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INTRODUCTION

WHEN A GROUP OF ISLAMISTS attacked the offices of the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 and killed several people, the controversial subject of whether or not Islam needs a reformation began to be debated in media circles shortly thereafter.[1] The discussion amplified over the year, it seems, with the publication of *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation* by Sudanese-born Dutch activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Muslim and non-Muslim journalists writing in major western newspapers weighed in on this topic of Islam's reformation—why it should or should not happen and whether or not it happened already. At stake in this conversation was also the question of leadership—framed in terms of whether there was a need for a "Muslim Martin Luther" to reform Islam and guide the community, since the tradition, according to those who supported the call for a reformation, had been usurped by Islamists. Not surprisingly, there was a flurry of responses, both productive and critical. For example, in January, *Financial Times* journalist Roula Khalaf noted that Egypt's Abdel Fattah al-Sisi had been considered for this role. Later that year, in *The Guardian*, political journalist Mehdi Hasan cautioned against any kind of "Muslim Martin Luther" to unify or purify Islam. Such an endorsement, he argued, provides justification for the rise and mission of figures such as Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, the recently deceased leader of ISIS.[2]

This particular debate about Islam's reformation was specifically tied to the events of 2015, but similar topics have been recurrent subjects of discussion and disagreement since the early period

of Islam. "Reform" is a widely accepted translation of two Arabic terms that share a common meaning: "tajdid" and "islah." *Tajdid* is generally understood as "renewal," or restoration of an original pure Islam, and *islah* frequently translates as "reform" or "repair" of the tradition's current state. Despite these technical variances, both terms communicate a similar conceptual implication: an imperative to unify the Islamic tradition. Furthermore, both ideas have historically aligned with another term, *mujaddid,* or "renewer." The *mujaddid* is the agent of reform, the leader designated to shepherd the community out of its broken or divided state. A well-known hadith, or saying of Prophet Muhammad, states that God will send to the Muslim community, at the beginning of each century, certain individuals who undertake the task to renew Islam. For example, the eighth century Ummayad Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz, the well-known ninth century theologian al-Ashʿari, and the renowned twelfth century philosopher Abu Hamid al-Ghazali are all acknowledged by a majority of Muslims as famous *mujaddid*s.

The discourse invoked in the 2015 debate—reformation, Martin Luther, heretic—represents a constellation of two distinct yet intersecting trajectories in the intellectual history of modern Muslim reform: one Muslim and one European Christian. When Europeans colonialized the Muslim world over the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, Orientalists and Christian missionaries brought with them Protestant conceptions of religion to which Muslims responded—and, in the process, redefined their traditional categories of knowledge. Muslim intellectuals generated new definitions of reform and Islam as a consequence of this entanglement, shaped by the epistemic logics of both the history and debates about *tajdid/mujaddid* on the one hand and European Christian notions of reform and religion on the other. The fundamental coordinates of this colonial Muslim redefinition project were Protestant in character: there was only *one* legitimate Islam. The implications of this revaluation were twofold: first, the idea of "one Islam" was circumscribed by boundaries largely defined by the beliefs and practices of a Sunni majority. And second, the proponents of this new definition exhibited a

"Sunni chauvinist" tendency that either implicitly criticized or explicitly excluded individuals and/or groups who did not meet the requisite conditions.

Sunni Chauvinism and the Roots of Muslim Modernism examines one specific episode in this European and Muslim interconnected archive of debate about reform: the modernist movement that arose in colonial and postcolonial periods of 1850–1950 in Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were unlike previous eras in Muslim history. Muslim intellectuals were impelled to respond to the new and culturally alien context of colonial modernity—the prosperity of the three Muslim empires had fallen into serious decline and the rise of modern Europe as a serious military, economic, and political presence set in motion the European colonialist enterprise. The Safavid Empire fell in 1736, the Mughal Empire was taken over by the British officially in 1857, and the Ottoman Empire was divided up by the British and the French in the post-World War I mandate. The dissolution of the three great Muslim empires, and the consolidation of British and French rule in India, the Middle East, and North Africa triggered a crisis, as Muslims were no longer in power and had to confront their subservience to European leadership.

This crisis gave rise to a wave of leaders who spearheaded new political and religious movements in response to this cultural transformation. These leaders are largely classified into two categories: traditionalist reformers and modernist reformers. Traditionalists were religious scholars, known as *ʿulama,* whose ideas about reform were shaped in *madrasa*s (religious schools). They believed it was necessary to redefine and reinterpret Islam through tradition: by cultivating individual morality, education, ethics, and a renewed commitment to following Islamic law. Modernist reformers, the subject of this study, approached reform from a markedly different perspective than their traditionalist counterparts'. The modernists attempted to reconcile Islam in the modern period with western enlightenment values—such as secularism, western education, civilizational progress, democracy, and women's rights.

This volume explores the political and intellectual thought of a select group of modernists: Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), Muhammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905), Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), and Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979). Although these modernists wrote in different colonial contexts, their responses were uniformly tied together by one main concern: the loss of Muslim political power and the imperialist expansion of Christian Europe. Their reform projects were motivated by the overarching question of how Muslims should orient themselves in a world no longer governed by Muslim rule. It was from this vantage point that modernists sought to redefine Islam in terms compatible with European ideas of education, modern scientific thought, and civilizational progress. It was their aim to transform the cultural fabric of Muslim society on the basis of values and ideas generated through the encounter with enlightenment thought. To clarify, modernists did not want to become secular or European. Rather, they wished to reshape Muslim culture along the lines of their new worldview formulated in response to, yet differentiated from, Europeans. Their distinctive campaign for reform was too delimited and idiosyncratic to take root and effect comprehensive change in society as they imagined it. It is for this reason that I frame modernist reform projects as communicating hopes, visions, and *ideas* of unity.

