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Introduction

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THE FORCES of modernisation have brought unprecedented disruption and change to Muslim societies during the twentieth century. Indigenous to Western historical development, they largely have been perceived as alien elements in the Muslim experience, and the changes brought by them as enforced from without. Even when such changes were welcomed, Muslims' relation to the modern was rendered profoundly ambivalent by their experience of the imperialist project, with which it was inextricably linked. The old and the 'traditional' thus survived the introduction of the new and the 'modern', leading to a state of continuous tension in Muslim societies. As the relationship with the self-past became problematised and cultural dignity was compromised, Islamic thought in the twentieth century itself became a discourse of crisis.

The responses of Muslim thinkers to the challenges posed by modernity, and to its philosophical underpinnings and overwhelming effects,[1] provide one example of the ways in which adherents of the great religious traditions have dealt with modernity, and how they deal with change more generally.[2] At the heart of these responses is a struggle to define the place of the sacred and that of human reason, and the role and implications of a commitment to transcendence. In facing the inexorable forces of rationalism, liberalism and secularisation radiating from the West, Muslim thinkers have elaborated disparate responses, justified through the resort to Islamic tradition. Tradition is recruited either to legitimise change, or to defend against perceived

innovation and to preserve threatened values. Consequently, tradition itself becomes the very substance of change.[3] Reflecting the absence of any level of consensus in Islamic thought in the twentieth century, Muslim thinkers have become polarised between two extreme types. There are those who argue from a defence of tradition for a comprehensive rejection of modern Western influences, and the 'return' to a 'pure' Islamic cultural mode: this is commonly accompanied by a utilitarian stance vis-à-vis the material and technological products of modernity. Others, in contrast, start from the embrace of Western modernity (or specific contemporary frameworks or worldviews generated by it), and radically remould tradition to justify this.[4]

Late twentieth-century thinkers of the latter tendency have caught the attention of Western academic and media observers in recent years, against a backdrop dominated by the successes, failures and radicalisation of Islamist forces in the Muslim arena. While rejecting traditional Islamic thought outright as inadequate to the demands of the modern context, these thinkers also repudiate the numerous shades of Islamist formulation. They advance their own projects as appeals – and potential contributions – towards a renaissance in Islamic cultural and intellectual life, and progress and reform in the material, social and political conditions of Muslim countries. Their political ideas are often close to the heart of the liberal tradition, based on reason and values of freedom, liberty and democracy. Calling for detachment of the entire public sphere from the purview of religion, they often project the Qur'an – Islam's foundational text – as a source of general ethical guidelines, rather than the answer to all human issues. Reflecting their exposure to Western culture and intellectual life, their own approach to this text and its meanings is often informed by contemporary intellectual trends and critical methods.

A selection of such thinkers from diverse national and cultural backgrounds, and their intellectual projects, form the subject of this volume. As Muslims constitute increasingly diverse reading communities around the foundational text, projects of the kind advanced by such thinkers might be expected to multiply in coming years. Muslims thus increasingly occupy a growing variety

of cultural and intellectual settings, and participate in ever widening and diversified networks. They increasingly contribute to the global debate on the hermeneutical quest for meaning, and function as Western scholars, breaking down boundaries and assumed dichotomies.[5] This is one reason for studying these projects. At the same time, study of such projects highlights salient aspects of Islamic thought and Muslim experience in the twentieth century, especially as this moves into and is viewed from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century. Three major themes in particular are illustrated by these thinkers and their projects, and form the focus of this introductory chapter: (1) They demonstrate the continuing validity for contemporary Islamic thought of the problematic of 'Islam and the West' or 'Islam and modernity'. While these formulae may be somewhat jaded, and can be legitimately critiqued and deconstructed on many fronts,[6] they continue to capture a vital debate in Muslim thinking against the background of the long and complicated history that has bound Muslims to the West, and vice versa. While several of the thinkers studied offer responses, if only implicitly, to this problematic, their own projects at the same time illustrate a particular mode in the internalisation of Western or modern ideas and concepts in contemporary Muslim discourses. (2) These thinkers exemplify the fragmentation and diffusion of intellectual authority in contemporary Muslim societies. They reflect the expanding multiplicity of voices and unprecedented uncertainty concerning who speaks for Islam, engendered by the cumulative impact of modernisation on traditional concepts and modes of intellectual authority. (3) These projects highlight the absence of consensus concerning the purpose and methods of Islamic reform and its legitimate boundaries. Several of the thinkers studied offer responses, again at times implicitly, to this fundamental question, and it is in this context specifically that their views concerning the Qur'an come into play. In this respect, their projects also illustrate the continued centrality of the Qur'an (and discourses constructed on its basis) to contemporary Muslim debates and politics, as the ultimate legitimising text of the Islamic tradition.

Before considering these themes in turn, as with all collected works observations concerning the approach of this volume and associated questions are in order.

Reflections on approach and some key questions

Any discussion of Muslim intellectual life in the twentieth century must take into account the defining context of modernisation, with its dislocating effects on structural, economic, societal, political and cultural realities in Muslim countries. Without these profound transformations, the unparalleled change on every front, and the problems this has generated, the projects studied here would hardly have been possible, and there is much to be gained from viewing them as products of these changes. They form an intrinsic part of the evolving Muslim discursive arena, shaped by the nation-state and its associated discourses, colonial and post-colonial trends, the Islamic *sahwa* (revival) and its impacts, and processes of globalisation.

Reflecting this, the present volume eschews an exclusively textually based approach, aspiring to strike a balance between analysis of the main texts and ideas studied on the one hand and exploration of their multiple contexts on the other. Contributing authors were encouraged to take into consideration thinkers' personal and professional trajectories, and to examine thinkers and texts within the contexts of their origination and development, paying particular attention to national and ideological dimensions. The essays collected here ultimately reflect their authors' own preferences and interests, however, and the degree of attention to contextual matters hence varies widely from one to another. Nevertheless, it remains an essential dimension in the attempt to position the thinkers studied, to understand what drives them to produce their texts, and to illuminate reactions to these. For example, certain of these thinkers directly or implicitly critique Muslim regimes for their privileging of Islamists and their capitulation to Islamist demands in a bid to pre-empt their effectiveness as vehicles of dissent. They also criticise these regimes for their failure to foster democracy, nurture civil society, or respect

human rights. Official postures concerning their texts (and concerning attacks on these by other actors) must thus be understood in terms of the endeavour by states to manage both Islamist pressures and the force of a public opinion, especially among younger generations, considerably under the sway of Islamist ideas.

Out of further consideration for the multiplicity and complexity of the contexts of their production, the present volume also aspires to avoid as far as possible the imposition of a single preconstituted category or label on the projects studied. Thinkers studied here engage in widely scattered fields of activity. Were they to be asked many, if not all, might not wish to identify themselves with some or all of the others. Subsuming them under a single label would obscure their diversity and distort their individuality, each of which forms a significant dimension of this study.[7] Underlining this, they are approached as individual voices in specific contexts: as ways of articulating a human existence in a given society and culture under a particular political system, and in the context of collective struggles engaged therein.[8] Their provenance within Muslim societies unites them.[9] They also share a role as modern intellectuals,[10] who are products of a modern 'secular' education or combine elements of this with aspects of 'traditional' Islamic learning. The place of the Qur'an and its meanings for contemporary Muslim life forms a prominent theme in their texts. Situated within a general concern with reform and an interest in intellectual modernity, it can be described as a unifying focus of their projects. Nonetheless, the diverse contexts and specific concerns of these thinkers and their consumption patterns as readers exposed to disparate intellectual influences and spanning different generations are clearly reflected in their texts, and are highlighted here.

Contributing authors were encouraged to explore perceptions of thinkers and texts, and their reception within various contexts and specific audiences, especially the Muslim one (in the specific national-regional-linguistic context of the thinker concerned and beyond this), and the 'Western' one. The reactions of Muslim audiences illuminate struggles in Muslim societies reflected in the

discursive arena, and point to their general intellectual and cultural milieux. The reception of these projects among Western audiences illustrates some contemporary Western attitudes towards Muslim societies, and expectations regarding their future in a globalising world. To establish a precise profile of patterns of consumption of these texts among these two audience types, to quantify them or to map their distribution is a tall order. However, impressionistic comments concerning their reception among Muslim and Western audiences are possible as a first step toward exploring the sociology of this literature. Many Muslims familiar with certain of these thinkers dismiss them outright, deeming them unqualified to contribute to the debates in which they engage. Some are condemned for failing to respect the historical Muslim consensus concerning issues fundamental to the Islamic religion, and the legacy of Islamic scholarship that expresses it. Others are accused of violating the sacred, and working to destroy 'Islam' from within. A common Muslim view emphasises how marginal certain of these projects are in contemporary Muslim contexts, pointing to their failure to resonate with Muslim concerns and needs. In this view, such projects have no intrinsic value, and any interest in them derives from the ideological contexts of their production exclusively. A perception of the small circulation of their texts is contrasted with the widespread circulation enjoyed by other twentieth-century works on Qur'anic meaning for the modern world.[11] Some Muslims might agree to disagree on specific aspects of these projects, nevertheless seeing in them a potentially valuable contribution to illuminating the future development of Muslim culture and society, whether internally or in relation to significant others. Yet others embrace certain of these projects unreservedly. Such positive Muslim evaluations can be confined to specific constituencies, such as women, the youth, and those who are Western-educated,[12] or educated to a high level in modern educational institutions in Muslim countries. In comparison with competing Islamic formulations, however, it is fair to say that the appeal of these projects among Muslim circles in general appears to be confined to a relatively small minority.

