The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought

Edited by

Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi‘
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Yoginder Sikand

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Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' is Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian–Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary and editor of *The Muslim World*. He has authored *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (State University of New York Press) and *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (Pluto Press), and edited several books.

Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid is Senior Lecturer in Politics at the School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia. He writes on the politics of Islam in Malaysia and has contributed articles to many leading journals such as *Kajian Malaysia*, *Indonesia and the Malay World*, *The Islamic Quarterly*, *Islamic Culture*, *Islamic Studies*, *Asian Studies Review*, *Global Change*, *Peace & Security*, and *Islam and the Modern Age*.

Khursid Ahmad is a leading Muslim scholar and thinker of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan. He directs the Institute of Policy Studies in Islamabad, Pakistan and is the head of the Islamic Foundation in Leicestershire, England.

Abdullah al-Ahsan is Professor of History and Civilization at International Islamic University Malaysia. Two of his major books are *OIC: Introduction to an Islamic Political Institution* (1988) and *Ummah or Nation: Identity Crisis in Contemporary Muslim Society* (1992). He is currently working on *Muslim Society: From Crisis to Catastrophe*.

Yasin Aktay teaches at Seljuk University in Konya, Turkey. He is a leading scholar in Islamic social and political thought in modern Turkey.

Syed Farid Alatas is Associate Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore. He is the author of *Democracy and Authoritarianism: The Rise of the Post-Colonial State in Indonesia and Malaysia* (Macmillan, 1997). He is currently working on a book on Muslim ideologies and utopias.

Talal Asad is Professor of Anthropology at the Ph.D. Program of CUNY Graduate Center in New York. He is interested in the phenomenon of religion (and secularism)
as an integral part of modernity, and especially in the religious revival in the Middle East. Connected with this is his interest in the links between religious and secular notions of pain and cruelty, and therefore with the modern discourse of human rights. His long-term research concerns the transformation of religious law (shari’ah) in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egypt with special reference to arguments about what constitutes secular and progressive reform. He has published several books in the above areas, especially *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford University Press); and *Genealogies of Religion* (Johns Hopkins University Press).

**Mucahit Bilici** is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He has written several critical articles on Islamic thought in contemporary Turkey and the interplay between nationalism and religion in Muslim societies.

**Ashk Dahlén** is lecturer of Iranian Languages and Islamic Studies at Uppsala University, Sweden. He is the author of *Islamic Law, Epistemology and Modernity. Legal Epistemology in Contemporary Iran* and has published several articles on Persian literature, Sufism, and Islamic thought. He is a member of the Iranian Academy of Philosophy.


**Mohamed El-Tahir El-Mesawi** is Assistant Professor at the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia. His academic and intellectual interests include Islamic legal theory, modern and contemporary Islamic thought and religion, and modernity studies. His publications include, among others, *A Muslim Theory of Human Society*, *The Qur’anic Phenomenon*, *The Question of Ideas in the Muslim World*, and *On the Origins of Human Society*.

**Asghar Ali Engineer** is a prolific Indian author on Islamic subjects. He directs the Center for the Study of Society and Secularism in Mumbai, India.

**Aslam Farouk-Alli** teaches Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. He is the editor of the *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa* (ARISA), associate editor of the *Journal for Islamic Studies* (JIS), and managing editor of the *Journal*
for the Study of Religion (JSR). His main research interest is contemporary Islamic thought.

Şahin Filiz is Professor of Islamic Philosophy and Turkish-Islamic Thought at Divinity School of Seljuk University in Konya, Turkey. He writes on traditional and contemporary Islamic philosophy.

Metin Heper is Professor of Political Science at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey, and a founding and Council member of the Turkish Academy of Sciences. He is author of The State Tradition in Turkey, Historical Dictionary of Turkey, Ismet Inönü: The Making of a Turkish Statesman, and The State and the Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation (forthcoming). Professor Heper’s edited or co-edited books include Islam and Politics in the Middle East, Turkey and the West: Changing Political and Cultural Identities, Politics in the Third Turkish Republic, Strong State and Economic Interest Groups: The Post-1980 Turkish Experience, Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey, The State and Public Bureaucracies: A Comparative Perspective, and Institutions and Democratic Statecraft.

Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim is Professor of History, International Islamic University Malaysia. His research interests include the history and politics of the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Islamic revivalism.

Aysçe Kadioglu is Associate Professor of Political Science in Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey. She is the author of Cumhuriyet Iradesi, Demokrasi Muhakemesi (Republican Will, Democratic Reason), 1998, Metis, Istanbul.

Zafarul-Islam Khan studied in India, Egypt, and the UK where he obtained a Ph.D. from Manchester University. He is director of the Institute of Islamic and Arab Studies, New Delhi since 1988, and editor of Muslim and Arab Perspectives since 1993 and The Milli Gazette since 2000. He is author and translator of over 40 books in Arabic, English, and Urdu including Hijrah in Islam (Delhi, 1996) and Palestine Documents (New Delhi, 1998). He has organized as well as attended dozens of conferences and seminars in India and abroad. He frequently appears as a commentator on Islamic and South Asian issues on radio and TV channels including Aljazeera and BBC Arabic.

Ali Mabrook obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy from Cairo University, where he taught for many years. He is currently Visiting Professor of Islamic Studies in the Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa.


Mehrdad Mashayekhi teaches at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. He writes on contemporary Iran.
Abdul Rashid Moten is Head and Professor of Political Science at the International Islamic University Malaysia. He has been teaching at university level for about 35 years in various countries. He has published 10 books and contributed about 80 articles to internationally refereed journals on Islam and the Muslim world. He is also editor of the Journal of Intellectual Discourse.

Irfan A. Omar is Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at Marquette University. He is co-editor (with Bradford E. Hinze) of Heirs of Abraham: The Future of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Relations (Orbis, 2005). He served as guest editor for the special issue of Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations (Birmingham, UK), entitled, “Islam in Dialogue,” 15/1 (January 2004), and is currently an associate editor of the Journal of Ecumenical Studies.