Sunni Chauvinism and the Roots of Muslim Modernism examines two principal perspectives in modernists' writings: first, their belief that Islam was a unified religion and community; and second, how this claim of unity created mechanisms and boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Modernists' call for the unity of the Muslim community and concomitant proposals for reform were in theory all-inclusive. However, this desire for unity led many modernists to denounce entire communities, such as the Shia, Bahais, Ahmadis, and Ismailis on the grounds that they undermined or resisted modernist definitions of what it meant to be a Muslim. Consequently, their redefinitions of Islam demarcated insiders and outsiders. Modernists launched criticisms against these aforementioned groups

through sustained arguments that relied on implicit or at times explicit "Sunni normative bias": a framework of ideas about the finality of prophecy that provided justification for allegations and accusations of transgression against groups whose ideas contravened their own. To read the movement of Islamic modernism from the perspective of aspiration and exclusion underscores the power structures at work in this implicit Sunni normative bias. Although the modernist project of reform never fully launched in the comprehensive manner they hoped for in the nineteenth century colonial period, the assumptions and epistemic logic of modernist thought about unity and exclusion—made coherent by its implicit Sunni normative bias—persisted well into the second half of the twentieth century.

Sunni Chauvinism and the Roots of Muslim Modernism seeks to understand the logics, biases, and contributions of modernism in this long history of reform and debate about leadership that continues today. It is important to clarify that this book neither stakes a claim in the modern debate about reformation nor intervenes in theological conversations about reform within the tradition. The task here is to outline the history and development of modernist theories of Islam produced in response to European enlightenment concepts over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This project builds on a general consensus about the genesis and development of modernism as articulated in foundational scholarly studies of the topic.[3] This book shares a similar subject of enquiry to two recent monographs that foreground the intellectual contributions of many of the same thinkers discussed herein. Irfan Ahmad's *Religion as Critique: Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to the Marketplace* and Khurram Hussain's *Islam as Critique: Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Challenge of Modernity* both examine key political and religious insights of modernists, challenging the widely held view that "critique" is only possible from the western enlightenment perspective. [4] Hussain, for example, analyzes Sayyid Ahmad Khan's oeuvre and Ahmad examines writings of Mawdudi among others to argue that Islam ought to be understood

as tradition of critique, rather than a static entity that simply aspires or responds to the liberal "West."

This monograph does not attempt to reframe modernism as Ahmad and Hussain propose; however, it too calls attention to the limitations and assumptions that are operative in the "Islam" and "West" modernist framework—in particular, the Sunni inflection and bias at work in the "Islam" piece of the dichotomy. It brings into conversation well-known writings of canonically recognized modernists to explore the analogous ways in which modernist theories and definitions of Islam were shaped by a desire to unite the global Muslim community in the name of civilizational progress. Each chapter traces this modernist aim through key figures' writings on *tawhid*—the Quranic theological term signifying unity of God. Modernists reinterpreted this Quranic concept as political unity of the Muslim community, as was the need of the hour. As such, *tawhid* functioned first, as the conceptual medium through which they conveyed their hopes to unify and strengthen the Muslim community, which they believed was fragmented, stagnant, or backward. Second, modernists' statements about *tawhid* opened up discussions about which communities were excluded from the fold of Islam. The Shia, Ismailis, Ahmadis, and Bahais were key groups whose status was up for debate in this frame of inclusion and exclusion. My readings demonstrate how modernists formulated arguments against these communities in terms of "sectarian" deviance, but often their denouncements were specifically targeted at authoritative leaders of these communities. For example, modernist polemics about sectarian transgression were grounded in criticisms of false prophecy and heretical leadership, mounted against figures such as Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the prophet of the Ahmadis, and ʿAbdul Baha, the leader of the Bahais. I read these accusations as exemplifying a Sunni normative framework of beliefs, ideas, and practices centered on the finality of prophecy, which provided justification for accusations of transgression against groups that believed in more expansive ideas of prophetic continuity and leadership. The modernist writings I

analyze put into sharp relief some fundamental biases at the heart of the modernist reform project—the first and foremost being a Sunni majoritarian perspective that deliberates, debates, and frequently denounces altogether the legitimacy of minority groups.

There have been many books written on individual minority Muslim communities such as the Ahmadis or Ismailis. However, these studies tend to be monographs focused on one particular community. Moreover, they all address in some manner the relationship and/or tension with ideas and authoritative claims of the Sunni tradition. No book on modernism thus far has addressed how the debates about the role of minority groups have been central to the modernist project. Nor has any book on modernism identified an underlying Sunni normative bias that explicitly or implicitly operates as an essential component and force of canonical modernist thought. Each chapter describes the contours of arguments and accusations constructed by modernists and tries to understand possible motivations for what at times comes off as sheer antipathy and vitriol against certain communities and their leaders specifically. The modernists I read all convey some form of Sunni chauvinism, albeit in different ways, and against different groups. There has yet to be a study of modernism that has made the claim that the debates and positions of minority communities have been integral to the formation of modernist thought itself.

