Jundi and many advocates of reform in the modern period, the rebuttal of the idea of following ancient discursive authority of the law schools (*taqlīd*) was one of the most important rhetorical markers of the reform movement. Instead of following authority, they advocate *ijtihād*, or independent thinking. However, often *ijtihād* meant following a variety of legal opinions instead of one law school. And instead of following the canonical authority of a law school and its interpretations, in the sphere of moral teachings and ethics, the reformists sometimes resorted to plain readings derived from the Qur’an and sunna but more often fell back on the opinions of ancient schools.

The U.S./European wars in Afghanistan and Iraq against a range of Muslim groups from terrorists and militants to religious revivalists and pietists has had a major impact on the discourse of revival and reform. If certain Muslims in the 19th and 20th centuries were suspicious of the agenda of revivalism and reform as a vehicle for Westernization advanced by European colonizers, then in the early 21st century, discourses of revival and reform have become deeply politicized and polarizing within Muslim societies where some see revival and reform as a bridgehead for new crusades against Islam. For instance, after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Egyptian public intellectual Muhammad ‘Imara wrote a pamphlet titled *Religious Discourse: Between Islamic Reform and American Subversion (al-Khiṭāb al-Dīni bayna al-Tajdīd al-Islāmī wa-l-Tabdīd al-Amrikānī)*, in which he identified himself

as a protagonist of an Islamic reformist agenda. Renewal was not only a rational necessity, said ‘Imara, but also a part of the “tradition (*sunna*), necessity (*ḍarūra*) and universal rule (*qānūn*).” He argued that without renewal, the chasm between “thought (*fīkr*), ethics (*fiqh*), Islamic discourse (*al-khiṭāb al-Islāmī*),” which represent the shari’a on the one hand and the demands of societal change on the other, would only widen. ‘Imara also argued that a unifying agenda of reform was impossible, and hence diversity would be a hallmark of any such project. However, he was highly skeptical of what he called the American-financed reform projects that supported Muslim secularists, Marxists, and mercenaries, whose purpose he viewed as the replacement of Muslim religious discourse with secularism. ‘Imara’s rhetoric, however exaggerated, has gained traction in contexts where conflict with the West has reached new levels of antagonism.

‘Imara’s focus was on the disagreement within Muslim circles over the rights to and limits of reform. But ‘Imara chose a demonic rhetoric to describe his Muslim intellectual adversaries, similar to the way anthropologist Saba Mahmood charged certain Iranian and Arab Muslim thinkers of tailoring their reforms to American imperial designs. Among the targets of these critics were figures such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010), Hasan Hanafi, Khalil ‘Abd al-Karim (d. 2002), and the pivotal Iranian reformist thinker Abdolkarim Soroush, who were engaged in fairly far-reaching criticisms of traditional Muslim discursive and interpretative paradigms. ‘Imara invoked the authority of Afghani and ‘Abduh in order to distinguish genuine reform from what he suspected was the bacillus of subversive reforms. This overheated debate has echoes of early and mid-20th-century debates in Egypt, where such thinkers as Taha Husayn (d. 1973), ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Raziq (d. 1966), Qasim Amin (d. 1908), and Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah (d. 1977) were demonized as hostile and subversive elements who attempted to undermine the authentic inherited narrative of Islamic thought. One of the perpetual challenges for Muslim reformers was to know where to draw the line in the realm of ideas.

Revival and reform also became the pretext for a largely sterile but earnest debate among academics in the Western academy during the 1980s over the larger political implications of revival and reform. Fazlur Rahman, the Pakistani scholar and émigré to the United States, observed a neo-Sufi revivalist tradition that in his view combined spirituality with activism, a move away from the passive, world-denouncing, ascetic Sufism of old. While some scholars, such as John Voll, agreed with him, others, including Rex O’Fahey, Bernard Radtke, Reinhard Schulze, and Ahmad Dallal, voiced alternative viewpoints. Their fundamental disagreement with the Fazlur Rahman and Voll thesis was that it tried to explain a range of revivalist Sufi practices under a singular rubric—neo-Sufism—whereas the actual story was much more complex. Rahman and Voll’s detractors argued that Muslim intellectuals and social reform movements in the 18th century were generating revivals independent of European influences in creative and innovative ways that defied the charges of decline.