Muhammad Fathi Osman is a leading scholar in contemporary Islamic thought. He directs the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World in Los Angeles, CA.

Mehmet Pacaci is Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the Divinity School in Ankara, Turkey.

Ziauddin Sardar, writer, broadcaster and cultural critic, is regarded as one of the leading public intellectuals in Britain, featuring recently among Prospect’s Top 100. He is the author of the classic studies The Future of Muslim Civilisation (1979, 1987) and Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come (1985). The most recent of his over 40 books include Postmodernism and the Other (1998), The A to Z of Postmodern Life (2002), Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader (2003), his autobiography Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim (2004), and the co-authored international best-sellers, Why Do People Hate America? (2002) and American Dream, Global Nightmare (2004). A Visiting Professor of Postcolonial Studies, Department of Arts Policy and Management, the City University, London, Professor Sardar is the editor of Futures, a monthly journal of policy, planning, and futures studies and co-editor of Third Text, a critical journal of visual art and culture. He is a regular contributor to the New Statesman magazine and has a regular presence on radio and television in the UK.

Syed Shahabuddin is a former Ambassador of India, former Member of Parliament and former editor of Muslim India. He is currently President of All-India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat. He writes regularly on contemporary issues, both national and international.

Yoginder Sikand is a reader in the Department of Islamic Studies at the Hamdard University, New Delhi, India. He is the author of The Origins and Development of the Tablighi Jama’at, and Muslims in India Since 1947.

Muhammad Sirozi is Associate Professor of Islamic Education at Program Pascasarjana IAIN Raden Fatah in Palembang, Indonesia.

Mun‘im A. Sirry is a Ph.D. student in the Religious Studies program at Arizona State University, USA. He has written the following: Resisting Religious Militancy (Jakarta:

**Nayereh Tohidi** is Associate Professor of Women’s Studies and Sociology at California State University, Northridge and a Research Associate at the Center for Near Eastern Studies of UCLA. She has written extensively on gender and social change, women and modernization, democracy and Islamism in the Middle East and Central Eurasia, especially Iran and post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Her latest publications include: *Globalization, Gender and Religion: The Politics of Women’s Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts* (Palgrave, 2001); *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity within Unity* (Lynne Rienner, 1998); and “Women, Building Civil Society, and Democratization in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan,” in *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and the John Hopkins University Press, 2004).

**Nelly van Doorn-Harder** is Associate Professor of Islam and World Religions at Valparaiso University. Her areas of study are Islam in Southeast Asia, Muslim–Christian relations and Christianity in the Middle East. She is the author of *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur’an in Indonesia* (University of Illinois Press, 2006) and has written several books on the Copts of Egypt.

**Yudian Wahyudi** is Assistant Professor of Islamic Legal Philosophy (*Falsafat al-Tashri’ al-Islami*) at the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (Yogyakarta, Indonesia), and received his Ph.D. from McGill University in 2002 with the dissertation “The Slogan ‘Back to the Qur’an and the Sunna’: A Comparative Study of the Responses of Hasan Hanafi, Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri and Nurchohish Madjid.” During his residency as a visiting scholar at the Islamic Legal Studies Program, Law School, Harvard University (2002–4), he wrote what he considers to be the second and third volumes of his dissertation: “The Problem of Psychologism in Qur’anic Legal Hermeneutics” and “Shari’a and State in Egypt, Morocco and Indonesia,” respectively.

**Şükran Vahide** is a freelance writer and translator. She has written extensively on Said Nursi, and has translated a large part of his collected works into English. Her published works include *The Author of the Risale-i Nur, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (1992); and *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (2005).

**Tahir Uluç** is research assistant at Selçuk University Divinity School in Konya, Turkey. He has translated several books and articles from Arabic into Turkish. In addition, he is fellow of the Turkish Academy of Sciences.

**Ahmet Yildiz** works at the Atatürk Library in Ankara, Turkey. He has written several articles on Islam and politics in contemporary Turkey.

**Ahmad F. Yousif** is Associate Professor at the Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Brunei. Previously, Dr. Yousif taught at the International Islamic University Malaysia and the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ottawa (Canada), where he obtained both his M.A and Ph.D. degrees.
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Islamic Thought: One or Many?

Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi‘

The progress of opinion is fluid and indefinite; it does not easily lend itself to any system of dates and clear-cut chronological divisions.

Modernization has taken place throughout the world through a series of social, political, and cultural movements that, unlike movements of change and rebellion in many other historical situations, have tended to combine orientations of protest and those of center-formation and institution-building. It has fostered the establishment of a universal civilization in which different societies have served one another as mutual reference points . . . The continuous spread of these assumptions throughout the world in a variety of guises – liberal, national, or socialist movements and ideologies – has greatly undermined the basis of legitimation found in historical or “traditional” societies.

The Renaissance breaks with medieval thought. Modern thought distinguishes itself from that of the medieval period by renouncing the dominant metaphysical preoccupation. The importance of partial truths is systematically valorized, while the pursuit of absolute knowledge is left to amateurs.

Enlightenment thought . . . embraced the idea of progress, and actively sought that break with history and tradition which modernity espouses. It was, above
all, a secular movement that sought the demystification and desacralization of knowledge and social organization in order to liberate human beings from their chains.


In his seminal 1946 essay entitled “Politics and the English Language,” George Orwell bemoans the decline of English prose after World War Two, and points out that what is troublesome about some major English writing is lack of precision, sheer incompetence, and vagueness. This insight into the political language of England in the 1940s is, more or less, applicable to a good number of Western writings on Islam and the Muslim world, especially the journalistic type of writing. Our journalistic prose has often confused such terms as: (i) Islam; (ii) the Muslim world; (iii) Islamic history; and (iv) Islamic revivalism or fundamentalism.