In contrast with a limited and perhaps overwhelmingly unreceptive Muslim response, there is evidence of great interest in some of these projects in European and American circles. University courses devoted to them are being introduced and some of the thinkers behind them have been enthusiastically hosted and adopted. This raises a number of questions. What role have Western academia and media played in promoting these thinkers? Who benefits from the sale of their texts and who controls the means of their production? How has a Western involvement impacted on Muslim perceptions of them? Has Western interest in them bestowed an arbitrary and artificial weight on projects with little inherent intellectual substance when measured against historical Islamic thought and its towering figures? What assumptions about these thinkers' self-identities lie behind their projects? How do they wish to be received, and by whom: for whom are they writing? What does a lack of receptivity to some of these texts reveal about many Muslims' orientations and concerns during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries? What is revealed by an exaggerated Western interest in projects that are unrepresentative of more influential discursive interpretations in contemporary Islamic thought? Specifically, what does this interest reveal about Western attitudes towards Muslim societies, or the ideological leanings of Western scholars of Muslim societies, Islamic civilisation and culture?[13] Does this interest manifest an innocent Western yearning for a Muslim 'other' whose values resonate closely with those of the self? It should not be forgotten in this regard that perceptions of a long-standing Western interest in dissident voices are common in Muslim societies. Conversely, what do Muslim attitudes towards these projects reveal concerning perceptions of the Western 'other' as internalised in the self-world and the formulation of its religious discourses?

While it is not possible to answer all of these questions here, it is important to draw attention to the fact that neutrality is ultimately unattainable in any analysis (including what follows), given that every context of analysis brings its own horizons, special concerns and biases. The deconstruction of underlying methodological

expectations, presuppositions and assumptions in any attempt to assess their projects is further necessitated by the fact that several of the thinkers studied here represent marginal voices. Their simultaneous if implicit critique both of regimes and Islamists places them in a particularly vulnerable position, while they themselves are often rejected by Islamists, Islamic traditionalists and Islamic officialdom alike, and even sometimes by secularists. The intention here is neither to praise them nor to privilege negative perceptions of them. Nor is it to suggest their intrinsic or relative merit by drawing attention to them. It is rather to offer some elucidation of the bases of their reception among different audiences, while at the same time presenting their projects for further comparison and debate. The long-standing conventions and methodologies of the Islamic tradition clearly shape the expectations of many Muslim critics: from this perspective, these projects are unwholesome, hybridised, unconvincing and threatening. In contrast, Western enthusiasm for such thinkers – as an *avant-garde* of 'Islamic liberalism' or members of a new elite advocating an Islamic 'reformation' – expresses an underlying assumption that this is what Islam 'needs' to render it capable of existing cooperatively in the modern world.

In what follows, Muslim expectations reflecting more traditionally oriented positions are given particular attention. While this partly reflects this author's own interests, it is a legitimate analytical perspective for two reasons. Firstly, most of the thinkers studied here self-consciously frame their discourse in terms of the texts and culture of Islam. Secondly, their Western admirers adopt and fête them in their capacity as *Muslim* thinkers specifically, perhaps seeing in them a desirable model of Islamic spokespersons.

Islam and Western modernity

In the nineteenth century, responses to the growing Western presence in Muslim societies took three distinct courses. At one end of the spectrum ultra-conservatives called for a rejection of

any interaction with the modern West, while at the other end secularists urged its wholesale embrace. The *via media* characterised what is often termed the 'Modernist' trend. This crystallised during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the form of a synthesis between modern values and systems on the one hand, and what were seen to be eternal Islamic values and systems on the other, creating an 'Islamic-Western' composite.[14] This paradigmatic response to Western modernity has been assumed by much recent scholarship to underpin projects such as those collected in the present volume, as evidenced by the positing of a line of continuity between the historical 'Modernists' and certain of these contemporary projects. All are subsumed under a distinct trend, described either as 'modernist Islam' or 'liberal Islam'.[15]

The assumption of common underpinnings can be usefully explored here. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ulama, statesmen and intellectuals who advanced a synthesis between Islamic and modern Western values referred to themselves as *muslihun* (reformists),[16] or salafis,[17] terms which underscore the Islamic character of their self-perceptions.[18] While the impetus for their reform project was provided by the challenge of modern Europe, its impulse lay within the Islamic tradition,[19] and although modernity provided answers, the Islamic culture furnished the integrating framework for these. The Islamic parameters and commitment of the early reformists' endeavours reflected the reality that this culture represented the only frame of reference imaginable to them.[20] In the late twentieth-century Muslim experience, in contrast, multiple frames of reference have become imaginable, thanks to the relentless penetration of competing worldviews and cultural forms amidst the social, political and economic dysfunctions caused by modernisation. This is evidenced by some of the projects discussed here, for which Western modernity appears to be the starting-point and ultimate goal, whether consciously adopted or unconsciously assumed. This perspective might be projected through a discourse that resorts to Islamic tradition in a bid to lay claim to its culturally authenticating force, and by way of response to competing Islamic formulations.

Both Muslim imaginings of the 'West' and Western self-imaginings have undergone significant shifts since the era of the early reformists. Their approach to the West and their understanding of Western modernity was largely selective and apologetic. For example, they failed to discern, or preferred to ignore, its imperialist dimensions. The success, force and internal stability of the nineteenth-century Western experience had precluded the emergence of any serious critique of the Enlightenment and its consequences within Europe itself, let alone on the part of Muslim reformists. Their enchantment with modernity and its Enlightenment values can thus largely be explained in terms of the fact that its intrinsic crises and shortcomings were yet to be seen. Three important differences separate the experience of Muslim thinkers of the late twentieth century from that of the early reformists in this regard. First, the Western modernity they encounter is significantly transformed from that encountered at the century's turn. In the course of the twentieth century, its pillars were shaken and its self-confident narrative of emancipation and progress was undermined. World wars, unjust effects and destruction of the environment caused by science and industry, social disintegration and the trivialisation of life reflected in much of modern culture have all reduced confidence in the project of modernity. While its inherent problems have been starkly exposed, internal fragmentation, erosion and self-critiques have grown.[21] Second, compared with the early reformists, Muslim thinkers of the late twentieth century are generally more intimately familiar with Western modernity and its complexities. While for the early reformists it was a new discovery, made from the perspective of traditional Islam, contemporary Muslims have long been exposed to its realities. The old enchantment has gone, and they are better placed and equipped to critique it. Finally, contemporary Muslims are widely convinced that an element of cultural imperialism permeates Western attitudes and policies where Muslim societies are concerned. This creates an inhospitable climate for projects perceived to call for assimilation of the worldview or the cultural–intellectual products of Western modernity as a basis for the reform of Muslim societies and insti-

tutions, and for projects which are openly grounded in Western thought or enthusiastically supported by Western parties.

For their part, the reformists generally developed a critical facet to their overwhelmingly positive projection of the West only after the outbreak of World War One.[22] The fate of their imagining of the West and its implications for future efforts to create a culturally synthetic formula can be traced with particular clarity in the Arab context. The dashing of Arab expectations and the ensuing colonial policies cast serious doubt on the view of the West held by the Arab-Islamic reformists, and led ultimately to the unravelling of their synthesis of 'Islam', the 'West', and a largely cultural Arabism. Its constituent elements took shape in the inter-war period in trends of Westernised, secular intellectuals, radical Arab nationalists, and those upholding an increasingly ideologised, 'post-reformist' Islam. Rejection of Western imperialism became the universal point of departure, while throughout the new discourses the West was increasingly imagined in terms of an irreconcilable animosity, projected as an unjust organisational model and a morally degenerate and culturally corrupt society. Arab fascination with the West had been dealt a fatal blow by the end of the 1930s. As Nafi puts it:

> [G]one was the clean, harmonious, charitable, prosperous west that was depicted in al-Tahtawi's *Takhlis al-Ibriz*; the west of the enlightenment, of the French revolution … under whose impacts and in whose image Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi … Muhammad Abduh and the young Rida moulded their visions of modern Islam. In its place, a new version was being pieced together of a ruthless, exploitative, self-destructive and lethal west.[23]

In spite of their self-conscious rejection of the West, however, it soon became apparent that the self-same 'West' had reappeared, to occupy a significant place within these new discourses.[24] For example, Arabism was cast in an overwhelmingly Western conceptual mould, while Islamists gradually adopted Western political methods in their bid for state power, assuming the modern nation-state as the arena for their struggle. The West had in fact remained to haunt even those discourses that explicitly and vehemently rejected it.[25] The Arab experience in this respect was

not unique: throughout the Muslim world, major ideas, assumptions and methods of the modern West have become unconsciously internalised, where they have not been consciously adopted, in all types of ideological and discursive formulation.