Before I explicate these unexamined assumptions of modernist arguments, let me turn to a brief discussion of what characteristics modernists share. Modernists were set apart as a group of Muslim reformers in that they were unambiguous about promulgating "modern values"—that is to say, values clearly identified with the modern world, such as rationality, science, civilizational progress, constitutionalism, and human equality. As the scholar of modern Islamic thought Charles Kurzman has noted, the modernist movement, roughly spanning the period 1850–1950, was not simply modern (as in taking root in the modern period, or feature of modernity), but explicitly a proponent of modernity. Modernist reformers were unambiguous supporters of freedom of speech,

unapologetic about their endorsement of enlightenment ideas, and wholly committed to disseminating their views on reform. Modernists participated in political parties, lectured at universities, and published their ideas in local newspapers, but it would be misleading to assume that the modernist movement created an autonomous Muslim public sphere. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, traditional structures of power in the Muslim colonial context were weakened by growing European presence. This specific political transformation limited internal economic growth, which necessarily restricted the development of independent institutions of learning. With notable exceptions like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who founded Aligarh Muslim University in India, modernists did not establish schools or official educational organizations. Despite this lack of formal institutions in the colonial context, they were determined to debate and broadcast their positions on reform. They relied on informal leadership and mentorship as well as the written word. For example, Afghani was the revered mentor of Muhammad ʿAbduh and Rashid Rida, who gathered and taught students in coffeehouses, at the university, and in Freemason societies in Cairo. Although many modernists took to traditional literary forms of expression such as poetry and debate to convey their ideas, the most common medium through which they conducted their campaigns to redefine Islam in modern terms was the printing press. The periodical press was established in Muslim communities throughout India, North Africa, and the Middle East. It was the primary vehicle through which modernists addressed the issues they felt were the most pressing: Muslim cultural revival, women's rights, political reform, modern science, and western education.

Modernist ideas generated and transmitted through intellectual lineages and print from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century were principally motivated by the existential condition of colonial occupation. When modernists stood as political representatives, gave speeches in universities, or composed opinion pieces in the press, they often did so from a defensive and/or nationalist

perspective, undoubtedly under pressure to respond to European criticisms of Islamic civilization. That is to say, their ideas were certainly circulated and debated within Muslim public spheres, but the content itself was largely formulated as responses to European ideas and theories of science, philosophy, and history. Modernists wrote in reaction to books written in and about Europe, and specifically on topics generated by Orientalists, such as the periodization of the "Golden Age" of Islamic civilization and the rise of Islamic decadence associated with the Ottomans prior to the arrival of the Europeans. They were motivated by concerns about the weakness of Islam as civilization, which they believed could be saved through their modernist program of reform.

Recently, the global historian Cemil Aydin has demonstrated how a unified Islamic civilization or "Muslim world" never existed. The "Muslim world" represented an idea rather than any kind of reality, and this concept of civilizational unity took substantive shape and form in Muslim intellectual and political thought during the late Ottoman and Indian nationalist period—roughly 1870–1930s. [5] The modernists analyzed in this volume held the view that Islam was a discrete civilization and religion, thereby promulgating the coherent idea of the Muslim world Aydin identifies. They defined Islam as such against and in response to European Orientalists and Christians, who were the first to describe and translate Islam as a religion equivalent to Christianity. Modernists offered their various interpretations of Islam, sometimes in agreement and sometimes in disagreement with western ideas. What is interesting to note is that all those involved in the conversation—Europeans and Muslim elites—acceded to the belief that Islam was bounded and definable just like Christianity.[6]

The overarching argument of this volume about aspirational unity and exclusion is examined through the writings of modernists on the subject of *tawhid*. *Tawhid* was originally a Quranic idea that refers to God's unicity and theologically implies the assertion of monotheism. Herein, I analyze the writings of Afghani, ʿAbduh, Rida, Iqbal, and Mawdudi to demonstrate how they offered a new

interpretation of *tawhid* to describe the unity of the Muslim community. Their understanding of *tawhid* as political and social unity conceptually functioned in a bifurcated manner. It represented an ideal of both the past and the future. It signified, on the one hand, a description of a "Golden Age" when the Muslim community was once united politically and socially, and on the other hand, an aim for a similar future. In this sense, it was the idiom through which modernists expressed both lament as well as aspiration.

Tawhid served as the platform through which this group of modernists communicated a host of concerns that were tied to the anxiety of civilizational decline. First, underlying their analysis of *tawhid* as social unity was an assumption that Islam had become fractured because of practices associated with "sects" such as Sufism and Shiism as well as the Bahai and Ahmadi traditions. Modernists viewed what the historian of Islam W. C. Smith called the "cumulative tradition" of Islam—the multiplicity of religious practices, notions of religious authority, interpretations of scripture, art, and music that change and develop throughout history—as "accretions" that compromised *tawhid*.[7] For these particular modernists, historical diversity of the Islamic tradition precluded the possibility of a future Islam that could become unified as it had been in the past. The prescription they offered to the problem of religious "accretions" was an argument that the Quran serve as the exclusive source of authority for all Muslims. Modernists embraced a *sola scriptura* position—one that emphasized the importance of individual rationalist interpretations of the Quran—over and against a heterogenous understanding of Islam as a diverse tradition of beliefs, practices, and interpretations of the Quran mediated through figures such as imams, pirs, and clergy. They made the case that if Muslims relied exclusively on an intellectual and individualist approach to the Quran and denounced devotional practices—such as memorizing the Quran or visiting the tombs of saints—the community as a whole could unite again as it had done so in the past.