The concept “contemporary Islamic thought” reflects a wide variety of intellectual currents dominating the contemporary Muslim world since roughly the end of World War Two, the rise of the nation-state and the beginning of the decolonization process. It is possible to delineate four major intellectual movements dominating contemporary Muslim intellectual life: (i) nationalism; (ii) Islamism; (iii) Westernization; and (iv) state ideology. Far from being monolithic, each of the preceding categories contains a diverse number of positions on national, religious, political, social, and economic issues and problems.

Because of the complexity of the contemporary Muslim world and the nature of the political dynamics that have given rise to the nation-state in this world, it is impossible to talk of one homogenous Islamic intellectual history. In order to begin to analyze the different intellectual forces and modalities of the contemporary Muslim world, it is imperative to highlight the different intellectual histories of this world. Although there are some major commonalities between the several intellectual histories that make up contemporary Islamic thought, each intellectual history has responded to a unique set of circumstances and criteria that have in turn defined it over the past several decades. For example, the Partition of India and the subsequent creation of the modern nation-states of India and Pakistan in 1947 define, to a large extent, the contemporary intellectual history of Islam in South Asia. In the same vein, the emergence of the nation-state in Indonesia after centuries of Dutch colonialism defines the intellectual experience of the Muslims in that country.

It is only in the preceding sense that one can discern multiple intellectual histories in the contemporary Muslim world. These multiple intellectual histories reflect the complex cultural and economic transformations taking place in the Muslim world since the nineteenth century, to say the least, that is to say, since the advent of Western capitalism into many a Muslim country. As such, multiple intellectual histories have registered the cultural, religious, and intellectual responses to this encounter and documented the rise of new social classes, new blocs of power, and new intellectual forces in almost every Muslim country. This has been the more poignant since the official end of colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s.
In the political area, many journalists and political scientists have written the general outlines, at least, of the political history of the modern Muslim world. In a more specialized way, due to academic division of labor, a number of scholars have written the social and political histories of each Muslim country. However, writing the intellectual histories of the modern and contemporary Muslim world has been a formidable task indeed. To carry this out requires a team of scholars who are versed in several Islamic and Western languages and who are familiar with the social, economic, and intellectual histories of the modern and contemporary Muslim world. The collection of articles in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* is intended to fill a major lacuna in this area and alert us to the various currents of thought dominant in the contemporary Muslim world and their articulation of the questions and challenges facing it. In addition, this collection of articles helps us formulate comprehensive perspectives on the current movements of thought in Muslim societies.

Speaking of multiple Islamic intellectual histories reflects the following criteria: one is the diversity of intellectual trends in each intellectual history; second is the host of issues and problems each intellectual history tackles; and third is the starting point of each intellectual history. For example, as mentioned above, contemporary Islamic intellectual history in South Asia is more or less predicated on the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and the intellectual, moral, and political questions and burden generated by such Partition. In the case of Indonesia, contemporary Indonesian intellectual history begins more or less after the independence of the country in 1945 and as a response to the great problems facing the country since independence. In the same vein, Arab intellectual history in both the Middle East and North Africa begins with the onset of the decolonization process of the 1950s and 1960s and the construction of the nation-state in different parts of the Arab world. Contemporary Turkish thought, on the other hand, owes its existence to the Kemalist experiment and the foundation of the modern Turkish Republic in 1923. In the latter case, it is quite impossible to address all the Turkish trends of thought emerging in the post-Republic phase without coming to grips with the intellectual genesis of Kemalism and its aversion to religion, that is, Islam in its private and public pronouncements and practices.2

So far, we have discerned four broad currents of thought in the contemporary Muslim world and ascertained that each current is deeply diverse, extremely complex, and is the product of various vital political, philosophical, religious, social, and historical conditions and formations. In other words, although some intellectual historians, such as the American Lovejoy,3 argue that intellectual history is an autonomous field of knowledge, it is autonomous to the extent that it reflects the social and intellectual forces of each country. And it is a basic fact that these forces have been in constant interplay with one another.

Several worldviews constitute a people’s intellectual history and as such, intellectual history is necessarily multidisciplinarian by nature. It cuts across different fields of specialization, especially philosophy, theology, history, politics, and political economics. It is also guided by different philosophical and ideological positions. As it is clear in the various essays included in this *Companion*, ideology is at the heart of intellectual history. In other words, even a careful reading of any particular worldview constituting intellectual history will not render a purely objective picture of that trend. *Intellectual history*
is ideological by nature. Being ideological, one must read the constituent elements of intellectual history against their social, economic, and political backgrounds and contexts. What this means is that, “Intellectual history cannot claim to be the true or only history . . . It exists only in connection with, and in relation to, the surrounding political, economic, and social forces. The investigation of subjects of intellectual history leads beyond the purely intellectual world, and intellectual history per se does not exist.”

Because of the different worldviews they represent, intellectual historians do not work on the assumption of a shared specific method. This justifies the notion that intellectual history lacks one governing problematic. In effect, contemporary Islamic intellectual histories, far from being reduced to one problematic, are distinguished at the core by a variety of conceptual approaches and questions with varying degrees of intensity and interrelationship.

One may summarize these problematics as both internal and external. On the internal side, modern and contemporary Muslim intelligentsia have wrestled with the meaning of Muslim identity and tradition and their relevance to the contemporary concerns of the Muslim world. For example, Muslim women have begun to examine the position of the primary sources of Islam, that is to say, the Qur’ān and hadith, on women and the relevance of these primary sources to the current realities of the Muslim world. The debate on women and Islam is most poignant in such countries as Iran, Turkey, Malaysia, Egypt, and Pakistan. On the external side, Muslim intellectuals have been wrestling with the big questions of modernity and globalization, their impact on Muslim societies, and the relationship between the Muslim world and the advanced capitalist West. All of these debates have something to say about the nature of the state, i.e., the ruling system, in the Muslim world. In other words, part of the story of multiple intellectual histories in the Muslim world revolves around the meaning of “the state” in contemporary Muslim intellectual discourse and the political elite’s influence on contemporary Muslim societies. One might add that the intellectual history of “the state” in the modern and contemporary Muslim world is yet to be written. In other words, the intellectual history of the political elite in the contemporary Muslim world must be written in order to reflect the ideological positions of this elite over a period of time and its position on national as well as foreign issues.