Certain of the projects studied here demonstrate the extent of this unconscious internalisation, others the degree of conscious adoption, in the context of discourses that engage primarily with the Islamic texts and tradition. At the same time, these projects – and Muslim reactions to them – bear witness to the persistence in contemporary Muslim thinking of the problematic of 'Islam and Western modernity', with its attendant challenge of cultural authenticity or self-referentiality. Its continuing relevance is confirmed by Muslim perceptions of the threat to traditional cultural distinctions inherent in processes of globalisation, and the perceived failure of the West to establish relations with the Muslim world based on cultural equality and exchange. For Muslims exercised by such concerns, some of the projects explored here appear to actively discourage confidence in the cultural resources of Muslim societies, and do the West's work of cultural imperialism for it.[26] In this view, it is no accident that these thinkers, projected as agents of Westernisation, have spent lengthy spells in the West and its academe. The Muslim experience of the twentieth century has been one of enduring crisis, precipitated by the onslaught of Western modernity with its thirst for domination, and perpetuated by continuing Western injustice towards the Muslim world. In light of this, those who appear to advocate Western solutions to the problems of Muslim societies are naturally denounced as spokespersons for the 'West', rather than for Muslim concerns or for 'Islam', even when they relate their ideas directly to the Islamic textual tradition.[27]

Who speaks for Islam?

In traditional Muslim societies, a single social group spoke authoritatively for Islam: this was the class of the ulama. It had held the societal nexus throughout Islamic history, while safeguarding the

tenets of the faith from a position of semi-independence from the political system. From the late nineteenth century, the comprehensive changes produced by the impact of European colonialism and modernisation gradually eroded its position. The control of the ulama over the educational process and legal systems was broken, and the bases of their economic power and independence were lost. The ulama class would discover that its languages and methods were not those of the emerging order,[28] while its traditional Islamic learning was perceived to be less relevant to the new concerns and preoccupations of Muslim societies. New social classes created by modernisation rose to prominence, while modern education produced a new educated elite, professionals and modern intellectuals. As the social position of the ulama class shrank, a rising intelligentsia with a self-professed commitment to Islam occupied a significant part of the resulting vacuum. Various social actors entered the cultural arena with claims to speak for Islam: alongside intellectuals and professionals such as engineers and medical doctors, these included government officials and military personnel, for example. In the course of the twentieth century, the traditional impulse to solicit and defer to the opinion of the ulama has been considerably weakened, not least by their cooperation with the modern state, and their failure to respond effectively to the overwhelming discursive challenges of the modern era.[29]

The intellectual authority of the ulama class in pre-modern Muslim societies derived from societal recognition of its members' piety, and their specialist training in elite institutions of Islamic learning. In *madrasa*s and 'mosque-universities' such as al-Azhar, formal Islamic knowledge and the authoritative interpretation of tradition were transmitted directly from generation to generation, in a system where customs of *ijaza*-granting signalled mastery of a more-or-less fixed canon of traditional texts and the principles of interpretation established therein. The monopoly of the ulama both on the transmission and the interpretation of formal Islamic knowledge was first broken by the introduction of print culture in Muslim societies. This produced a revolution in access, through the mass production of books:

> Books, which they [the ulama] literally possessed … could now be consulted by any Ahmad, Mahmud or Muhammad, who could make what they will of them. Increasingly from now on any Ahmad, Mahmud or Muhammad could claim to speak for Islam. No longer was a sheaf of impeccable *ijaza*s the buttress of authority.[30]

The 'democratisation' of direct access to the traditional texts of Islam made possible by print has been complemented by the 'massification' of modern education in Muslim countries since the mid twentieth century, creating unprecedented levels of popular literacy. The practical necessity to consult those with 'ulamatic' training has thus been greatly reduced.[31] The traditional, hierarchical concepts of Islamic intellectual authority were dealt a further blow by the contribution of the reformists to the revival of the salafi notion of returning to a direct understanding of the primary texts of Islam. Their argument effectively liberated Muslims from the need for specialist expertise, theoretically removing all barriers of learning between the texts and their readers. This greatly weakened the assumption of 'ulamatic' training as the necessary credentials for speaking on behalf of Islam, throwing open the doors of interpretation to those without the skills and qualifications that might ensure a degree of continuity in this. Increasingly today those without formal training in the Islamic disciplines claim direct interpretive rights over the Islamic texts as equals with the ulama, and in direct competition with them.[32] Any possibility of uniformity or continuity of interpretation, or of a controlled diversity of readings, has been lost.

New claims to Islamic intellectual authority are tied to the norms and expectations created by modern education. Compared with the exclusive, erudite and at times inaccessible repertoire of the ulama, new spokespersons for Islam frame their discourses in forms accessible and relevant to modern-educated readerships, and adopt innovative techniques of interpretation.[33] Marked by diffusion, diversification, and above all fragmentation, new modes of authority are linked to the rise of the professions, to political and social activism, and to the introduction of new information and media technologies in Muslim countries. As claims to Islamic intellectual authority multiply, new spokespersons for

Islam are able to disseminate their interpretations to ever wider, anonymous audiences, while the control of information and opinion has become increasingly difficult, thanks to communicational changes reflecting an increasingly information-rich global context.[34] Increasingly, it is a matter of circumstance, indeed accident, which of the myriad 'authoritative' voices, texts and discourses are encountered and embraced, as Muslims access information across all boundaries. A 'spectacularly wild growth of interpretations'[35] in recent decades reflects the absence of any guiding or uniting concept of intellectual authority, and of the credentials that might underwrite it.

Several of the intellectuals explored in the present volume provide clear illustration of this trend. For the most part, they neither graduated from traditional institutions of Islamic learning, nor are they situated within these.[36] Most are professional academics in modern universities. Some are self-taught in the Islamic disciplines, but most have engaged in the advanced study of Islam in modern universities, and many have had significant encounters with Islamic studies in the Western academe. Their roles as professional academics converge with their postures as interpreters of Islam. Several consciously adopt and apply contemporary discourses and methods in the academic study of Islam. In contrast with the so-called 'Islamic books' that have flooded markets in many Muslim countries in the course of the last decade or two,[37] certain of the texts discussed here speak to a more elite readership, which is either familiar with these discourses and methods or seeks this familiarity. For some, their appeal lies in their perceived achievement in incorporating these discourses and methods into the Islamic discursive arena, thereby rendering the latter relevant to global intellectual-cultural trends and debates.

The general changes in Muslim contexts sketched above have led some Western observers to note possible parallels with aspects of the Protestant Reformation. The rupture of traditional Islamic intellectual authority, debates concerning intellectual leadership and the authority of the past, the popularisation of access to Islam's primary texts, and the rapid and widespread dissemina-

tion of new ideas are all cited, among others, in this regard. Some focus specifically on projects such as those collected in the present volume. For example, one scholar has suggested that the Syrian engineer Mohamed Shahrour's *al-Kitab wal-Qur'an: qira'a mu'asira* may one day be seen as a 'Muslim equivalent' of Martin Luther's *95 Theses*.[38] Dismissive Muslim reactions to such analogies point to the lack of appropriate credentials among Shahrour and his likes. They also emphasise widespread perceptions of their alienation from their own societies, culture and historical traditions.[39]