Second, their anxiety about *tawhid* was explicitly tied to leadership, often associated with communities they criticized, such as

the Bahais, the Ismailis, the Ahmadis, and the Shia. Modernists were highly dismissive of local community leaders such as imams, pirs, and even the *ʿulama*. They claimed that that there had been only one paradigmatic leader in the history of Islam, Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, they made the case that mediating figures of authority were unnecessary and in fact contradictory to the essential principles of Islam. There was a fundamental tension and contradiction in their views on this topic, however. On the one hand, they felt it imperative to assert that no prophetic leader could follow or replace Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, they also asserted that the contemporaneous time in which *tawhid* was compromised required new modern leadership to shepherd the divided Muslim community, a position which many modernists saw themselves as filling. To be clear, I am not saying that they believed they were literally prophets of Islam. Rather, they saw themselves as exceptional men and bearers of special wisdom. As I discuss further below, their self-assertions as authoritative guides involved the strategic undermining of groups that had officially recognized leaders already, such as the Bahais, Ahmadis, and Ismailis.

Unlike reformers of earlier periods or traditionalist reformers of the same period, modernists argued that it was possible to reach across the various schools of Islamic law (*maddhabs*) and/or bypass the traditional schools altogether. For them, primacy was given to the Quran—and it was necessary to reconcile this foundational source of Islam with human reason. The modernists were in general quite critical of the *ʿulama* and traditional institutions of seminary training, and in fact claimed that they, rather than the traditional legal and religious scholars, were equipped to reinvigorate and redefine the Islamic tradition in the modern period. Furthermore, they deployed distinctive modes of expression to transmit their ideas. Modernists published their ideas in media such as newspapers and journals, but they also found ways to convey their intellectual positions in traditional Muslim genres of expression, such as poetry and debate, modifying and reconfiguring the content

with their views about the compatibility of western science, education, and progress with Islam in the modern period.

One of the main differences between the traditionalists and the modernists was their respective positions on *ijithad*, or reinterpretation, of Islamic sources and concepts. Unlike the *ʿulama*, modernists thought it was possible and at times necessary to bypass the legal schools in order to provide fresh interpretations of Islamic ideas that could speak to modern changing conditions.[8] In fact, modernist reformers explicitly worked to renew and reinterpret Islam against and in conversation with enlightenment ideas of the colonial West. ʿAbduh, Rida, and Iqbal followed in the footsteps of their predecessors, al-Afghani and Sayyid Ahmed Khan, who believed that the tradition of Islam required renewal in the wake of secularization and the discovery of science in Europe. In response to these developments, Muslim intellectuals in the Middle East and India were concerned that Islam, as a religion and culture, was in a state of weakness, particularly after the decline of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires and the rise of colonialism. The modernists indeed sought to reform Islam like many earlier reformers—but the conditions in which they did so were altogether new, insofar as they operated in a milieu that was dominated by European cultural mores, political rule, and economic power.

The modernists' distinctive perspective is illuminated by comparison with that of traditionalist reformers writing in the same time period. The traditionalists, as mentioned earlier, were primarily members of the clergy, the *ʿulama*, or Sufis who oriented their projects of reform through the structures and institutions of particular legal or Sufi schools of interpretation. In India, for example, the disintegration of the Mughal Empire and the hierarchical structure of the royal court society of Persianate imperium ushered in a new audience for reformist literature. The language of composition changed from Persian to Urdu and the theological content of this reformist tradition was simplified and narrowed, with the primary topics of study focused on the Quran and the hadith. This Protestant approach to scripture served as a theological

"leveler," as the masses could access the Quran and hadith literature on the subject of piety, composed in Urdu for the people, in a way that was not possible through the hierarchical structure of the royal court.[9] The ultimate goal for traditionalist reformers was to disseminate the traditions of Quranic interpretation and hadith exegesis to a wider Muslim community. *Tawhid*, from a traditionalist perspective, functioned in a theological capacity. This new traditionalist religiosity emphasized the unicity of God and individual piety for all.

Piety was not front and center of the modernist project. Certainly, many of the modernists were religious men, and some trained as and were mentored by the *ʿulama*, such as Muhammad ʿAbduh and Rashid Rida. However, their intellectual campaigns, unlike the traditionalists' projects, did not revolve around the restoration of piety. What distinguished the modernist worldview was their preoccupation with how Islam as a civilization could prosper again as it had in the past. Modernists formulated arguments that reflected on the past, though they weren't historians. They were ideologues who glorified a golden age of Islam, bemoaned the present, and directed their visions for reform toward the future. *Tawhid* served as a conceptual medium through which they conveyed their reflections on Islam as a religion and a civilization. Each chapter in this book, therefore, is framed by an analysis of modernists' reinterpretation of *tawhid*, which provides an opening into two lines of thinking that have yet to be analyzed by scholars in the study of Islam: first, the ways in which modernist thought created a new form of Muslim majoritarian logic that demarcated specific groups as minority sects; and second, how many of the modernist reformers saw themselves in a salvific role, of a "Martin Luther"-type reformer, with a mandate and mission to restore Islam to its early glory.

As I mentioned in the opening, there are certain figures that are recognized as *mujaddid*s within the Islamic tradition. Many of the modernists mentioned thus far, such as Muhammad ʿAbduh and Muhammad Iqbal, are commonly identified as crucial members

