

## Reform Within Islam:

### The Tajdid and Jadid Movement Among the Kazan Tatars (1819-1917): Conciliation or Conflict?

By Ahmet Kanlıdere, Istanbul: Eren, 1997, 198 pp.

When the western influence or civilization came to impinge upon the Muslim world in the late eighteenth century, a profound process of transformation began in Muslim thought. There had been so many encounters between the West and the East, or in other words, between Islam and Christianity over centuries in various ways and on different levels. However, this was a novel phenomenon, without antecedents, resulting from "the technical age" and accordingly from a state of comparative superiority among nations placing them inexorably in an objective hierarchy in terms of their use of the possibilities of this age. (The term "technical age" is used here as defined by Marshall G.S. Hodgson in *The Venture of Islam* as a universal human development, contrary to the term "modern age," which implies western superiority.) Having lost the sense of absolute superiority provided by their faith, Muslims had come to feel themselves more vulnerable to the Western challenge than ever. Quite naturally this led Muslim thinkers to question their thought, religion, and civilization in comparison with those of the West. Few if any thinkers, like the architect of the Majalla, Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, the foremost intellectual figure in modern times, in whom the authentic 'alim tradition was embodied, remained bound to the idiosyncrasies and possibilities of Islamic thought in coping with the Western challenge to the bitter end. The bulk of the Muslim intelligentsia and 'ulama, far from possessing a staunch, implicit faith in the self-sufficiency of Islamic legacy, as Ahmed Cevdet Paşa has, felt themselves as bound to compromise with western thought in some way or other. Then a new way of thinking on the part of Muslim thinkers "Islamic modernism" came into being.

Seen in this light, Islamic modernism marks a decisive rupture in the history of Islamic thought in that it represents an attempt at renewal from outside, as opposed to the *ihya* or *tajdid* tradition codified by the Prophet himself, which

was a process of renewal from within, in an organic way. The measure of success of this attempt was elusive; and as is every thought with an apologetic ring, Islamic modernism, following an initial phase of ardor, proved unable to tackle the western challenge. Apparently, as Fazlur Rahman, one of the most notable representatives of neo-Islamic modernism, pointed out, no classical Islamic modernism seems to have survived its fundamentalist version, remaining as the bogey of the western world today. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we are completely above comprehending the accomplishments of Islamic modernism. It is well known that as the prevailing movement at the time, Islamic modernism found a wide area of exercise displaying a great deal of variety. So it is necessary to gain a full picture of the movement in order to assess its achievements properly. Although the Egyptian branch of this current, namely, that embodied in the careers of Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh, has come to the fore, other branches of Islamic modernism are equally significant. It may be said that Islamic modernism has had six branches: Egypt, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Muslim Russia.

The work of Ahmet Kanlıdere under review deals with the most neglected branch of Islamic modernism, the modernist movement among the Kazan Tatars in Russia. As the author himself states, Tatar revivalism took on a fairly different form from its well-known nineteenth-century counterparts, owing to the unique character of the region. Relatively close contact with western ideas through Russian channels and the existence of a vigorous sufi tradition in Tataristan contributed to its respective feature. Their brand of Islamic modernism, blended with marked nationalist and parochial elements and bearing marks of the achievements of all the Islamic world going through the onerous experience of "westernizing" reform, requires accordingly a special, rigorous treatment. So the work under consideration, which is originally a Ph.D. dissertation submitted to Columbia University, exhibits a two-faceted character—ideological and historical. The work tries to trace and define the historical and intellectual roots of the Tatar *Tajdid* and *Jadid* movement by focusing on leading Tatar religious reformers such as 'Abd Al-Nasr Qursavi, Shihab Al-Din Marjani, Rida Al-Din b. Fakhr Al-Din and Musa jar Allah Bigiyef on the first level. Then it sets out to show the bearing of these efforts on the reform and transformation of society on the second level.

As the author has shown, the Tatar reformists formulated an ideology which allowed them to remain orthodox Muslims while espousing western values and ideas. The reform movement inaugurated by them was a multi-faceted project with religious, cultural, educational, and political objectives. It was only through such an orientation that the Muslims of Russia could resist and survive in a world beset with challenges and difficulties. The work also shows successfully how the reformers played a constructive (or passive in some eyes) role aimed at peaceful coexistence and participation in political life. Apparently their success, albeit limited, came from their awareness of the specific milieu and conditions in which they lived. This study is of prime importance in that it sheds light on the roots of Pan-Turkism propagated in Turkey by such thinkers as Yusuf Akçuraoğlu and Ismail Gaspirinski.

However, there is some criticism to be made. The main failure of the work, I think, is its theoretical framework. As in many works, the author uses such terms

as "reformism," "modernism," and "revivalism" loosely. These concepts are unlikely to make sense without placing them in a historical context of Islamic thought. For example, contrary to what many think, the terms "modernism" and "reformism" are not identical. While modernism implies a mere intellectual activity, a way of thinking aimed at making the Islamic concepts and values compatible with those of the West, reformism designates a process of practical programs, a set of actions aimed at the improvement of life regardless of whether it is in accordance with the modernist way of thought. For instance, Mustafa Reşit Paşa, the architect of the Tanzimat, was a leading reformer but not a modernist in the usual sense of the term.

Second, the treatment of the Ottoman link, that is, the interaction between Muslim Russia and Ottoman Turkey, seems to be weak. While most of the inspiration of the Tatar reformist movement has been attributed to Al-Afghani and Abduh, the accomplishments of the New (or Young) Ottomans, the mission of Namık Kemal and his fellows, has been omitted. As the ground-breaking work of Şerif Mardin has disclosed, the origins of Islamic modernism can be traced back to the New Ottomans. (See *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, Princeton, 1962.) It has proved clearly that, to their credit, the New Ottomans were the real precursors of Islamic modernism. (There has been a growing tendency to do justice to the New Ottomans in the matter. For a recent assessment of this, see Aziz al Azmeh, "Muslim Modernism and the Text of the Past," *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity: Historical and Contemporary Contexts*, Sharifah Shifa al-Attas, ed. Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996, 397.) So, it is impossible to assess Islamic modernism without referring to the New Ottomans.

Third, the book suffers a number of grave errors of omission. Abd Al-Rashid Ibrahimov's link with Sultan Abdulhamid II has been omitted. Indeed, Ibrahimov was one of the foremost figures promoting Pan-Islamist themes. As an itinerant-missionary prompted by Sultan Abdulhamid II, Ibrahimov committed himself to the preaching of Pan-Islamist themes. An even more important error of omission is the career of Halim Sabit. He is considered by many as a leading figure among the preachers of Islamic modernism in the Second Constitutional Era. In fact, Kazanlı (from Kazan) Halim Sabit, one of those who gathered around the semi-official periodical of modernists, *Islam Mecmuası*, got involved in several controversies and served as a "vector" of the ideas launched by his fellow citizen Musa Jarullah in Turkey. (For some of these controversies see Sadık Albayrak's passionate, if somewhat heavily documented, work in Turkish, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık-Batıcılık Mücadelesi* [Struggle for Islamism and Westernism in Turkey], Istanbul, 1990, 296–320.) Finally, the sharp polemics between Musa Jarullah Bigiyev and Shaykh al-Islam Mustafa Sabri could have been treated much more in accordance with their importance.

To conclude, the study adds a new, important dimension to our assessments of Islamic modernism. The omissions notwithstanding, the rigorous scholarship the author has brought to his work in general deserves genuine appreciation.

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