The Qur'an and the limits of Islamic reform

The lack of consensus concerning Islamic intellectual authority and its requisite credentials is mirrored in the absence of any agreement concerning the purpose, methods and, perhaps most significantly, the limits of Islamic reform. The historical Islamic experience was marked by a continuous tradition of internal revitalisation, encapsulated in concepts of *islah* and *tajdid*.[40] This was conceived as an authentic dimension in the working out of the Islamic revelation in history, and thus went beyond purely practical human needs or ends. Reflecting its inspiration in the vision of the early era of excellence, its ultimate purpose was to bring existing realities into line with the transcendent and universal standard embedded in the Qur'an and Sunna, through a process of restoration. There was neither a spirit of self-conscious innovation, nor dependence on a notion of progress. The tradition of *islah–tajdid* has consistently challenged the Muslim status quo from within the fundamental sources of Islamic inspiration. Its reaffirmation of the status of the Qur'an and Sunna as a unique and complete source of guidance informs a vigilance against anything that might threaten the integrity of the Islamic message, or compromise its distinctiveness. This often finds expression in a call for a return to a strict application of the Qur'an and Sunna, understood through a direct application of *ijtihad,* and rejection of rigid adherence to post-Prophetic elaborations as a source of authority.[41]

While the modern period has witnessed numerous examples of this tradition, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reformist or salafi project is among the most significant. Certain of the thinkers explored in the present volume share with the reformists their interest in Western modernity, their rejection of traditional Islam, and their tendency to repudiate classical Islamic authorities in the endeavour to understand Islam's primary text. However, some of their projects present themselves more as evidence of the internalisation of Western modernity, and thus as a reflection of the problematic of 'Islam and Western modernity' (as suggested above), than as efforts from within to achieve Islamic renewal. In place of the challenge set for subsequent generations by the model of excellence encapsulated in the Sunna and the salaf, some evidently play to the challenge set by the modern West. Responding to global forces and working from within wide-ranging intellectual networks, some of the producers of these projects are hardly rooted in Islamic culture, although they might invoke specific Islamic intellectual traditions in their work.[42] Like the reform project of the turn of the twentieth century, their own projects create a rupture with the traditional intellectual modes of the Islamic past. At the same time, however, some of these projects engender a disruptive conflict with the Islamic present, begging a question concerning their potential contribution to the cultural coherence of their producers' communities of origin, or the broader Muslim community.

Reform necessarily implies a challenge to current – and especially dominant – religious, cultural and intellectual modes. As the most significant form of critical separation from the status quo across Islamic history,[43] the potency of *islah–tajdid* sprang from its operation within the fundamental sources of Islamic guidance and the evolving consensus that set the boundaries of orthodoxy. While animating evolution of the cultural and religious life of the Muslim community, a leading concern of this tradition was to preserve its unity of faith and cohesion. In this spirit, an important aim of the reform project at the turn of the twentieth century had been to restore Muslim consensus. Throughout the century, Muslims moved by the same concerns have endeavoured to

engage creatively with the foundational texts of Islam, debating the authority of the past in the service of applying the Islamic message under the changed conditions of modernity, within the broad parameters of the sources of Islamic inspiration. At the same time, however, it must be conceded that Islamic thought as a whole in the twentieth century is no longer internally generated from within Muslim cultural traditions, but is substantially a reaction to extrinsic challenges. In contrast with traditional Islamic epistemology, where divergent opinions and schools of thought (which were tolerated and even celebrated) referred to a common origin, contemporary Muslim thinking reflects both internal and external frames of reference, and is shaped by diverse influences, which may be ideational or structural.[44] The question 'what is Islam?' has come to dominate Muslim debates,[45] and there appear to be as many different responses (and inspirations for such responses) as there are Muslims prepared to reflect seriously upon the question. Shifts in the intellectual-cultural terrain are evidenced by the fact that ways of thinking about 'Islam' which were virtually inconceivable for most Muslims a few generations ago now circulate widely and are enthusiastically advocated by some thinkers.

For many Muslims, some of the thinkers presented here appear occasionally to question the very tenets of Islamic faith, especially in relation to the most sensitive issue: the status and meaning of the Qur'an as God's authentic, uncorrupted and inimitable Word. At the turn of the twentieth century, the reformists were careful to avoid the potential excesses of a rational-historical interrogation of the Qur'an, and would not touch the sanctity of the text. Certain of the thinkers presented here, in contrast, appear to see their own 'return' to an unmediated reading of the Qur'an as an altogether free enterprise, driven exclusively by 'reason' and mediated by the fruits and techniques of Western intellectual life.[46] In some cases, this 'return' is framed in an approach to Islam that appears to reflect a postmodern mood of radical criticism and suspicion, directed at meta-narratives in general, and an interest in the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. Viewed from the perspective of the Muslim community inter-

preting its own heritage, even certain of those thinkers who take the principle of God's Word as revealed in the Qur'an as their point of departure are deemed to have exceeded acceptable limits.

Scholarship on the Qur'an in Western universities has recently adopted contemporary schools of literary theory and criticism, and hermeneutical theories.[47] Such approaches demonstrate that the meaning of a text cannot be taken for granted but depends on diverse textual, contextual and inter-textual factors, in addition to the circumstances of textual receptors in creating horizons of meaning.[48] The contribution of Muslim academics to the contemporary field is such that it is now commonly argued that the notion of a 'divide' between 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim' or 'Western' scholarship on the Qur'an is increasingly irrelevant.[49] When such recent Muslim contributions have become known among a broader Muslim public, general reactions have betrayed a deep-seated unease, with many insisting that specific boundaries be maintained around the text as the authentic repository of God's uncorrupted, inimitable Word, as much in scholarly realms of discourse as in others. The same unease has of course long informed Muslim reactions to 'Western' studies of Islamic sacred literature,[50] but it is particularly acute when such scholarship is of Muslim provenance.[51]

A Muslim scholar has recently characterised the challenge facing colleagues who write for *Muslim* readers, in their attempt to apply discourses such as those on literary theory, deconstruction and hermeneutics to discussions of textuality and determinations of meaning in the Islamic context. Abou El Fadl has pointed to the simple fact that such discourses are alien to the Islamic tradition and its constructs of symbolism and meaning. They reflect a specifically Western historical experience. His recommendation is that Muslim scholars should start with the Muslim experience and consider how such discourses might be utilised in its service. They should be careful not to use categories that reconstruct and remodel it according to Western paradigms, and should not superimpose an epistemology upon Muslims that might not reflect the Muslim experience faithfully. While they are not

necessarily to be rejected out of hand, transcultural epistemological transplants should thus be executed 'with measured restraint and a degree of reasonableness so that the receiving body will not violently reject them'.[52]

The pertinence of Abou El Fadl's plea might be illuminated from a somewhat different perspective with an example drawn from the practical experience of a developing Muslim participation in inter-religious dialogue. Reflecting on the 'entrance' of 'Islam' into dialogue based on an assessment of articles appearing in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* in the course of the last generation, Leonard Swidler notes that the very first article by a Muslim author, which appeared in 1968, was contributed by Isma'il Ragi al-Faruqi.[53] He writes:

> Faruqi was a traditionally orthodox Muslim … a highly knowledgeable Islamicist who did an immense amount to break open Islam to dialogue. It was Isma'il's very traditional orthodoxy that allowed him to accomplish this so effectively. His often highly sceptical religious confrères trusted him implicitly not to 'give away' anything Islamic, and hence were open to being coaxed into joining the dialogue, although most often rather defensively.[54]

For most of the thinkers studied in the present volume, their engagement with the Qur'anic text is, of course, far from an exclusively academic or scholarly project. This engagement itself speaks to the continued cultural centrality of this text, and the pivotal place it occupies in the struggles and aspirations of contemporary Muslim societies, as in Muslim politics.[55] In the contemporary world, millions of people refer to the Qur'an daily to justify their aspirations or to explain their actions, reflecting a scale of direct reference unprecedented in the Islamic experience.[56] This can partly be explained in terms of new modes of communication and information technology;[57] it also reflects the impact of the Islamic resurgence on the public arena and the language of politics. Intellectuals from secular backgrounds who are concerned with the future of a fragile civil society are faced with the challenge both of radicalised Islamist forces and the growing successes enjoyed by their moderate counterparts in the democratic process. If they are to find an audience in the

discursive arena, they must themselves appeal to the Islamic tradition and its ultimate legitimising text.

Appeals to the Qur'anic text are not only framed in the context of opposition to Islamist discourses, however. As the present volume demonstrates, such appeals also appear in struggles against authoritarian regimes, as in those against dominant patriarchal modes of thought and social structures that marginalise or exclude women, and against traditionalist Islamic culture more generally. They are recruited in addressing concerns over threatening national disintegration and inter-communal strife, as in concerns over cultural impasse, intellectual stagnation, and the absence of material development in Muslim countries.