In reading the articles of this Companion, it is imperative to form a general sense of the elite in contemporary Muslim societies. By and large, one can differentiate four different types of elite in the Muslim world: (i) political elite; (ii) business elite; (iii) military elite; and (iv) intellectual elite. One must pay special attention to the connection between the political and intellectual elite in the contemporary Muslim world. Although it is quite difficult to summarize this relationship in a few sentences, it suffices to say that the political elite of many Muslim countries does not hail from the educated classes and that power and wealth have been used by the ruling power elite to acquire knowledge or acquire men of knowledge who can be useful in maintaining the political and social status quo. To a large extent, the power elite has also put to use some religious intelligentsia in order to promote the status quo in the eyes of the masses. This is true in almost every Muslim country. However, that is not to say that all religious intelligentsia have been subservient to the state. A good number
of them have opposed the authority of the political elite and their international allies.\(^5\)

The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought wrestles with the works of those Muslim intellectuals who represent a variety of social and intellectual positions, and in that sense the various articles in this Companion will help us appreciate the core ideas discussed by some of the main intellectuals in the contemporary Muslim world. Some of these intellectuals belong to well-established religious classes in Muslim societies. They transmit a complex Islamic tradition in a highly dynamic age. Others have only recently risen to the fore. This is true, for example, with Ustaz Ashaari of Malaysia, whose grassroots organization has been banned by the government due to its challenge of the state’s official religious discourse. (See Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid’s article on Ustaz Ashaari in this Companion.) The same can be said about the case of Fethullah Gülen of Turkey, living in exile in the United States since 2000, for his movement represents a great challenge to the authority of the Turkish state.\(^6\) Gülen is a popular religious intellectual who has established and led the most powerful social and religious Islamic movement in contemporary Turkey, a movement that has been seen by some as posing a great danger to the Kemalist foundations of the Turkish Republic. Gülen was educated in the religious tradition current in East Turkey after the foundation of modern Turkey. His interpretation of the religious idiom has made him an attractive figure to a good number of religious intelligentsia in contemporary Turkey.

It is important to bear in mind that being an intellectual in the contemporary Muslim world is a difficult undertaking, indeed. The intellectuals, by and large, have been active in the anti-colonialist struggle and have had a vision about the construction of the nation-state after independence. However, a good number of contemporary Islamic intellectuals feel betrayed by the political elite of their countries. Some have actively tried to change the status quo, as in the case of religious leaders in Iran, while others, as in the case of the intellectuals of the Justice Party in Turkey, have opted to democratize their societies without attempting to change the Kemalist foundations of the state. A third type of Muslim intelligentsia and professional has opted to migrate to the West to seek their personal fortunes as an exit from their own dilemmas. The migration of intellectuals to Europe and North America has been a saga of the Third World since the dawn of imperialism. The rise of the United States to world prominence exacerbated the “brain drain” from the heart of the Muslim world. Therefore, it is erroneous to identify Muslim intellectual histories with just the intellectual forces present in the Muslim world. Many Muslim intellectuals in the West try every day to articulate a new identity that is in consonance with their social and political realities in the West.

The relationship of the intellectuals with the masses is very complex in contemporary Muslim societies. Religious intellectuals, by and large, have kept in touch with the masses. However, a good number of religious intellectuals have adopted the official side of the government line and represented the elite in their dealings with the masses. It is important to be guided, though not limited, by Antonio Gramsci’s ideas on the meaning of intellectual and power, culture and politics, exile and creativity, civil society and religion. The distinction made by Gramsci between ecclesiastical and organic intellectuals might be helpful in dispelling some ambiguity about the role of the intellectual in contemporary Arab society. What prevents us from postulating that the most organic
intellectual in the Muslim world of late has been the ecclesiastical activist, he or she who speaks the language of the masses and identifies with their suffering and predicament?