Conclusion

Revival and reform have been integral to Islam from its very beginnings. The idea of reform relates to mending a fractured present in order to generate something entirely new or to rehabilitate an original form. Whether reform seeks to renew or rehabilitate, it is always a creative and dynamic process that produces change and newness. The various projects of reform in the intellectual and social history of Islam both converged and diverged on important points. Almost all moments of reform engaged with certain authoritative discourses and bodies of knowledge such as the Qur'an, sunna, and traditions of canonical law. However, every moment of reform articulated varied points of emphasis on what reform entailed. For example, the conception of reform for premodern luminaries Ibn Khaldun and Shatibi was very different compared to later figures. Ibn Khaldun was captivated by the necessity of cultivating social solidarity, while Shatibi's concern was to synchronize the law with its fundamental objectives. Both of these thinkers engaged in what might be called reform, but the specific trajectories of reform differed significantly. Reform in Islam remains variegated, diverse, and unpredictable.

Fundamental to thinking about the question of reform in Islam is the role of memory and how that memory relates to the founder, the Prophet Muhammad, and the revelation, the Qur'an. The "body" of the Prophet, whether discursive, political, or mystical, remains a central reference point. In order for reform to be credible, however, reformers often strive to connect the memory of the past with the fractured and the always incomplete present. But a set of contentious and hotly debated questions remains. How much of the past should inform a project of reform and recovery? Can reimagining, reforming, and reviving political theology be constrained by boundaries and limits? How does the knowledge of the tradition relate and converse with modernity? Answers to these fundamental questions have varied significantly, depending on the individual agents of reform, as well as specific political, cultural, and material conditions. Therefore, in the modern period, developments such as colonialism and the eventual rise of the nation-state, the emergence of print, and the consolidation of such institutions of state building as the census all transformed the Muslim reform tradition in profound ways. These shifts in the political and institutional terrain enabled new trajectories of reform and brought into central view particular questions of authoritative debates (such as the humanity of the Prophet) with an unprecedented intensity and vigor. Like any other aspect of Islam, the Muslim reform tradition is neither monolithic nor predictable. Rather, reform in Islam is continually invested with and divested of particular meanings, knowledge, and aspirations at specific junctures in history.

See also fundamentalism; messianism; modernity

Further Reading

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EBRAHIM MOOSA AND SHERALI TAREEN

revolutions

Revolution is a transformation of the social, political, economic, or religious structures in a society, carried out, most frequently, by revolts of the less powerful or disenfranchised against ruling authorities. This transformation can occur in a single locale over a period of days or extend across a wide geographical region over a period of decades. Revolutions signal or embody a crisis of the status quo. Revolutions may involve a political crisis for existing regimes of power and authority that cannot respond effectively to challenges from external or internal actors or coalitions of actors. Sometimes revolutions are led by intellectuals, elites, military cadres, or members of the middle class, but quite often, revolutions begin at the grassroots level through the discontent of the masses or dispossessed.

Revolutions and revolutionary thinking have had a place within Islamic thought since the Prophet Muhammad first overturned the prevailing cultural, political, and religious status quo of the Arabian Peninsula by establishing new institutions of governance, law, and society in Medina in 622. The boundaries of revolution in Islam are defined, first and foremost, by Qur'anic injunctions, regardless of the ideological commitments of the various Muslim revolutionary thinkers. There is a revolutionary quality to the Qur'an itself: beyond being the direct word of God, the Qur'an offers itself as a witness to itself, as revelation and instruction unlike any other, and as reliable guidance for the purpose of establishing a righteous social and political order under the specific theological, ethical, and human framework of belief in the one God. Muslim revolutionaries throughout history have cited various verses of Islam's sacred text in order to justify and validate revolution as authentically Islamic and have rejected the admonitions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad regarding the *fitna* (trial) of rebellion against unjust rulers. According to many of these thinkers, the mission of Qur'anic revelation is to provide a revolutionary ideology, sufficient unto itself, that can transform people and free them from the shackles of unjust cultural and social practices. Modern-day Islamic revolutions