Like those of the Islamists with which many such appeals to tradition take issue, they can ultimately be interpreted as responses to the ongoing failure in the Muslim world to create a culturally viable, successful modern state. The Islamist reaction to the failure of cultural modernisation and secularisation processes launched by the post-colonial elites is to invoke the self-past, re-imagined in terms of culturally authentic and 'pure' models, and motivated by perceptions of the West (with its agents within the Muslim world) as a threat. In contrast, some of those surveyed in this volume uphold the very same processes of modernisation and secularisation, while dismissing, denying or refuting the issue of their 'alien' cultural provenance and their compatibility with an Islamic commitment to transcendence, through a re-imagining of 'Islam' that itself rivals the Islamist one. This advocating of 'modern' values via a re-imagined Islam nonetheless sets their posture apart from that of the secular intellectuals.

This volume

The three themes discussed above are brought to the fore by the present volume as a whole and, each to a greater or lesser extent, by its individual chapters. The structure of the volume presents a clustering of some chapters, reflecting certain features or tendencies loosely held in common among some of the thinkers considered. The first chapter discusses the project of the late Pakistani

scholar Fazlur Rahman, a towering figure of twentieth-century Islamic reform. Although he spent most of his academic life in the West, as **Abdullah Saeed** points out, Rahman remained firmly committed to an Islamic process of knowledge, while at the same time subjecting traditional Islamic thought and methodologies to a profound critique. Rahman emphasised areas that have been neglected in Muslim understandings of the Qur'an, and it is from this that his importance largely derives. Such areas include the socio-historical context of the revelation, the spirit of its message as a whole, and the retrieval of its moral elan, as a basis for elaborating a Qur'an-centred ethics. Rahman's wide-ranging influence is evident in the work of such thinkers as those who form the subject of the two following chapters. These are his former student Nurcholish Madjid, a prominent Indonesian public figure, and the American scholar Amina Wadud.

As **Anthony H. Johns and Abdullah Saeed** demonstrate, Madjid has endeavoured to achieve a pragmatic realisation of Qur'anic values in a manner appropriate to the distinctive character and needs of the Indonesian state. His aim in this is to safeguard Indonesia's integration as a religiously and ethnically plural entity, and to enhance the role of the Pancasila in its capacity as the ideological cornerstone of national unity. His 'contextualist' approach to understanding the Qur'an is informed by a recognition of the pressing need for inter-religious harmony in Indonesia. It is equally motivated by his consciousness of the historically divisive impact of *fiqh* among Muslims there. Also inspired by Rahman and in contrast with Madjid, Amina Wadud's concern, as described by **Asma Barlas**, is with the problematic of Qur'anic interpretation and the marginalisation of women's full human agency within society. Wadud is a pioneer among a growing cluster of Muslim women scholars who are developing a feminist reading of the Islamic tradition and foundational texts. As Barlas, herself a member of this cluster,[58] demonstrates, Wadud highlights the connections between traditional *tafsir* (exegesis) and the means of its production, explaining the genre's masculinist nature, and its resultant biases against women. She calls for a more egalitarian *tafsir*, inclusive of women's voices,

and reflecting new, holistic modes of understanding and participation in Muslim religious life. The claim that it upholds the ontological equality of the sexes stands at the core of her own reading of the Qur'an, which thus serves the project of Muslim women's emancipation.

It has been suggested that Rahman never consciously introduced analytic procedures derived from Western thinkers in a major manner, and was not attracted to the ongoing debate in Western intellectual circles, even in those areas that influenced his methodology.[59] In contrast, in the assessment of one scholar, in his employment of 'the categories of post-modernity' to call for a rethinking of the whole Islamic tradition, the Algerian-French scholar Mohammed Arkoun,

> seems to be using the Islamic tradition as a text upon which to continue a debate about Western epistemology. He pays little attention to the specificity of the Islamic condition or tradition, as if the Islamic tradition is expected to serve as a yielding raw material for constructing the epistemological edifice of the West.[60]

Arkoun presents his project as a detached, ideologically neutral and radical perspective on the development of the 'religious phenomenon', and its implications for present and future human concerns. He rejects any link between his own thought and '*islahi* (reformist) thinking'.[61] Questioning the assumptions of the historical-critical method, his own critical reading of 'Islamic reason', his deconstruction of centuries of Islamic thought, and his constructs of revelation and orthodoxy challenge both academic scholarship on Islam, and Muslim self-understandings. As **Ursula Günther** suggests, the 'Arkounian' perspective has had little impact on both potential constituencies thus far.

The Egyptian scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd introduced a linguistic problematisation of the religious discourse to a contemporary Arabic readership in a substantial manner for the first time. As **Navid Kermani** shows, his approach is based on application of the most relevant achievements of contemporary linguistics to the Qur'an, combined with literary study of the text and the adoption of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. Its conclusions are implicitly posited in opposition to contemporary

Islamist discourses with their notion of a single, eternally valid interpretation of the sacred text. This provides the context for understanding postures adopted towards his writings in Egypt, and his trial.

Mohamad Mojtahed Shabestari's project provides an example of the rethinking of the Islamic revolutionary tradition in Iran. It represents one trend among post-revolutionary Iranian Islamic discourses, as they endeavour to address the contradictions inherent in the paradigm of what **Farzin Vahdat** terms 'mediated subjectivity', inherited from the founders of the Islamic Republic. Well-versed in German theological and philosophical scholarship, Shabestari relies on the principle of inter-subjectivity, which he situates within a religious model. He thus adopts a hermeneutic approach to subjectivity, which avoids any direct interpretation of Qur'anic texts. Vahdat sees in his hermeneutic construct of inter-subjectivity a framework in terms of which the discourse of religious modernity in post-revolutionary Iran can be advanced, as compared with the inherited paradigm. Shabestari's critique of the negative side of human subjectivity is accompanied by the suggestion that religion, projected as a source of permanent principles and general values, can help ameliorate the crises that accompany the unavoidable modernisation process in Muslim countries.

The Tunisian scholar Mohamed Talbi is best known for the case he advances from an Islamic perspective for religious pluralism and inter-religious dialogue, and for his work as a historian of North Africa. **Ronald L. Nettler** demonstrates how his progressive, liberal ideas are justified through a historical-contextual approach to the Qur'anic text, which seeks to elucidate God's intention in it. His 'intentional' reading is put forward as a foundation for resolving the current crisis in the Islamic encounter with modernity, and a foil to the literal readings that plague contemporary Muslim understandings.

Osman Taştan points to the pragmatic, utilitarian approach to the Qur'an, and its legal content in particular, developed by the veteran Turkish scholar Hüseyin Atay. Atay's extraction from the Qur'an of practical solutions to specific Islamic issues serves a

straightforward understanding and simplified practice of Islam. While this makes it accessible to the general practising public, its rationalist, anti-traditionalist orientation clearly reflects and sits comfortably with the established emphasis on modernity in the Turkish Republican context. This orientation is prominent in the publications of many scholars who, like Atay, are situated in Faculties of Islamic Studies in Turkish universities.

The Syrian engineer Mohamad Shahrour and the Libyan writer Sadiq Nayhum share common features. Both emanate from essentially secular backgrounds, and are self-taught in the area of Islamic learning. Driven onto the discursive arena carved by the Islamic resurgence, their engagement with the Qur'an partly serves a critique of traditional Islamic and Islamist formulations and contemporary political conditions. Shahrour advances his 'contemporary reading' of the Qur'an as the foundation for a comprehensive project of cultural, social, political and material renewal in Arab-Muslim societies. **Andreas Christmann** elucidates his employment of a linguistic analysis to reprogramme Qur'anic terminology, thereby estranging readers from conventional understandings and challenging traditional religious authority. As **Suha Taji-Farouki** demonstrates, Nayhum recruits Qur'anic texts in the context of a call for a culturally rooted form of direct democracy, embedded in 'Islam' reconstructed as a formula for political emancipation. To some extent, his resort to the Qur'an suggests a 'ritualistic' acknowledgement of the Islamic textual tradition. At the same time, it illustrates the appeal of the 'Qur'anic message', however appropriated, among secular-oriented Muslim intellectuals confronting the experience of alienation and fragmentation brought by modernity.

By way of conclusion to this introductory chapter, attention must be drawn to a reform-oriented but Islamically rooted voice, which has become increasingly influential during the late twentieth century, reflecting a certain resonance with a broad public understanding in Muslim societies. This is the voice of reform-minded Muslim intellectuals and academics and a small number

of reform-minded ulama, whose diverse contributions, put together, bear witness to important patterns of intellectual development and change in contemporary Islamic thought.

While such reform-oriented thinkers might themselves be subject to various Western influences, having in some cases been trained in Western universities, they work self-consciously from within Islamic cultural and textual traditions, and adhere to an Islamic frame of reference. Often with an eye to invalidating extremist Islamic postures, they address the ongoing challenge of elaborating modern Islamic responses to the modalities and demands of the modern experience, and the profoundly changed realities and novel problems of modern Muslim life. Their interpretive approach to the Qur'an and Sunna is direct and pays attention to social and historical contexts, distinguishing between universal principles and the moral thrust of the revelation on the one hand, and directives that may be bound to its specific circumstances on the other. In determining the meanings and implications of the revelation, they draw on the rich legacy of Islamic tradition in its diverse branches, while carefully probing the complex relation between this tradition and the context of its elaboration, taking into account aspects of its contingency.