On the whole, contemporary Islamic intellectual histories have dealt with the following questions and challenges. First is the issue of decolonization and political independence. Most Muslim countries have gained their independence from European colonialism only in the past several decades. Has political independence translated into a healthy process of modernization or economic development without any major objection from the Center? Second, in the decolonization process, all sorts of nationalist, secular and religious forces participated in order to rid their societies of European hegemony and exploitation. There was a measure of balance in the fight against the colonial structure. What happens to this balance after independence? How do some forces highjack political decisions after independence? Third, the Muslim world has experienced a tremendous demographic explosion since independence. What have been the ramifications of such an explosion on the infrastructure of modern Muslim societies and what happens to the population born after independence? Fourth, as a result of the lack of development in the countryside, the rural poor migrate to the cities or even overseas, as in the case of many people from North Africa. What is the fate of the new urban poor and the relationship between this phenomenon and religion or religious activism in contemporary Muslim societies? Fifth, there is the big question of the emerging political elite in Muslim societies after independence and the role of the military in politics and the shape of civil society. All of these are major questions that await answers. It is not farfetched to argue that liberal democracy is not a reality in most, if not all, Muslim countries. Why has this been the case? Is this due solely to internal factors? Furthermore, the political elite in the Muslim world has put religion, that is to say, Islam, to its use. It has not shown a tendency to free religion from the patronage of the state, and as a result, a good number of the religious intelligentsia have taken the side of the state against the poor. The religious intelligentsia has been effectively co-opted. Sixth, one must raise questions about the social origins of the ruling elite in contemporary Muslim countries. What class interests do they represent? What is their connection to world capitalism? Are they interested in democratizing their societies? Seventh, what happens to the Islamist movements after independence? The major ones were established during the colonial era and fought colonialism as vehemently as did the nationalist and secular forces. What is their fate in Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa? Eighth, what is the role of intellectuals in the Muslim world after independence? This is a huge question with many possible answers. By and large, because of the prevailing political conditions in the Muslim world and the rule of either a military or tribal dictatorship, the intelligentsia has become disenchanted with the political structure and some resorted to silence or migration. The process of the “brain drain” is a direct result of actions on the part of the ruling elite in the contemporary Muslim world to accommodate their intelligentsia and secure a free environment for academic research and intellectual freedom, where the intelligentsia can thrive and help the intelligentsia of the ancien régime transcend their predicaments and problems. Ninth, oil is a major commodity in the modern world-system. This has created a unique situation in the Gulf states, where a number of underdeveloped countries with meager populations are pro-
ected by capitalist interests and are developed overnight in order to meet the demands of the capitalist market. Are the Gulf states modernized? In other words, are they part of the historical project of modernity? Do they lack modernism? Do they have modernization? Tenth is the question of Palestine. Is this the never-fading issue? What has been its impact on the Muslim world? Is it true that Western and American support of Israel and the lack of support for Palestinian rights have solidified the anti-American forces in the Muslim world? Or are these forces angry with America and the West because of what they endured under colonialism and neo-colonialism? Eleventh, one notices after independence the virtual lack of knowledge that Muslim countries have about each other. Educated people in Cairo, Istanbul, Karachi, and Jakarta know more about the West than they do about other Muslim countries. This phenomenon of the colonial past is still a problem today. How is it possible to develop inter-Islamic consciousness in an age of increasing specialization and in an age controlled by the Center? Furthermore, it is important to note that the educated people of the non-Arab Muslim world (i.e., Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia) know more about the Arab world than vice versa. Of course, much of this is due to the impact of Islam on these societies. This brings us to a whole host of questions about the lack of economic and political coordination in the Muslim world and its weak position vis-à-vis the world capitalist system. Twelfth is the status of religious sciences in the modern and contemporary Muslim world. There is no doubt that since its inception, the Islamic religious phenomenon contributed to the urbanization and modernization of the Muslim world. Islam is based on a sacred text, on literality. The Muslim world in the early modern period built a comprehensive system of madaris in order to impart Islamic teachings to the youth. In addition, Islamic civilization developed more or less an intact Islamic urban and literary cultural and religious system. However, all of this collapsed with the advent of colonialism in the Muslim world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Nineteenth-Century Background of Contemporary Islamic Thought

In documenting the salient features of modern and contemporary Islamic intellectual histories, let us first focus our attention on the primary concerns of the Muslim intelligentsia at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Only in this way can we understand the problematics of contemporary Islamic thought. As a reaction to the penetration of Western capitalist modernity into all aspects of Muslim societies from the Arab world to Southeast Asia, a significant number of Muslim intellectuals began to write down the general outlines of a new intellectual project that is often referred to as “Islamic modernism.” In the Arab world, Iran and the late Ottoman period7 was represented by such luminaries as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (in his early phase), and a host of other religious scholars and thinkers who were intent on finding a rapprochement between their grand Islamic tradition and the scientific and philosophical achievements of capitalist modernity. In South Asia, the project of Islamic modernism was represented by such thinkers and activists as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Amir Ali, Mawlana Abu al-Kalam Azad, and others.8 In Southeast Asia, most
notably in Indonesia, the project of Islamic modernism was represented by the Muham-
madiyyah organization and its founder, Muhammad Dahlan.9

The major features of classical Islamic modernism were as follows: (i) the revival of
erational elements in the Islamic tradition; (ii) finding Islamic solutions to the challenges
of the West; (iii) embracing the philosophical and scientific features of modernity; (iv)
constructing new academic and religious institutions to meet the challenges of moder-
nity; (v) the revival of Kalam science; and (vi) the revival of Islamic languages and focus
on foreign languages. Islamic modernism can be said to be composed of two major fea-
tures at the beginning of the twentieth century: (i) on the one hand, it was deeply con-
scious of foreign occupation and its intellectual and educational design aimed at
eradicating foreign control. This was the case with the Muhammadiyyah; (ii) on the
other hand, it saw the salvation of Muslims as being united with the foreign presence,
as can be seen in the movement represented by Khan in India at the end of the nine-
teenth century. However, the logical outcome of both sides of Islamic modernism was
to lay down the blueprint for an independent homeland for Muslims in the Middle East,
Southeast Asia, and South Asia.

Along with the rise of nationalism in different parts of the Muslim world in the latter
part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Islamic modernism paved the way
for the foundation of the nation-state in the modern Muslim world. In Indonesia, for
example, Islamic modernism combined with nationalism and the rise of other Islamist
parties to power led directly to the creation of modern Indonesia. The same combina-
tion of factors can be seen in the case of Pakistan.

Independence, national struggle, and the creation of modern institutions have been
the landmark of contemporary Islamic thought. In the case of the Muslims of South
Asia, the Partition of India and Pakistan has been a watershed in both contemporary
Islamic intellectual and Indian intellectual histories. It is quite impossible to understand
the huge issues besetting contemporary Islamic thought in South Asia without under-
standing this pivotal historical event and its intellectual, religious, social, political, and
economic consequences and realities.