of this group, either specifically in accordance with the hadith about *tajdid,* or as subjects in academic studies of seminal reformers in the modern period. The contributions of the Bahais, Ismailis, and Ahmadis—communities whose ideas have always been part and parcel of the history of Islam and whose charismatic leaders were so critical to the reform period of the nineteenth century—rarely inform discussions about *tajdid* or *islah* in scholarly accounts of modern Islamic reform movements. Why these groups have been relegated to "sectarian" status and their interventions in Islamic reform denied in standard narratives of *tajdid* are questions that have yet to be interrogated by scholars in the study of Islam. One possible reason is that traditionalist/modernist frameworks, the binary through which modern reform is examined, cannot account for their contributions. It is certainly the case that Ahmadis and Ismailis do not fit into the traditionalist paradigm, as neither were their leaders trained members of the *ʿulama* nor were their teachings focused on piety according to Islamic law. However, there are many components of their beliefs that align with modernist reform. Take for example the Ahmadis. The founder of the Ahmadi community, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, from Qadian, Punjab, claimed to receive God's revelation, and in 1888 called on Muslims to pledge their allegiance to him and to a new movement to reform Islam. He declared that he was the Promised Messiah, the Mahdi of the Muslims, and appeared in the likeness of both Jesus and Prophet Muhammad. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad instigated much controversy as a consequence of his radically new ideas, experiences with the divine, and approach to Muslim reform centered on his prophetic authority. He participated in polemical debates with Arya Samajis and Christian missionaries while simultaneously advocating for British rule.[10] Mirza Ghulam Ahmad endorsed *ijtihad*, wrote about the importance of the state (in this case his support of the British), and engaged Europeans and non-Muslims as well as Muslims about Islam. It is obvious that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's ideas do not fit into the traditionalist model of reform; but surprisingly, his contributions to Muslim reform are

never included in standard accounts of modern reform of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when in fact many of his positions fit into the modernist paradigm. I would argue that this occlusion can be attributed to scholarly accounts of modernism that have given primacy to canonical modernist figures such as Afghani, ʿAbduh, Rida, and Iqbal. It is not a coincidence that these canonical modernist thinkers have articulated criticisms of sectarian groups such as Ismailis, Ahmadis, and the Shia. It is likely that the implicit Sunni normative bias adopted by modernists has shaped the study of modernism itself. This has led, I argue, not only to an overall neglect of Shii and Sufi perspectives, and a disavowal of the impact of charismatic leaders such as Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, but also to a delimited understanding of modernism that is fundamentally majoritarian.

The major difference between Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and the canonical modernists was that he believed that he was a messiah, having arrived in the likeness of Muhammad as well as Jesus to renew Islam, as he explains in the following passage from 1900:[11]

> I am both Jesus the Messiah and Muhammad Mahdi. In Islamic terminology, this type of advent is called a *buruz* [re-advent, or spiritual reappearance]. I have been granted two kinds of *buruz*: one is the *buruz* of Jesus, and the other is the *buruz* of Muhammad. . . . In the capacity of Jesus the Messiah, I have been assigned the duty of stopping the Muslims from vicious attacks and bloodshed. . . . In the capacity of Muhammad Mahdi, my mission is to re-establish Tauhid in this world with the help of Divine signs.[12]

For Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *risalat*, prophetic calling, was the solution to the crisis of Islam and the disintegration of *tawhid*. As the above passage illustrates, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was impelled to find an appropriate solution to the problem of compromised *tawhid*; but in this case, the answer was his prophetic calling. Herein lies the connection with the canonical modernist response: both see the world temporally bifurcated. There was an ideal *tawhid* of

the past and a possibility of an ideal *tawhid* in the future. For the Ahmadis—as well as the Bahais and Ismailis—official charismatic leadership of the respective communities helped navigate this existential condition in ways that were not possible for the canonical modernists.

Afghani, ʿAbduh, Rida, Iqbal, and Mawdudi all implicitly or explicitly espouse a Sunni normative position in their writings. Therefore, it is possible to interpret their arguments against the Ismailis, Bahais, and Ahmadis in a sectarian framework. That is to say, it is possible to interpret modernists' statements about deviation as a kind of assertion of Sunni orthodoxy. However, it is clear from the subject matter of their treatises, as well as their trenchant criticisms that often border on antipathy, that these target groups all, in some form, posed a threat to modernist leadership and authority. In this way, it is important to regard their accusations of theological transgression with suspicion. As I address in the chapters, modernists' polemical arguments are generally directed toward the specific leaders of these communities, and their motivations are oftentimes political or personal rather than theological. Furthermore, many of the modernists, such as Afghani and Mawdudi, often suggest their own credentials for leadership over the Muslim community in their writings. Even more surprising is that these same modernists sometimes adopt ideas and beliefs of these communities that have well-established structures centered on a charismatic figure. As I discuss below further in the first chapter: Afghani, for example, describes his own qualifications as a potential leader by appropriating and reworking ideas of prophecy that originate from the Shia and the Bahais—groups whom he accuses of heresy.

The canonical modernists refer to communities they perceive as violating the terms of unity as "sectarian," but as I have argued previously, the underlying logic of "sect," which presumes a corporal center, the "church," cannot be mapped upon the Islamic tradition in which no centralized institution or authority exists.[13] Moreover, there was never any kind of formal institutional decision

or event in the history of Islam equivalent to the Protestant Reformation that demarcated different Muslim communities into sects. It would, therefore, be helpful to think about the Ahmadis, Ismailis, and Bahais in terms that are more capacious than "sectarian."