Some of these thinkers deconstruct and critique aspects of the project of Western modernity, often sharing common ground in this with the critical discourse of modernity and its post-modern critics. However, they part company with the latter in their Islamic frame of reference, and their concern to offer 'constructive' responses to the human predicament. Refusing to bow to a blanket privileging of the modern over the pre-modern, they maintain that modernity's characteristic sense of superiority must be tempered with a respect for pre-modern sources which, if properly contextualised, can yield much that is of value. Others divest the modern West of its claims to universal validity; their commitment to Islamic cultural resources derives further confidence from an awareness that, at this juncture in history, there is a possibility for other voices to be received with less prejudice. Crucially, their contributions explore and advocate significant contemporary areas of reform within this culture, including

democratisation, pluralism, tolerance, openness to other religions, and equality of status for women and minorities in Muslim societies. Their arguments in this regard evince an alertness to the specific worldview upon which concepts and institutions are premised, identifying what may be incompatible with an Islamic cosmology and a commitment to transcendence.[62]

Certain of the thinkers presented in this volume clearly contribute to this reform-oriented, Islamically rooted trend, which is exemplified to varying degrees by such figures as Khaled Abou El Fadl, Muhammad Salim al-'Awwa, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Taha Jabir al-'Alwani and the 'professional' *'alim* Yusuf al-Qaradawi, to name a few. Relative to them, others studied here create an impression that they are Westernised liberals still under the spell of Western modernity, seeing in it a solution to the needs and problems of Muslim societies. In contrast with both, yet others discussed in this volume appear to have set out on the postmodernist road, which in its extreme form can ultimately lead to nihilism.[63]

The reform-oriented Islamic discourse sketched in these concluding lines remains intimately connected to the reformist discourse of the turn of the twentieth century. Those who contribute to it are perhaps the genuine heirs to the reformists' legacy, while taking this into uncharted waters towards a destination yet unclear, in an unpredictable and rapidly changing context. What is clear is the bid made by such thinkers to avoid the pitfalls and excesses of modernity, and to preserve the moral and cultural integrity of the Islamic worldview, and the special Islamic identity and cohesion of Muslim societies. In the wider world, the contribution of this discourse perhaps lies ultimately in its non-negotiable commitment to applying an ethical dimension to the exercise of reason and power. In Muslim countries, it might respond effectively to pressing concerns for the injection of justice and morality into the political and socio-economic order, while avoiding the problems and excesses inherent in certain Islamist options.[64]

The 'West' is now an omnipresent party to the ongoing process of re-negotiating Islam among Muslims, in which this reform

trend represents one of many competing voices.[65] This undeniably complicates the task that confronts it, whether in invalidating extremist Islamic formulations, or galvanising Muslim opinion in the endeavour to establish an effective bridge between the demands of an ever-changing present and a commitment to eternal values and the tradition and culture that embody them. Indeed its foremost challenge perhaps lies in successfully navigating a path between openness to external influences and an enduring faithfulness to the internal cultural map and dynamics of Muslim society, in a world where human interactions are growing dramatically.

It hardly need be pointed out that the Qur'anic text forms the bedrock of any Islamic discourse, reform-oriented or other, worthy of the name. Modernity has focused attention perhaps in an unparalleled way on the complexities of interactions between texts and readers. During the last few decades, Muslims have read the Qur'an in a rich multiplicity of ways, something of which is illustrated by the present volume. It is hoped that the essays collected here will point to some of the challenges, problems and responsibilities contained within this act of reading.

NOTES

1. For a classic discussion of 'the maelstrom of modern life', see Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London and New York, 1981). For institutional transformations associated with it, see Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Oxford, 2000).

2. The uprootings and dynamic of constant change that characterise modernity have been of particular concern to the major religions, as they are rooted in pre-modernity, and endeavour to sustain significant continuity with the past. A 'comparative religions' perspective might thus be valuable. There are evident parallels between Muslim responses and those of modern Christian theology, and between modern Muslim debates concerning approaches to the sacred text and Biblical studies and interpretation. However, a comparative perspective might perhaps more usefully focus on Islamic and Jewish responses to modernity specifically, and on efforts of modern reform within the two traditions.

3. Cf. Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 2–4.

4. Modernity is referred to as 'Western' in this discussion in loose

reference to its largely European origins, and thus to its alien provenance as viewed from a Muslim cultural perspective.

5. Cf. Patrice Broduer, 'Arabic Muslim Writings on Contemporary Religions other than Islam: A Framework for Inquiry', in Jacques Waardenburg, ed., *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey* (New York, 1999), pp. 240–49.

6. For an overview of some relevant ideas, see Gema Martin Muñoz, ed., *Islam, Modernism and the West* (London and New York, 1999), especially pp. 3–21.

7. The preoccupation with 'types' in the study of modern Islamic thought and the use of essentialising formulations to denote them is inherently problematic. Western studies frequently focus on 'Islam' itself, rather than Muslims, as the object of definition and classification. It is approached as an expandable range of ideological constructs, denoted by externally imposed labels that are generally not employed by those concerned to self-define, and often elucidate the concerns of the labeller to a greater extent than the labelled. References to 'radical Islam', 'official Islam' and 'political Islam' are commonplace, for example, while thinkers such as those in the present volume are generally dubbed representatives of 'liberal Islam' or 'modernist Islam'. As expressions of Islamic thought become more diversified and fragmented, it is increasingly difficult to capture this complexity adequately or to do justice to pervasive nuances, admixtures and internal tensions through the application of simple labels, which can be usefully employed only as a heuristic device in academic study.

8. Consistent with this, it must be emphasised that not all comments in this introductory discussion apply at all times to all of those studied in this volume.

9. Amina Wadud is an exception, having converted to Islam as an adult.

10. The term 'intellectual' is employed here to denote 'people who are specialists in ideas, images, and symbols', in accordance with Shils' definition, cited in John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (Oxford, 2001), p. 4. The authors (pp. 3–22) provide a useful discussion of the role of intellectuals in Muslim history and modern Muslim societies.

11. Throughout the twentieth century, works on the Qur'an have enjoyed vast circulation among all sectors of the reading public. These encompass works of *tafsir*, works of *'ulum al-Qur'an* and, more recently, works that draw on more than one Islamic discipline in a broader discussion of the Qur'an, such as Muhammad al-Ghazali's *Kayfa nata'amalu ma'a al-Qur'an* (Herndon, 1991).

12. It is perhaps noteworthy in this regard that some of the contributing authors in this volume are Muslim scholars based in Western universities.

13. As Brown (*Rethinking Tradition*, p. 4) remarks, the tendency among scholars of modern Muslim intellectual history to emphasise ideas that are new, or seem to be the peculiar product of modernity, is a product of cultural bias and a vestige of the Enlightenment idea of progress. Added to this is the tendency to judge an author significant because their ideas are attractive to the scholar who studies them.

14. For a classic discussion of this response, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic*

Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939 (Cambridge, 1989). See also Basheer M. Nafi, *The Rise and Decline of the Arab-Islamic Reform Movement* (London, 2000); idem., 'The Rise of Islamic Reformist Thought and its Challenge to Traditional Islam', in S. Taji-Farouki and B. M. Nafi, eds., *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London, forthcoming). The discussion here draws in particular on the latter two sources.

15. See, for example, Ronald L. Nettler, 'Islam, Politics and Democracy: Mohamed Talbi and Islamic Modernism', in David Marquand and Ronald L. Nettler, eds., *Religion and Democracy* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 50 ff; Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* and *Modernist Islam, circa 1840–1940: A Sourcebook* (New York and Oxford, 1998; 2002); Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, 'Religious Modernism in the Arab World, India and Iran: The Perils and Prospects of a Discourse', *The Muslim World*, LXXXIII, 1 (1993), pp. 20–41.

16. On the root notion of *islah* see Hamid Algar, 'Islah', *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* ed. H.A.R. Gibb *et al.*, new edn (Leiden, 1960–), vol. 4, pp. 141 ff. (Hereafter references to this edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* are indicated as *EI*^{2}). In contemporary Islamic literature the term denotes specifically 'reformism of the type that emerges in the doctrinal teachings of Muhammad 'Abduh, in the writings of Rashid Rida, and in the numerous Muslim authors who are influenced by these two masters and, like them, consider themselves disciples of the Salafiyya.' The Qur'an describes *al-muslihun* as engaged in God's work. See John O. Voll, 'Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: *Tajdid* and *Islah*', in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York and Oxford, 1983), pp. 32–47.

