

Symposium Islamic Reformation and Tajdid

The Islamic university of Applied Sciences Rotterdam has organized the symposium “Islamic Reformation and Tajdid” with the participation of many scholars and PhD students from different countries, who have contributed significantly to the success of the seminar.

We keep hearing calls for a modern and reformed Islam, but does Islam need a reformation? And would Islam reformation be a solution against extremism or have an impact on the idea of Jihad? Is Islam compatible with modernity, western values and human rights?

Several questions concerning reformation and Tajdid were raised during the symposium. These questions have been analyzed and answered by the speakers.

In the first lecture, prof. dr. Ahmet Akgunduz, the rector of the IUR, tried to clarify the difference between modernity, reformation and tajdid. Later on, he mentioned that Islam tolerates Tajdid in a confined way. He referred to reformists like such as Muhammad Abduh and Rachid Rida who tried to reform Islamic law from within and to revive the tradition of rationalism. Then he referred to some thinkers who have criticized the insularity of the individual madhabs, arguing for a sustained study of comparative law. On the one hand he respects views and opinions on the subject, yet he also believe that there are numerous misunderstanding between the western and Islamic narratives. On the other hand he rejects the method of choosing freely among the opinions of past authorities or combining the Legal doctrines of various madhabs to come with an appropriate solution, and called this talfiq (patching, piecing together).

He also discussed the terms “Tajdid” and “Mujaddid” and clarified that a Mujaddid, who, according to the prophetic Sunna, was perceived as the “centennial renewer”, has to regenerate a community which in the course of time has deviated from the straight path. Therefore Muslim authors and theologians adopted the term “Mujaddid” as a honorary title reserved only for the few worthy of it. Nowadays, the different groups such as secularists or liberals, traditionalists or conservatives, reformers or modernists, and Salafism assign different definitions to tajdid.

The second speaker, prof. dr. Tom Zwart dealt with the theme “Islam as a source of human rights”. Because the most human rights scholars raise the question how human rights can contribute to Islam, prof. Zwart posed a counter-question. The question was how Islam can contribute to the field of human rights.

People think that Islam is inferior to human rights, therefore people always raise the question how human rights can contribute to Islam.

He explained that the Islam is not well visible in human rights discourse and because of that absence at the international level the liberal view is gaining a monopoly position in international human rights law to which Muslim states and Muslim people are also bound. Moreover, the Muslims deny themselves in this way a very important podium for explaining and promoting the Islamic view on rights and therefore the opportunity to ensure that the rich perspectives of Islam become part of the international human rights discourse.

Prof. Zwart is convinced that there are many views of human rights, such as the Chinese view, the European view, the liberal view and the Islamic view, but the liberal view of human rights is dominant.

The reason is that people in the North have money and power. Muslims may reject and contest the liberal view of human rights, but not the concept of human rights itself. He finds that Islam represents a valid approach which currently missing from the human rights discourse.

The third speaker, *prof. dr. Hossam Mohamed* gave a speech on Islamic Reform and the Modern Nation State. He spoke about the Islamic character of the state in the Muslim world prior to the twentieth century, and the political transformations that happened after the abrogation of the Islamic Caliphate. He emphasized in his speech that the attempts to harmonize between the modern nation-state and Islamic principles have created ideological and political conflicts between the proponents of sharia and the advocates of secularization.

In his speech he mentioned that many western scholars such as Ernest Renan, Max Weber, Bertrand Badie believed that there is an inherent contradiction between state from Islamic view and modernity. Hereafter, he referred to the scholar of Islamic law and Islamic intellectual history prof. Wael Hallaq who advocated in his book "The Impossible State" that there is a complete contradictory between Islam and the modern state and that the paradigm of an "Islamic State" is impossible to survive.

Prof. Hossam disagrees with prof. Hallaq and other western scholars in his speech, because everybody knows that the "Islamic State" has a rich historical existence for more than ten centuries, and that the paradigm of an "Islamic State" was not impossible in the past and will never be impossible. It is not fair to accept everything that modern is and to destroy everything that old is.

The fourth speaker, *dr. Nadia Halim* shed light on the concept of religious reform and its importance in the era of modernity and on the Moroccan religious reform experience. She emphasized that the continuation of the message of Islam with generations in their changes, and the consolidation of religiosity in the life of the nation, requires that Muslim scholars follow this development, and reconsider the components and mechanisms of religious affairs with a new vision derived from the spirit of religion and its purposes. In her speech, dr. Halim assured that religious reform is a strategic necessity because the interpretation of religious texts and the extraction of juristic ruling that have been provided to humanity in an old era may not be compatible with modern-day challenges. As far as Morocco is concerned she clarified that the main aim of the religious reform in Morocco is the renewal of the religious field in order to protect Morocco from extremism and preserve its identity, which is marked by balance, moderation and tolerance.

The fifth speaker, *dr. Mutaz Al-Khatib* shed light on ethics in the context of reform movement in modern Egypt. He attempts to show that ethics was an integral part of reformist thought in its various trajectories. Western ideas gave rise to modern discussion in Egypt, and the intellectual response took different positions, ranging from adaptation, critical revision, and rediscovery or reinterpretation of the Islamic tradition. He finds that Modern European civilization and philosophy contributed to the revival of Arabic philosophical and ethical studies to the extent that they became a scientific field and part of the educational curriculum.