The Meaning of Salafiyyah in Modern and Contemporary Islamic Thought

In general, the Salafiyyah refers to a diverse number of religious and intellectual forces
in the modern and contemporary Muslim world that have taken their inspiration from
the primary sources of Islam and that opt to live their contemporary lives in a way that
is resonant with the ideals of the past and demands of the present. One can divide the
Salafiyyah movement into three forms: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. The
best example of the pre-colonial is the Wahabiyyah, which has had a marked impact
on modern and contemporary Islamic thought since its inception at the end of the eigh-
teenth century in Arabia. One may consider the Wahabiyyah a great revolutionary
movement in its initial thrust, since it relied on a comprehensive ideology of radical
social and political change. It intended to purify society of superstition and negative
social practices. The second is the colonial Salafiyyah. In the Arab world, it is repre-
sented by such scholars as ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī, Aḥmad al-Mahdī, al-Sanūṣī, Ḥassan
al-‘Aṭṭār, al-Saffār, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, and Rashīd Riḍa. The third is the post-colonial Salafiyyah represented by such religious scholars and activists as Mawlana Mawdūdī, ‘Ābd al-Qādir ‘Awdah, Yūsuf al-Sibā‘ī, ‘Allāl al-Fāsī, Sayyid Qūṭb, and Muḥammad Qūṭb. One must not forget the several militant Salafi movements, such as the jihaḍ and Jama‘ah al-Islamiyyah in Egypt. Unlike the major Salafi trends, these movements seek to establish the Islamic polity through a military take-over of the state.

Many Salafi thinkers, especially from the Ahmad Khan school of thought in South Asia, sought accommodation with Westernization, as mentioned above. The Alighrah movement spearheaded by Khan in the nineteenth century produced generations of Muslim intellectuals in South Asia that sought accommodation between Islamic tradition and Western modernity. By and large, this movement was not critical of colonialism and Westernization. It is only in the twentieth century that some Salafi thinkers, especially those belonging to Islamic revivalist movements, began to contemplate the disastrous implications of capitalist culture and philosophy for Islamic metaphysics and ethics. Such revivalist thinkers as Khurshid Ahmad, Sayyid Qūṭb, Muḥammad Bāqīr al-Ṣadr, Muḥammad Ḥussain Faḍlallah, and Rāshid Ghannoushi have been critical of Western colonialism and its implications for the Muslim world. Because of its aggressive nature, capitalist modernity forced Salafi thinkers to seriously consider capitalist modes of production and their impact on modern Muslim societies.

One can consider Islamism as a natural outgrowth of the nineteenth-century Salafiyyah, especially in its ‘Abduh and Afghānī formulations. Islamism can be summarized both as an indigenous response to triumphant imperialism and the deep sense of political, religious, and intellectual malaise enveloping Arab society in the interwar period, especially after the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in 1923. Being a response to the penetration of the modernity of imperialism in the different corners of the Arab world has always defined Islamist identity as intricately linked to that of the West. In a sense, this aggressive modernity has forced Islamism to be an avid observer of things Western, and has led it to present a comprehensive critique of the Western worldview and strategies in the Muslim world. This important dimension characterizes the thought of such people as Ḥassan Bānna, Sayyid Qūṭb, Muḥammad Faḍlallah, and many others. Although critical of imperialist modernity, both nineteenth-century Salafiyyah and interwar Salafiyyah adopted one key idea of Western modernity: the notion of reform and progress. However, one must draw an important distinction between the notion of progress as espoused by modernity and that as understood by the Islamic Salafiyyah. The Salafiyyah espousal of progress is not at all divorced from its appreciation of the centrality of the Islamic intellectual tradition and its modern intellectual positions.

In the Arab world, for example, and especially before 1967, the Salafiyyah was on the defensive while Arab nationalism was on the offensive. The 1967 defeat drastically changed this: it weakened and even paralyzed nationalism and forced it to revert to Islamic themes in its public pronouncements. In the words of the Egyptian thinker Ghali Shukri, the Salafiyyah “mushroomed” after the 1967 defeat. This happened in such countries as Syria, Egypt, and Jordan. A similar phenomenon took place in Iraq, especially after the second Gulf War.
After considering this historical sketch of the religious permutations of Salafiyyah, one must remember that the Salafiyyah movement in the Middle East was responding to a different set of circumstances than that in the Gulf states, especially the Wahabiyyah Salafiyyah in Saudi Arabia. In several Gulf states and most notably in Saudi Arabia, the Salafiyyah was intimately wed to the state to the extent that only an astute observer could distinguish the subtle difference between the state and the Wahabiyyah. The state claimed adherence to Islamic identity and the modernization of society. While the Salafiyyah in such countries as Syria and Egypt was on the defensive in the pre- and even post-1967 era, this was not the case in the Gulf states. The tribal Gulf state needed the Salafiyyah in order to boost its imported modernization programs in the 1960s and the 1980s and it needed it once again to attack Iraq in the second Gulf War. Furthermore, one may argue that the official Salafiyyah in most countries in the Gulf took the side of the state against Iraq after its occupation of Kuwait.

It is important to note that the Salafiyyah included a number of distinguished Shi‘ite thinkers in the Arab world, most notably Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr of Iraq and Muḥammad Ḥussain Fadlallah of Lebanon. These two thinkers, in particular, have had a major impact not just on Shi‘ite youth but on Sunnite youth as well. In addition, one must not forget the major impact of the 1979 Iranian revolution on Arab consciousness in general and the Salafi outlook in particular.

The success of the Iranian revolution was seen as the concrete embodiment of genuine Islam in an Islamic society. A number of Salafi thinkers began to publicize the ideas of such figures as Ali Shari‘ati and Imam Khomeini. Iran’s contemporary intellectual history has been deeply influenced by the Khomeini revolution of 1979; the debates within Iran since that time are important. In treating the Salafi trend with its complex components in contemporary Arab thought, it is important to invoke the famous distinction drawn by Maxime Rodinson between “Official Islam” and “Popular Islam.” To begin with, this is more than an academic sociological distinction about the nature of religion in contemporary Arab society. “Official Islam” represents the position of the state on religion and its various mechanisms, both subtle and concrete, to define a manageable relationship between the two. The constitution of almost every Arab state proclaims that Islam is the official religion of the country and that the shari‘ah is the main source of legislation. Besides raising questions about non-Muslims in Arab societies where the shari‘ah is the main source of legislation, this official position raises the fundamental question about the religious elite who enjoy the support of the state. This religious elite, dispersed as it is in different corners of the country, gains the official patronage of the state through the creation of a ministry for endowment and religious affairs, whose function becomes to keep those rebellious young preachers who may not heed the call of official reason in check.