17. See, for example, Emad Eldin Shahin, 'Salafiyah', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York and Oxford, 1995), vol. 3, p. 463.

18. This is in contrast with the term 'Modernist', which from a contemporary perspective reflects more the preoccupations of Western scholarship or internal Muslim polemics.

19. While the reformist project was undoubtedly a response to the crisis engendered by European dominance, its origins within the intrinsic historical Islamic tradition of renewal and reform must be highlighted. Significant examples of internally generated calls for renewal and reform arose across the Muslim world well before the European colonialist challenge. The Western 'other' was instrumental neither in their appearance nor in their ideas. What set the modern reformists apart from their predecessors was the reality of Western superiority, which presented as the central concern.

20. Their appeal to Islam cannot be reduced to a stratagem for justifying the embrace of modernity, whether for its own sake or as a means to restore the balance of power vis-à-vis Europe. For example, while the positive projection of the West in reformist thought manifested a desire to adopt from it, it was equally employed in the conflict with those who clung to traditional Islam, in the service of what the reformists believed could be the only viable *Islamic* future. See for example Nafi, 'The Rise of Islamic Reformist Thought'. For an alternative view characterising the legacy of 'modernism' in terms of an Islamic tendency divorced from the very foundations of Islamic thought (as a result of its departure from traditional

Islam), see Nasr, 'Religious Modernism'.

21. Postmodernism might be understood to have 'de-centred' the West, by recognising that the claims made by modernity are in many ways 'less like reflections of universal truths and more like narcissistic fantasies'. It has revealed 'the limit of modernity's intellectual, moral and cultural mastery', putting into question the idea that 'West is best'. Moreover, the characteristic postmodern suspicion of meta-narratives has cast doubt on the most powerful narrative of the last two hundred years, which told 'the tale of the West's destiny'. See Bobby Sayyid, *Association of Muslim Social Scientists (UK) Newsletter*, 4 (2001).

22. Certain reformist elements indeed diverted their attention to defending Muslim freedom from the West by force. From 1920 onwards, for example, the great reformist Rashid Rida became actively involved in the Syrian revolt, the Palestinian struggle, and the Moroccan anti-Spanish and anti-French resistance.

23. Nafi, *The Rise and Decline*, p. 63.

24. Ibid., pp. 55–6.

25. As Sadri and Sadri note, 'Those who are quick to point out that… Islamic liberalism has borrowed from mainstream Western liberal theories, forget that the Islamic fundamentalists have also borrowed from Western countercurrents of populism, fascism, anarchism, Jacobinism, and Marxism.' Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, trs. and eds., *Reason, Freedom and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of 'Abdolkarim Soroush* (Oxford and New York, 2000), p. xvi. For his part, Nasr ('Religious Modernism', p. 29) argues that Islamic revivalism, which he projects as linked causally with 'modernism', shares in common with it 'the assimilation and absorption of Western ideas and worldviews'.

26. It is common among Islamists in particular to refer to a process of 'cultural invasion' (*al-ghazw al-thaqafi*) as a major consequence of Western imperialism, aimed at weakening Islam and Muslims by transferring Western ideas into Muslim culture, thus creating an ideological battle within the latter. For an example from the writings of Muhammad al-Ghazali see Ibrahim Abu Rabi', 'The Concept of the 'Other' in Modern Arab Thought: From Muhammad 'Abdu to Abdallah Laroui', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 8, 1 (1997), pp. 90–1.

27. At the same time, of course, large sectors of Muslim populations have an appetite for the material, political and cultural trappings of Western modernity, created by expanding mass education and communications, and the impact of processes of globalisation.

28. Nafi, *The Rise and Decline*, pp. 38, 44.

29. Cf. Esposito and Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, pp. 14–17; Nafi and Taji-Farouki, 'Introduction' in Taji-Farouki and Nafi, eds., *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*.

30. Francis Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print', *Modern Asian Studies* 27, 1 (1993), pp. 245–6. As the author demonstrates, this in turn made possible 'radical leaps forward' in religious thinking, typically among Muslims who were not graduates of seminaries or formally trained ulama, and whose thinking has been partly

shaped by access to sources on Western civilisation. The link between new technologies and new interpreters must be underlined. See for example Jon W. Anderson, 'The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters', in Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, eds., *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington, IN, 2000), p. 43.

31. Dale F. Eickelman, 'The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and its Social Reproduction', in Juan R. I. Cole, ed., *Comparing Muslim Societies: Knowledge and the State in a World Civilisation* (Ann Arbor, 1992), pp. 97–132; Dale F. Eickelman, 'Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies', in George N. Atiyeh, ed., *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East* (New York, 1995), pp. 255–72.

32. Augustus Richard Norton, 'The New Media, Civic Pluralism, and the Slowly Retreating State' in Eickelman and Anderson, eds., *New Media*, pp. 19–20; Nafi and Taji-Farouki, 'Introduction'.

33. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, 'Redefining Muslim Publics', in Eickelman and Anderson, eds., *New Media*, p. 11.

34. See for example Anderson, 'The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters', p. 41 ff.

35. Fazlur Rahman, 'Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies: Review Essay', in Richard C. Martin, ed., *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Oxford, 2001), p. 195.

36. For this reason, such intellectuals are sometimes described as 'secular', while it is pointed out that they nevertheless believe Islam has an important role in the contemporary world. See for example Abdou Filali-Ansari, 'Can Modern Rationality Shape a New Religiosity? Mohamed Abed Jabri and the Paradox of Islam and Modernity', in John Cooper, Ronald Nettler and Mohamed Mahmoud, eds., *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond* (London, 2000), p. 169.

37. That is, popular Islamic publications conveying a 'vernacularised' Islamic discourse addressed to the new readership created by mass education. See Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, 'Print, Islam and the Prospects for Civic Pluralism: New Religious Writings and their Audiences', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, 1 (1997), p. 49; Eickelman and Anderson, 'Redefining Muslim Publics', pp. 12–13.

38. Eickelman, 'Inside the Islamic Reformation', *Wilson Quarterly* (Winter, 1998), p. 84. In addition to its approach and conclusions, he considers this book important because it has sold 'tens of thousands of copies', in spite of being banned in many Arab countries. Eickelman argues with some confidence that the 'Islamic Reformation' is underway. For a less sanguine reading of the current situation in Muslim countries see Abdou Filali-Ansari, 'Islam and Secularism', in Martin Muñoz, ed., *Islam, Modernism and the West*, pp. 133–4.

Eickelman is not alone in his opinion concerning Shahrour specifically. See for example Michael Jansen, 'Syria's Islamic Reformer Outsells Mullah', *The Irish Times*, 13 Aug 1993. Similar arguments have been advanced in relation to the Iranian pharmacologist-intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush, also dubbed the 'Luther of Islam'. See for example

Robin Wright, cited in Sadri and Sadri, *Reason, Freedom and Democracy*, p. xv.

39. The debate concerning the reality or possibility of change in Muslim societies amounting to an 'Islamic Reformation' might revisit the highly influential salafi intellectual tradition, and its impact, which has found very broad expression during the twentieth century. Its characteristic bid to recover the foundational texts of Islam from the accumulated weight of classical Islamic tradition through a direct reading finds expression, in certain of its more radical articulations, in an attitude towards received authority reflected in the following dictum, concerning the producers of the legacy of historical learning: 'We are men, and they are men'.

For discussion of parallels between sixteenth-century Protestant reformers and contemporary Islamist movements specifically relating to the direct reading of scripture and implications for views concerning the socialisation required for its authoritative interpretation see Ellis Goldberg, 'Smashing Idols and the State: The Protestant Ethic and Egyptian Sunni Radicalism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33, 1 (1991), pp. 3–35. The author points out that Shukri Mustafa (radical salafi leader of the 1970s Egyptian Islamist group Jama'at al-Muslimin) argued that the only tool that may be needed to explain some of the terms of the 'clear, Arabic Qur'an' was a good Arabic dictionary. This argument was in open defiance of the control of the ulama elite over scripture and its authoritative interpretation; ibid., p. 28.

40. The notion of *tajdid* is generally referred to a hadith encapsulating God's promise to send renewers of the faith to the Muslim community at the head of each century. On *islah*, see n. 16.

41. This paragraph draws on Voll, 'Renewal and Reform', pp. 32 ff.

42. The Mu'tazili tradition is a case in point, including what has been termed the 'spirit of the Mu'tazili discourse' with its emphasis on 'reason, dialogue with others and a rational basis of ethics'. See Richard C. Martin and Mark Woodward with Dwi S. Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford, 1997), p. 7. A good part of the historical assumptions and worldview of this tradition, held in common with its theological opponents, has of course been quietly abandoned.