He showed that there is a multiplicity in the perceptions of the reformers and their ideological references. He also identified several directions in these trends, ranging from conservative virtue ethics, classical Roman or Greek ethics, and modern social, idealistic, and existential ethical theories, to theological and spiritual ethics. The reform project initiated by Muhammad Abduh for instance did not remain within abduh's vision. It has developed into variant and sometimes even conflicting projects

because of many factors, such as Egyptian student studying in European universities, the translation movement, and the internal dynamics of Egyptian intellectual discourse.

The sixth speaker, *mr. Chauki Lazhar* discussed the subject of “Reform of Islamic Sciences in a Modern Context”. He explained that Islamic sciences is one of the main issues which were advocated by modern scholars, and clarified that the big epistemological problem is in defining Islamic sciences. He finds that scholars should reread the Islamic legacy, to resist the bid’a in modern context and not refuting the whole legacy.

Then he mentioned some critics of Ismail al-Faroqi who argued that our past scholars provided us with the perfect law as well as the institutions to renew it through ijtihaad, but Muslims of today make no use of the self renewal machinery of the shari’a. He referred to some scholars like Ramadan al-Bouti who share the opinion that the jurisprudence schools did everything and the scholars of today could not add anything. In contrast to this opinion Wael al-Hallaq finds that the gate of Ijtihaad is not closed and will never be closed.

Mr. Lazhar finds that scholars have to assess classical Islamic sciences with clear methodology by reform.

The seventh speaker, *Mrs. Neda Saghaee* shed light on the theme “Reform from a Mystical Perspective”. She clarified that reformation was also in the area of mysticism. The Sufi reformation emphasized on the other hand political activism and enforced the Islamic law. Mrs. Saghaee mentioned many historical examples where Sufi movements used force to challenge colonial powers. But in general is Islamic mysticism more orientated toward a set of moral and practical practices and has a lot of influence on Islamic tradition. Therefore the Sufi reform is considered by many people as the enlightenment revolution.

The eighth speaker, *Mr. Arnold Mol* shed light on the theme “Islamic and Human Rights Discourse in relation to Renewal/Reform”.

Mr. Mol assumed that in order to understand the relation between human rights discourse and Islamic renewal/reform, we first need to assess how human rights and Islam are defined and compared. He mentioned that the overall majority of analyzed literature state that a form of compatibility between Islam and modern human rights is possible, but they also believe that a true form of compatibility has not been attained yet. So, he finds that Muslims have incorporated (‘Islamization of knowledge’) and engaged (‘synthesis/compatibility’) elements of modern human rights discourse. Therefore both Islamic human rights discourse and ‘Islam and human rights’ discourse exist, but that both discourses have not attained the level that is desired.

He claimed that Islamic human rights discourse is an internal discourse on human rights that is not Influenced by external forces or ideologies. It is a discourse on our own terms. ‘Islam and human rights’ discourse on the other hand emerged together with the emergence of the modern human rights regimes, and has been a constant external pressure on Muslims to reform ‘Islam(ic) law’ and has created apologetic discourse such as the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights as upheld by the OIC.

When analyzing these discussions on Islam and Human Rights discourse into typologies, we can not only see which Islam human rights need, but also which human rights Islam needs. From this assessment new understandings how to engage Islamic ethics in the form of a modern Islamic human rights discourse without falling into apologetics or theological corruption can be derived.

The ninth speaker, Mr. Elmostapha Rouam shed light on the theme “A systems approach to determine the static and the dynamic elements in Islamic tradition”. He assumed in his speech that before to reach an aim it is obligatory to understand the issue through understanding the actuality, and understanding the Islamic ruling that suits this actuality. Moreover, the scholar is the one who control the procedure and help the people to reach their aim.

He mentioned that some Salafi believe that the text is holy and that other people that their understanding of the text is holy, and these are two extremely different concepts. On the other hand he referred to the fact that there are people who have good understanding of the actuality but they do not have Islamic knowledge and that is insufficient to engage in the discussion of reform.

The tenth speaker, Mr. Bilal Farooqi shed light on the subject “Islamic Reform and the Concept of Jihad”. He explained that modernization and the ideals it brought clashed with institutional, social and political norms throughout the Muslim world. These intellectual ruptures were accompanied by colonization of large parts of the Muslim world, which further complicated things.

He assured in his speech that in order to understand the concept of the idea of jihad, it is necessary to look at the major shift happened during nineteenth century. Because throughout the nineteenth century Muslim world was under severe pressure. Muslim territories were colonized, and Muslims were exposed to new philosophies such as naturalism and materialism. Moreover, the basic Islamic tents were under attack by the western scholars. There were several efforts to reconcile Islamic ideals with the modern ideas, especially in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt.

In that era Muslim communities were trying to resist the colonization by practically doing jihad. There was huge criticism on the idea of jihad by the western scholars. The main characteristic of Islamic reform movement was to return to the Quran and the Sunnah to enable the reinterpretation of traditional religious norms and laws. At the time of this reinterpretation, major ideals that prevailed in the Muslim world, including jihad, were reviewed.

At the time Muslim scholars reinterpret the idea of jihad and they made two changes. One the eliminated the concept of aggressive jihad and also, they make it obligatory for every individual which was a communal duty before that. During this period, the doctrine of jihad took a great shift and became quite different from its classical interpretations.