**Liberalism, Nationalism, and Marxism in the Muslim World**

Besides Salafiyyah in its bewildering varieties, liberalism has had a real presence in the Muslim world since the nineteenth century. It is beyond the scope of this *Companion* to deal with liberal, nationalist, and Marxist trends of thought in the Muslim world in any
comprehensive manner. However, the reader must bear in mind that these tendencies have coexisted with the Islamic trend of thought, have influenced and been influenced by it. It suffices to mention that liberalism in Western thought refers to a mode of thought that reflected the economic and cultural aspirations of the nascent bourgeoisie. In its different economic and political activities, liberalism prides itself on the notions of liberty and democracy. As a complex bourgeois movement, liberalism sought to achieve a number of things: philosophically, it sought to introduce a radical break between metaphysics and rationalism or between faith and reason. Liberalism no longer considered metaphysics to be the queen of sciences; an unfettered exercise of thought was considered the new criterion for progress. To be sure, the progress of science in the nineteenth century gave liberalism an edge over all religious philosophies. Economically, liberalism sought to achieve the unobstructed movement of goods. Laissez-faire capitalism was its natural expression in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Socially, liberalism was for constituting a new social and work ethic that was not defined by either religion or tradition, or where religious philosophies occupy a marginal position. Educationally, liberalism preaches a new type of liberal education that rejects the control of religious reason and institutions.

Modernization and Religious Revivalism

Although we can date the beginning of contemporary Islamic thought to roughly the 1950s, its seeds were planted in the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The Muslim world’s response to the challenges of colonization was multifaceted; it sought to revive or reconstruct the religious, social, political, and economic institutions of the modern Muslim world. On the whole, three different movements channeled this response: modernization, nationalism, and religious revivalism.

The European challenge to the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century helped awaken the central authority from its slumber and encouraged it to launch an ambitious program of modernization called the Tanzimat, which began in the early part of the nineteenth century. The Empire responded by adopting Tanzimat, a wholesale modernization of Ottoman society from the top down. Ottoman political and military elite were aware of the necessity of taking drastic “modernization measures” if they wished to keep the Empire afloat. Most leading Ottoman bureaucrats and intelligentsia, including the religious intelligentsia, were firmly behind modernization. The ulama supported modernization in the hopes that “the welfare of the ummah” would be safeguarded. Although the different nineteenth-century Ottoman sultans put their weight behind the Tanzimat, the process did not prevent the collapse of the Empire by the end of World War One. However, before the Empire folded, a new breed of secular Ottoman intelligentsia arose, and a small part of that intelligentsia saw the salvation of the state in adopting Westernization. They saw this as the only solution to the backwardness of the state. The discourse of this community of people centered on a new understanding of nationalism, secularism, and progress.

Therefore, in the case of Turkey, contemporary intellectual history begins with the construction of the ideological foundations of Kemalism in the 1920s. Atatürk was a
charismatic figure who desired the modernization of his country and people along European lines. One must situate the rise of different trends of thought in Turkey in the context of Kemalism and its impact on Islamic and leftist currents of thought. To a large extent, Islamic intellectual history in contemporary Turkey has been a response to the challenge of Kemalism to religious identity. One can discern four major trends of Islamic thought in contemporary Turkey: the first is the pacifist, represented by the thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, a leading theologian of world renown who wrote the *Magnum Opus Risaleh Nur*, and who founded a community known as the Nur community.\(^\text{11}\) The second is an educational Islamic movement represented by the theologian Fethullah Gülen, mentioned above. The third is the Islamic activist represented by the Refah party and the fourth is an activist moderate Islamic movement that works within the Kemalist system and that currently holds power in Turkey. (See Metin Heper’s article in this *Companion.*) In addition to these representations of Islam, there is a host of Sufi brotherhoods that are still active in Turkey nowadays.

As mentioned above, nationalism represents the second tier of nineteenth-century Muslim response to the predicament of the Muslim world and Western challenges. Nationalism, in Anderson’s celebrated phrase, “is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”\(^\text{12}\) Nationalism is a limited imagining of the nation, much more limited, let us say, than Christendom or the Muslim *ummah*. Nationalism did not have to defend a stagnant past, although very often it resorted to inventing its own past in order to give a certain measure of authenticity to its actions. The nationalist movement in the Muslim world led the nation in a struggle against colonialism, which paved the way to creating several nation-states in the Muslim world. As a matter of course, nationalist leaders of the Muslim world did not use religious themes in their speeches or slogans. Such personalities as Ahmed Sukarno in Indonesia, Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, Muhammad Ali Jinnah in Pakistan, and Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasser in Egypt represent this trend. Being highly charismatic, these founding figures fought for the political independence of their nations from the West while being at the same time envious of Western scientific and political achievements. Although they fought political domination by the West, they opted to model their societies according to the Western philosophy of life. It is interesting to examine the conditions in which Third World nationalisms arose. Much literature has appeared on the social or philosophical origins of European nationalism, but very little addresses the origins in the Muslim world. Overall, nationalism in the Muslim world fought very hard to liberate itself from imperialism in two important domains: the spiritual and the institutional. On the spiritual level, as Partha Chatterjee ably shows, nationalism seeks to ensure its sovereignty on the personality of the nation, its past, and cultural identity. On the institutional level, it seeks to establish its nationalist state by learning from Western science and institution building.\(^\text{13}\)

The rise of nationalism in India is particularly interesting. Most of the Indian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century, regardless of their religious affiliation, were united on an ambitious nationalist program of ridding the country of British domination.\(^\text{14}\) Any cursory reading of the career of the Indian Congress from the latter part of the nineteenth century until the 1947 Partition will undoubtedly reflect this preoccupation. However, under pressure from the British and because of certain religious and
economic conditions, some Indian Muslims began to contemplate a separate state from the Muslims of India, which became Pakistan after Partition.