43. Esposito and Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, pp. 10–11.

44. See further Taji-Farouki and Nafi, 'Introduction'.

45. On the 'objectification' of Islam in Muslim consciousness and the impact of 'objectified understandings', see Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), pp. 37–45; Eickelman, 'Inside the Islamic Reformation', p. 85; Dale F. Eickelman, 'Islamic Religious Commentary and Lesson Circles: Is there a Copernican revolution?', in G. W. Most, ed., *Commentaries – Kommentare* (Gottingen, 1999), pp. 144–5.

46. They either dismiss the Sunna, or show little interest in it. Early modern architects of *islah–tajdid* emphasised the Sunna as the best model for Islamic life. Rashid Rida, for example, referred to the historical *mujaddidun* as regenerators of the faith and the Sunna: by safeguarding the latter, they protected the continuity of the original values of Islam. Algar, 'Islah',

p. 142. For modern debates over Sunna see Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*.

47. Stefan Wild, ed., *The Qur'an as Text* (Leiden, 1996), p. ix. The author suggests that there has been a shift of attention away from the preoccupation with the constitution of the text characteristic of much Western scholarship of the last 150 years. Recent decades have marked the rise of a new interest in the Qur'an as textual corpus, regardless of its scriptural history, while the history of its reception, interpretation and aesthetic role is becoming an important new focus of research. This development is linked to 'a general hermeneutical awareness, to a new interest in literary forms and structures, to the development of semantics, semiotics, and textual linguistics, to the theory of discourse, and possibly to other international currents'. For an overview of methodology in contemporary Qur'anic studies (displaying the author's characteristically radical, critical approach), see Mohamed Arkoun, 'Contemporary Critical Practices and the Qur'an', *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden, 2001), vol. 1, pp. 412–31. For an example of the application of 'the languages of late twentieth century critical discourses' to the field, see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 'Text and Textuality: Q. 3: 7 as a Point of Intersection', in Issa J. Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (London, 2000), pp. 56–76.

48. Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures*, p. xi.

49. Many point to the ongoing collaborative project of the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* by way of illustration.

50. See for example Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, 'Outsiders' Interpretations of Islam: A Muslim's Point of View', in Martin, ed., *Approaches to Islam*, p. 185. The author argues that: 'The given truths accepted and upheld by all Muslims for the past fourteen centuries – the life of the Prophet, his Sunna, the text of the Holy Qur'an, virtually the entire sacred content of the faith of Muslims – have been subjected to misguided critical analysis, sometimes ruthless and usually insensitive.' S. Parvez Manzoor projects the 'Orientalist' enterprise of Qur'anic studies as 'an unholy conspiracy to dislodge the Muslim Scripture from its firmly entrenched position as the epitome of historic authenticity and moral unassailability.' Thus: 'The ultimate trophy that the Western man sought … was the Muslim mind itself. In order to rid the West forever of the "problem" of Islam, he reasoned, Muslim consciousness must be made to despair of the cognitive certainty of the Divine message revealed to the Prophet. Only a Muslim confounded of the historical authenticity or doctrinal autonomy of the Qur'anic revelation would abdicate his universal mission and hence pose no challenge to the global domination of the West. Such, at least, seems to have been the tacit, if not the explicit, rationale of the Orientalist assault on the Qur'an.' Cited in Toby Lester, 'What is the Koran?', *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1999.

51. The following comment by a reform-oriented Egyptian salafi intellectual echoes this unease: 'Tinkering with the … texts … of the Qur'an and Sunna … is unacceptable. They ought to remain beyond the reach of those who claim freedom of expression and research, and advance arguments aimed at undermining…[them].' Fahmi Huwaydi in relation to the

Abu Zayd affair, cited in Fauzi M. Najjar, 'Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd', *BRISMES Journal,* 27, 2 (2000), p. 184. As one Western scholar puts it, Muslims, who have 'the benefit of hindsight of the European experience', know very well that 'once you start questioning the holy scriptures, you don't know where it will stop.' Christoph Luxenberg, cited in Alexander Still, 'Radical New Views of Islam and the Origins of the Koran', *The New York Times,* 2 March 2002.

52. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 99–100. See also pp. 119 and 125. Referring specifically to conceptual frameworks and categories of analysis in the field of hermeneutics as this developed in the West, the author suggests that the important consideration is to apply these 'with the requisite degree of sensitivity to the specificity of the Islamic context and also with a certain amount of deference to established Muslim systems of belief'.

53. The journal was launched in 1964. In 1969, al-Faruqi joined as an associate editor.

54. Leonard Swidler, ed., *Muslims in Dialogue: The Evolution of a Dialogue* (Lewiston, NY, 1992), p. v.

55. Characterised as 'an engagement to argue over correct interpretations'; see Eickelman and Anderson, 'Redefining Muslim Publics', p. 6.

56. Cf. comments by Arkoun, cited in Lester, 'What is the Koran?'

57. For example, it has been pointed out that the 'democratisation of *tafsir*' has begun, thanks partly to the presence on the world wide web of thousands of references to the Qur'an, and the absence of scholars or ulama to police or censor web sites. See Herbert Berg, 'Computers and the Qur'an', *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, vol. 1, pp. 391–4.

58. In *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin, TX, 2002), Asma Barlas (whose work Wadud describes as a continuation of her own) claims to derive a method of reading the Qur'an from the Qur'an itself, both in its theological and its hermeneutic aspects. Through a historical analysis of religious authority and knowledge, she demonstrates how Muslims came to read inequality and patriarchy into the Qur'an in order to justify existing religious and social structures. Her own rereading points to a Qur'anic affirmation of the complete equality of the sexes, providing a basis for theorising radical sexual equality from within the framework of its teachings.

59. Earle H. Waugh, 'The Legacies of Fazlur Rahman for Islam in America', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 16, 3 (1999), p. 31. Cited by Abdullah Saeed, chapter 2. Compare with Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford, 1998), p. 64 ff.

60. Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, p. 133. The author refers to Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, tr. and ed., Robert D. Lee (Boulder, CO, 1994). He attributes to this the fact that the book finds little resonance in the Islamic context.

61. Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, p. 69.

62. The fundamental point here is summed up by Parvez Manzoor: 'The ultimate conflict between Islam and modernity…is neither over

governance, nor over technology, not even over society and social engineering, but over *transcendence* and the nature of ultimate reality. As against the immanentist claim of modernity, Islam holds that the ultimate reality is transcendent.' S. Parvez Manzoor, 'Modernity, Transcendence and Political Theory', *Encounters*, 5, 1 (1999), p. 56.

63. Reflecting on the 'postmodern mind', for example, Tarnas refers to its 'quasi-nihilistic' rejection of all forms of 'totalization' and 'metanarrative'. By virtue of its own 'self-relativising critical awareness', however, the 'postmodern mind' recognises that its position in this respect is itself not beyond questioning. This underlies what Tarnas describes as 'the unstable paradox that permeates the postmodern mind'. Thus: 'On its own terms, the assertion of the historical relativity and cultural-linguistic bondage of all truth and knowledge must itself be regarded as reflecting but one more local and temporal perspective having no necessarily universal, extrahistorical value. Everything could change tomorrow. Implicitly, the one postmodern absolute is critical consciousness, which, by deconstructing all, seems compelled by its own logic to do so to itself as well.' Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have shaped our Worldview* (London, 1991), pp. 401–2. For differing Muslim views of Postmodernism, see Tomas Gerholm, 'Two Muslim Intellectuals in the Postmodern West: Akbar Ahmed and Ziauddin Sardar', in Akbar S. Ahmed and Hastings Donnan, eds., *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 190–212, esp. pp. 209–10. See further Ziauddin Sardar, 'Deconstructing Postmodernism', *Encounters*, 5, 1 (1999), pp. 111–18.

64. Such concerns for justice and morality constitute a reaction to the corruption and marginalisation generated by the modern state. Cf. Martin Muñoz, *Islam, Modernism and the West*, p. 10.

65. For example, particularly since the events of 11 September 2001, American and European statesmen have publicly underlined the essential compatibility of Islam with American and European values. Some Muslims in Europe and the USA have self-consciously echoed their sentiments. For example, American Muslim activists recently underlined the consistency of the goals of the shari'a with the constitution of the USA. For their part, some second-generation educated European Muslims project their Islamic affiliation (in terms of universal values such as justice, democracy and tolerance) as a nexus with the European societies in which they live. See Salam al-Maryati, 'The Rising Voice of Moderate Muslims', text of speech delivered to US State Department Open Forum, January 2002, and Fouad Imarraine, cited in *Time Magazine*, 24 December 2001.