One concept that might be useful is "esoteric." Historically, esoteric refers to "hidden" knowledge accessible to a private community focused on practices of interior reflection. Esoteric groups, for the most part, never self-identified as such, as "esoteric" was more of an approach or way of comprehending the world rather than a structured system of belief and practice. Ancient and medieval esoteric traditions such as Gnosticism and Hermeticism, for example, were deeply intertwined with Christianity and also scientific practices. Recent scholarship on western esotericism has shown, however, that the Enlightenment ushered in a new framework for understanding esotericism. It created divisions between "secular" and "religious" disciplines and in turn established esoteric traditions as a separate sphere from both religion and science.[14]

This enlightenment categorization functioned in a similar manner as the new taxonomy of religion established by Orientalists starting in the nineteenth century. Orientalists inaugurated a novel classification system of religion, which was informed by comparisons to Christianity and theories of language and race. One crucial figure in this enterprise was the British philologist William Jones, who discovered "Indo-European"—the linguistic relationship between European and Indian languages—in the late eighteenth century. Jones's finding was premised on the categorization of languages into groups, such as "Aryan" and "Semitic." Over the course of the nineteenth century, Orientalists adopted this philological paradigm to outline theories of race. For example, the nineteenth century French philosopher and philologist Ernest Renan offered extensive explanations of Jews as Semites on the basis of Indo-European linguistic categories, most well known of which was the argument that the Semitic race was inferior to the Aryan race. New interpretations of religion also emerged from this paradigm.

Hinduism was considered "Aryan" in origin and Islam was classified as a "Semitic" religion, like Judaism. The logic herein created divisions within Islam as well. Sufism was identified as having roots in the "Aryan" race, as opposed to the "Semitic" race and religion of (presumably) Arab Sunni Islam. In this regard, the Orientalist framework of categorizing religion ultimately divided Muslims into separate identities and effaced religious components that were unrecognizable in this philological/race model.

This Orientalist paradigm that has become foundational to the comparative religion model of organization and classification has never recognized Ismailis, Bahais, or Ahmadis—yet, all three groups have been intertwined with the history of Islam, just as esotericism was historically imbricated within the Christian tradition. No doubt, the Ismailis, Bahais, and Ahmadis are distinct groups whose histories, community structures, fundamental theological premises, and practices preclude any kind of collective categorization. Bahais have roots in Islam but don't identify as Muslim, Ahmadis identify as Muslim but many Muslims don't recognize them as such, and Ismailis are generally understood as a sect of Islam. Despite these historical and theological differences there is a basic set of common features that these three groups share, which illustrate an "esoteric" orientation: first, they adhere to the belief in hidden truths; second, they proclaim that prophecy and/or revelation continued in some form after Muhammad and the Quran; and third, they believe their leaders possess hidden or special knowledge to guide their respective communities. All three groups in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were organized around charismatic leadership: that of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Aga Khan, and ʿAbdul Baha. To analyze Ismaili, Ahmadi, and Bahai approaches to reform as "esoteric" helps elucidate two main points integral to this study: (1) the unacknowledged representation of these three communities in traditional models of classification endemic to the study of religion/Islam; and (2) their distinctive approach to reform based on hidden knowledge, continuous prophecy, and living religious leadership.

The Ahmadis, Bahais, and Ismailis are the main target groups analyzed here, but canonical modernists also identify "Sufis" and the "Shia" as communities that at times undermine the social and political unity of the Muslim community as they perceive it. I would argue that the Shia and Sufis would also qualify as "esoteric" insofar as they acknowledge hidden meanings of the Quran and continuous prophecy, as I outline above. However, they function slightly differently in canonical modernist criticisms: Sufi and Shia beliefs and practices are regarded with suspicion, but these groups lack the publicly recognized leadership and routinized bureaucratic structure that developed with the Ahmadis, Bahais, and Ismailis, whose successful organization and mobilization, shepherded by their respective communities' charismatic leadership, set them apart as sources of threat and/or envy to the authority of modernists.

Both the canonical and esoteric modernists were concerned with the problem of a fractured Islam and wrote about Islam in the modern period in terms that were inflected by the values of the enlightenment. However, each group assumed different positions when it came to the leadership of the Muslim community. The esoteric modernists, by virtue of their belief in possibilities of continuous prophecy, ultimately resolved the question of who exactly is the reformer of the time. The canonical modernists officially claimed that prophecy was over, and so the question of who should lead the community remained open. What I wish to underscore in my analyses is how many canonical modernists saw themselves as leaders who could serve in a prophetic capacity for the Muslim community. However, they were unable to make this claim explicit because of their commitment to a Sunni normative paradigm that precluded the possibility of prophetic authority after Muhammad. They, in turn, felt the need to deride and undermine groups that were unambiguous about the existence of continuous prophecy and its fulfillment by their charismatic leaders, such as ʿAbdul Baha and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

This volume explores the boundaries of modernists' definitions of Islam through close readings of their polemical arguments. The

modernists I study, on the one hand, make claims about Islam that are universal in character. They will often simply claim "Islam is x" or "What it means to be a Muslim is y." On the other hand, these same reformers' formulations are defined by parameters of inclusion and exclusion. Each reformer takes explicit positions on what beliefs, ideas, and people are outside the pale of their respective definitions of Islam as unity. This study focuses on how canonical modernists arrived at the conclusion that specific groups were excluded from the fold of Islam. Afghani's polemics were aimed at the followers of Sayyid Ahmad Khan as well as the Ismailis and the Bahais. For ʿAbduh, it was the Shia, and Rida believed that the Bahais as well as the Ahmadis and the Ismailis transgressed the boundaries of Muslim identity. Iqbal and Mawdudi both made pronouncements that the Ahmadis were heretics of Islam. Each chapter takes up a discussion of one particular modernist in light of the theme of Islam as unity, examines the contours of the modernist argument against a particular group or groups, and reflects on the reasons and driving forces behind the argument.