However, one must examine the genesis of nationalism in India from the prism of intellectual history. Modern Islamic intellectual history in India begins roughly after the failure of the Indian Mutiny against the British in 1857, which signaled the breakdown of the Mughal Empire and the onset of a new age for both Muslims and Hindus in India. Between 1857 and the end of World War One, several religious and intellectual tendencies developed among the Muslims of India competing for the formulation and definition of Islamic identity there. The following major movements arose: (i) the Alighrah movement, which was represented by Sir Ahmad Khan and his colleagues, and which advocated political and cultural openness to the English and their methods of teaching; (ii) the al-Khilafat movement, which aimed at preserving the Ottoman Empire; and (iii) the Muslim League. The al-Khilafat movement was Pan-Islamic in orientation and anti-British. In addition to these organized religious and intellectual bodies in Muslim India, there were a host of traditional educational institutions such as the Dar al-Ulum, established in Deoband at the end of the nineteenth century. The Dar al-Ulum is still committed to its original vision of disseminating traditional Islamic education in South Asia and creating bridges between the traditional religious elite and the masses. One of its most brilliant representatives is Sayyed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (See Yoginder Sikand’s article on Mawlana Nadwi in this Companion.)

Since Partition, there has been some confusion about the true identity of Pakistan. Was Pakistan created for the Muslims of India or was it created as an Islamic state? The careers of the founders of Pakistan and the movement behind the establishment of the country have reflected this uncertainty. What is certain is that only a portion of Indian Muslims were interested in migrating to Pakistan after Partition, and initially, the Jamaat-e-Islami, founded by Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdūdī in 1941, stood against Partition on the grounds that the future Islamic state would be limited to Pakistan only. The Pakistani movement was spearheaded by the Muslim “salariat class” of North India, a class that was “the product of the colonial transformation of Indian social structure in the nineteenth century and . . . comprised those who had received an education that would equip them for employment in the expanding colonial state apparatus as scribes and functionaries.” This class did not represent the interests of the majority of the Muslim peasants in rural India or those of the Muslims in south India. This explains why the majority of Muslims in the south and in the rural areas did not migrate to Pakistan after Partition. However, the creation of Pakistan did not solve the problems of Muslims in India. In 1971, Pakistan lost East Pakistan, and Bangladesh was established in the name of Bengali nationalism.

It is clear that the Partition left a deep mark on both Muslims and Hindus in South Asia. It signaled the failure of unitary Indian nationalism to establish one independent state after the termination of British colonial authority in India. However, both India and Pakistan opted to create a secular and not a religious system after independence. It is within this secular system in each country that one has to locate the debates around the big issues in each country, such as the creation of a religious state. This has been the more pertinent in the case of the Jamaat-e-Islami after the migration of its
founder to Pakistan in 1948. Mawdūdī never opted for Pakistan and he was one of the opponents of the Pakistan resolution in 1942. In other words, he did not see eye to eye with the Muslim League, which was fighting valiantly for the creation of a state for the Muslims of India. Mawdūdī did not initially opt for Pakistan since his Islamist vision of constructing an Islamic state all over India would have been greatly diminished. And diminished it was by the time that Mawdūdī and the top leadership of the Jamaat-e-Islami chose to migrate to Pakistan. (See Abdul Rashid Moten’s article in this Companion.)

It is within the parameters of the nation-state of both India and Pakistan that one must discuss Islamic intellectual history and its evolution to the present. Whereas the bulk of Islamic intellectual history in Pakistan has revolved around the Islamicity of the state and the necessity of constructing an Islamic political and economic system to be compatible with modernity, the bulk of Islamic intellectual history in India has revolved around the preservation of the secular and democratic foundations of the modern Indian nation-state. Muslims as a minority in India, albeit a major minority of around 15 percent of the population, have by and large eschewed the Islamic pretensions of Pakistan, remained loyal to the indivisibility of India, and constructed their intellectual debates around the best ways and means to construct an Islamic identity in a secular environment. That is to say that even the most Islamist of movements in India, the remnant of the Jamaat-e-Islami, has been fighting to preserve the secular identity of the Indian state and against the Hinduization of the state. This is remarkable in view of the fact that the intellectual and political agenda of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan has been for the Islamization of the state.

Since the creation of Pakistan, the Jamaat-e-Islami and other Islamist movements in the country have failed to establish an Islamist political system, which defines to a large extent the intellectual debates of Islamists in Pakistan. There is no doubt that the intellectual leaders of the Jamaat, such as the founder Mawdūdī, Khurshid Ahmad, and others, have remained faithful to the vision of creating an Islamist system in the country. Opposed to that has been the nationalist and secularist vision of the founders of Pakistan, which has been kept intact by the army in the country.

The third major response to the challenge of European colonization was Islamic revivalism. At the outset, it is crucial to differentiate among four major groups or classes of revivalism in the modern Muslim world: (i) pre-colonial; (ii) colonial; (iii) post-colonial; and (iv) post-nation-state. The Wahabiyyah of Saudi Arabia is a pre-colonial Islamic movement, which was created in reaction to internal Muslim decadence and sought to revive Islamic practices in light of a strict adherence to Islamic law and theology. To do so, the charismatic figure Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahab allied himself with the Saudi family, which led to the creation of the modern Saudi state.

Examples of the second form of colonial Islamic revivalism are the Muhammadiyyah and Nahdatu ul-Ulama organizations in Indonesia, both established in the first half of the twentieth century.20 We can also add the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and the Jamaat-e-Islami of India. These were mass-oriented social and religious movements committed to ambitious programs such as the reform of Islamic education or the control of political authority in preparation for implementing the shari‘ah in the larger Islamic society.