Canonical modernists' arguments fundamentally rely on the logic of western enlightenment ideas, such as reason, scriptural authority over popular practice, and, most importantly for this study, civilizational progress. As I began to outline above, their claims about Islam as cohesive and unified assume a Sunni normative bias that excludes groups such as the Shia, Ahmadis, Ismailis, and Bahais. However, canonical modernists often adopted esoteric concepts from these excluded groups—in particular, prophecy. The canonical modernists denounce Ahmadi, Bahai, and Ismaili ideas of prophetic continuity and authority; but their positions and arguments are often imbricated within many of the same logics and arguments about continuous prophecy that are practiced by these same communities. This is not altogether surprising, as esoteric ideas were in many ways woven into the historical fabric of Islam's cumulative tradition, as I noted above. What is quite remarkable to think about, however, is how Islamic modernists developed

many of their reformist ideas based on the simultaneous exclusion *and* appropriation of esoteric thought.

The conceptual distinction between "esoteric" and "canonical" modernism helps draw attention to a central line of investigation in this study: namely that Muslim modernism was given meaning and legitimacy through proclamations about exclusion. It is important to clarify that this argument is based on the writings of five main modernists at the center of this study—Afghani, ʿAbduh, Rida, Iqbal, and Mawdudi, who collectively illustrate a continuous line of thinking that developed over a wide geographic range starting in the nineteenth century and extending into the late twentieth century. Despite the different contexts and time periods in which each of these figures produced their ideas, they all demonstrate a consistent pattern of argumentation about unity and exclusion based on the redefinition of Islam as unity. I illustrate this continuity through their respective statements on *tawhid* but also outline the salient differences by analyzing the writings of the selected modernists in three phases over the period of approximately 1870–1980. Afghani and ʿAbduh represent early modernist thinking, as their positions on *tawhid* and exclusion are conveyed within the context of colonial rule. Rashid Rida too produced his works in the context of the colonial empire, but his views on *tawhid* were motivated by concerns about community that were nationalist in character. These positions mirrored Iqbal's, who wrote at approximately the same time as Rida and with similar nationalist concerns but in colonial India. Mawdudi, a late modernist, constructed his vision of *tawhid* with the question of the state—the postcolonial state specifically—front and center. This focus on the state distinguished his and Sayyid Qutb's modernism (or what is generally referred to as "Islamism") from that of the earlier group of modernists. The concluding final chapter examines the legacy of this modernist line of thinking about *tawhid* as unity through discussion of variegated Muslim political thinkers in the postcolonial period—as diverse as Fazlur Rahman, Ali Shariati, and leaders of Al Qaeda.

This group of modernists all provide sustained arguments about the boundaries of unity that implicate the esoteric modernists through the conceptual framework of *tawhid*. Moreover, they all reveal contradictions in their writings: on the one hand, they make pronouncements about heresy and exclusion; on the other hand, they are open to "heretical" ideas. For example, Iqbal is sympathetic to Sufi ideas of continuous prophecy while at the same time declaring Ahmadis heretical. Mawdudi reflects on the importance of a modern Mahdi to guide the community while also formulating arguments against Ahmadi religious authority. There is no single answer as to why this is the case. However, each chapter reflects on possible reasons for the contradictory and seemingly arbitrary positions on unity and exclusion. It is important to note that the spectrum of intention is quite broad in modernist thinking too: some modernists had deeply humanistic goals and, as I demonstrate in the concluding chapter, modernism also opened up reactionary and destructive ideas. This study aims to unpack how a pattern of thinking about unity and exclusion developed and persisted over a century in Muslim political thought, despite variegated intentions and consequences.

Chapters

The first chapter, "Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and 'Neicheri' Transgression" takes up a discussion of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), the most renowned and earliest of the modernists. Afghani was a political activist and agitator, orator, teacher, and journalist who traveled and spread his ideas throughout the Middle East, South Asia, and Europe in the late nineteenth century. He spent two years in Hyderabad, India (1879–1881), where he composed a series of essays, the most well-known of which was "The Truth about the Neicheri Sect and an Explanation of the Neicheris," which was later translated as "The Refutation of the Materialists." The subject of this first chapter is an interrogation of Afghani's understanding of "neicheri." The closest English

equivalent of "neicheri" is "naturalist." However, this definition is not simply descriptive. It was a derogatory neologism that Afghani invoked in his essay to describe heretical groups—Zoroastrians, Ismailis, and Bahais, as well as the followers of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898). The chapter analyzes Afghani's arguments about heresy in tandem with his position on *tawhid* (as political unity), which he believed was compromised at the time, primarily because Muslims were lacking proper leadership. Turning to a discussion of his time as a political and social leader in Egypt, I show how Afghani was recognized as a quasi-prophetic guide by a contingent of students and activists in Cairo. The question that animates this analysis is why Afghani condemns Sayyid Ahmad and his followers as heretical "neicheris" especially when Sayyid Ahmad shared many of the same values about Islam's civilizational progress as Afghani. The chapter concludes with the suggestion that Afghani undermined the ideas and followers of Sayyid Ahmad Khan because he resented his achievements as a successful leader of Muslims—a position Afghani sought for himself.

The second chapter "Muhammad ʿAbduh, Rashid Rida, and Bahai 'Esotericists'" discusses Muhammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905) and his student Rashid Rida (1865–1935). Together with Afghani, these three are widely regarded as the founders of Islamic modernism. The chapter begins with an examination of one of Muhammad ʿAbduh's most famous treatises, "Theology of Unity," in which he accuses the Shia for having undermined Muslim unity, and which is followed by an analysis of a less known exchange between ʿAbduh and Rida about Bahai beliefs, practices, and leadership. ʿAbduh's mentor Afghani made public proclamations against the Bahais, and ʿAbduh's student Rashid Rida vehemently opposed Bahai beliefs and practices. Rida explicitly denounced the authority of this group, describing them as "propagandists" similar to Ismailis and Sufis. But ʿAbduh, on the other hand, was quite sympathetic to Bahai ideas. This chapter calls attention to a surprising contradiction at the heart of many modernists' positions: Even though Afghani and ʿAbduh claim that specific groups explicitly

undermined Muslim political unity, their writings also reveal how they have been shaped and influenced by the esoteric components of Shia, Ismaili, and Bahai thought. I discuss this problem in Afghani's and ʿAbduh's writings in terms of the issue of prophecy—specifically how both ʿAbduh and Afghani rely on ideas of continuous prophecy from Shii and Bahai thought to establish their own views on religion and religious authority despite their strident positions against these groups.

The third chapter, "Muhammad Iqbal on the Question of Ahmadi Exclusion and Ismaili Inclusion," addresses the controversy about Ahmadi ideas of continuous prophecy through a study of Muhammad Iqbal's writings, in particular, his famous book-length essay titled *Islam and Ahmadism*, in which he makes the argument that Ahmadis should be considered a separate community from Muslims because of their heretical beliefs and practices. The chapter begins with Iqbal's views on *tawhid* as social and political unity, followed by his criticisms of the Ahmadis. Iqbal's idea of prophecy was fundamentally at odds with Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's interpretation. Iqbal claimed that prophecy manifested itself in a unique way in Islam, and what distinguished Islam from Christianity, as well as Judaism, was the special status of Muhammad as *nabi* (prophet). Ahmadi endorsement of continuous prophecy not only undermined the idea of *nabuwwat,* but also, through its belief in messianic salvation in the figure of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, disempowered both the individual as well as society at large. Scholars have argued that Iqbal's denouncement of the Ahmadis must be understood as an ethical and theological violation of the doctrine of Muhammad's final prophecy. This theological reading, I contend, does not provide a complete picture of why Iqbal would denounce the Ahmadis as heretics. This chapter engages the writings of several sociologists—Zimmel, Zito, and Bourdieu—to investigate the theory of the heretic. The intervention I offer to this debate about Iqbal's denouncement of the Ahmadis is that Iqbal perceived Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and his followers as "backward," and ultimately threatening to progressive ideas of community and leadership. The

Ahmadis in short precluded civilizational progress of the Muslim community from modernity. By way of comparison, I turn to Iqbal's statements about the Ismailis and their leader, the Aga Khan, whom Iqbal praises for their integration and accommodation into the Indian Muslim community. Whereas Afghani writes about the Ismailis as "*neicheri*," Iqbal claims that Ismailis represent the paradigmatic sectarian Muslim community, something to which the Ahmadis ought to aspire.

The fourth chapter, "Abul Ala Mawdudi's Islamic State and its Minority Ahmadis," focuses on the thought of Islamist theoretician Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979). Although there are clear distinctions between modernists and Islamists, the chapter examines modernist lines of thinking that continued with the rise of Islamist ideology. One of the key features of Islamism, outlined by Mawdudi, was the goal of an Islamic state. Whereas the earlier modernists wrote within the domain of colonial empire, Islamists like Mawdudi in India and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt wrote during the transition to and after the rise of the nation-state. Despite these distinct historical moments there were still connections and shared viewpoints between modernism and Islamism, found in conceptions of *tawhid* as political unity. Mawdudi, similarly to his modernist predecessors, deployed ideas of *tawhid* that represented political unity and civilizational progress; however, in Mawdudi's writings, *tawhid* stands at the center of his call for an Islamic state in which God is the only sovereign. Furthermore, the chapter calls attention to the ways in which his polemical writings against Ahmadis—in particular his call for their status as non-Muslims—draws from components of Iqbal's arguments, and how Mawdudi, like Afghani, exhibited aspirations to be recognized as a reformer and leader of the modern Muslim community.

The final chapter, "Postcolonial Legacies of Modernist *Tawhid*: A Quest for Justice and the Nation-State," reflects on the repercussions of the nineteenth century idea of Islam as political unity, through an analysis of various statements on unity and *tawhid* in the postcolonial period. The view that Islam was a cohesive tradition continued

into the 1950s, and the examples I briefly discuss all reflect on the subject of social and political unity from a perspective that can be broadly defined as "ethical." This chapter begins with a study of unity in the writings of Fazlur Rahman, the Pakistani modernist Quran scholar. Rahman shares many of the perspectives of his modernist predecessors, such as a Sunni normative bias that maligns groups such as the Shia and the Sufis. However, exclusion is not exactly front and center in Rahman's writings. In response and in contrast to Islamist and clerical interpretations of law and the Quran, Rahman claims that the Quran offers systematic moral and ethical guidelines based on the early community of the Prophet that can be applied to the contemporary context. Thereafter, the chapter analyzes how this ethical approach enjoined in discussions of *tawhid*/unity is given new meaning in the postcolonial period by political thinkers such as Ali Shariati in Iran, Farid Esack in South Africa, and the Afghanistan-based Al Qaeda. Ali Shariati, one of the seminal founding ideologues of the Iranian Revolution, casts *tawhid* into a Shii and Marxist framework that offers a corrective to what he identifies as the unjust social and political order of Shah Reza Pahlavi's state rule. South African scholar of Islamic studies, Farid Esack, examines how Muslims fighting against apartheid in the 1980s invoked *tawhid* as part of a larger campaign against racial and political oppression of the South African state. And finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of Al Qaeda, as a way to explore the reactionary turn and manipulation of modernist and Islamist views of unity and religious authority. Al Qaeda appropriated the Islamist idea of the vanguard and discursively legitimized terrorism against superpower western nation-states as a salvific project aimed to rescue a once unified but now fractured Muslim community.

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