Transcript

00:00:00

Good afternoon, everyone.

00:00:02

My name is Rehan Ismail.

00:00:04

I'm a professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.

00:00:10

I'm also a fellow of St.

00:00:11

Anthony's College.

00:00:12

And welcome to you all.

00:00:14

Tonight we have an exciting event.

00:00:18

It's a great pleasure to welcome Professor Fitzroy Morrissey.

00:00:22

He's a historian of Islamic thought at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.

00:00:27

He's also a fellow of Pembroke College, and he is a dear colleague to many of us, and I can see a number of our colleagues here tonight.

00:00:37

So Professor Morrissey specializes in Islamic intellectual history with a particular focus on Sufism and Islamic thought across the medieval and modern period.

00:00:48

And we were having this conversation earlier.

00:00:50

Not many people actually do that, look at medieval period as well as modern period.

00:00:55

So to be able to have such expertise, it's great, particularly when it comes to Islamic studies.

00:01:02

He is the author of several books, including Sufism and the Perfect Human, Sufism and the Scriptures, A History of Islamic Thought, which was named a book of the year by the spectator and Engersburg ideas.

00:01:17

Again, we have a colleague who's also very, very prolific.

00:01:21

And his most recent book, The Renewal of Islam, Thinkers and Believers of the Modern Era, published this year

00:01:29

explores Islamic movements of renewal and reform from the 18th century to the present day.

00:01:36

Alongside his academic research and teaching, Professor Morris is actively involved in public engagement, contributing to a wide range of publications, and speaking widely on Islam and religion.

00:01:51

Without further delay, please join me in giving a warm welcome to Wits and we look forward to hearing the talk.

00:02:05

Thanks very much, Rehan, for that really generous introduction and thank you for the invitation.

00:02:10

It's really a pleasure to be here.

00:02:12

I was saying earlier to Rehan that the work that went into the book

00:02:17

kind of grew out of an optional paper that I taught here at St.

00:02:22

Anthes in the Middle East Centre for the M-Phil among Middle Eastern studies on modern Islamic thought many years ago.

00:02:29

I think it must have been 2017, 2018.

00:02:31

So it's nice to sort of come full circle.

00:02:35

And I'm very grateful to all of you for coming.

00:02:37

It's really humbling to see such a learned and engaged audience.

00:02:43

So thanks very much.

00:02:45

As Rehan said, the book is really quite a wide-ranging survey of movements of renewal and reform in the modern period, focusing on the ideas underlying those movements.

00:03:01

And the type of the book is a reference to the concept of Tejdit, which is indigenous to the Islamic tradition.

00:03:11

I look at how various thinkers have

00:03:14

thought about Tajdeed.

00:03:17

It's quite a wide-ranging survey, as I've said.

00:03:20

So I thought that today I would try and pick out some of the underlying themes of the book and maybe focus in on one or two case studies.

00:03:29

But I'd be happy to talk to other themes in the book in the Q&A.

00:03:36

So seeing as we're at the Middle East Centre, I thought I would start with Albert Harani and his classic

00:03:44

Arabic thought in the liberal age.

00:03:46

And this famous passage, which he quotes from Rashid Ridda's Tariq al-Ustad al-Iman, his biography of Muhammad Abdu, probably the greatest representative of the modernist movement within modern Islamic thought.

00:04:09

And this is from the beginning of the introduction to the first

00:04:13

volume and really gives this account that Abdu gave of his own life and his intellectual project.

00:04:23

And Abdu gives this summary of what he refers to as , the two great matters, the two great things which animated his life's work.

00:04:38

One of those is the reform of

00:04:40

the Arabic language, which I won't speak to, but the first one is this, first to liberate thought from the shackles of Taqlid and understand religion as it was understood by the elders of the community before dissension appeared, to return in the acquisition of religious knowledge to his first sources and to weigh them in the scales of human reason.

00:05:06

which God has created in order to prevent excess or adulteration in religion, so that God's wisdom may be fulfilled and the order of the human world preserved.

00:05:17

And to prove that, seen in this light, religion must be accounted a friend to science, pushing man to investigate the secrets of existence, summoning him to respect established truths and to depend on them in his moral life and conduct.

00:05:33

So it's a very nice quote.

00:05:35

And I think it captures some of the key concepts within Abdu's program of Islamic modernism, and that's why Hourani has highlighted it.

00:05:45

So I've just underlined a few key phrases there, a few key terms.

00:05:50

So Abdu talks about freeing thought, from the shackles of Taqlid.

00:06:02

This is the

00:06:04

in a pejorative sense, the unthinking emulation of established legal opinion from within typically one of the four Sunni schools of law.

00:06:19

So this is instead of Taqlid, instead of kind of blind, unthinking emulation of a particular school of law, we're going to go back to how Islam was understood by the Salaf.

00:06:33

who were left undefined here, but by some kind of pious forebears, before the appearance of dissension, before dissension appears.

00:06:46

So this is kind of the return to a golden age of unity, of harmony.

00:06:52

And to return also to the first sources, to acquire knowledge,

00:07:09

So to return to the first sources.

00:07:13

So we have kind of three key concepts there, the kind of freeing of thought from Taqlid and implicit there is a turn instead to the use of Ijtihad and the jurists use of the utmost extent of his or her

00:07:33

intellectual capacity in order to derive the law directly from the fundamental sources and to take the salaf as a model.

00:07:43

And this quotation and these concepts, they speak to what Kisha Ali and others have described as the Protestantization of modern Islam, which is one of the main themes of the book.

00:08:01

this sense in which renewal is conceived of as a process of going back, of returning to origins, and doing that by returning to the fundamental sources.

00:08:15

So it's a kind of sola scriptura idea.

00:08:18

So Kisha Ali says, modern Islam is a profoundly Protestant tradition.

00:08:24

Among Sunni Muslims in particular, core elements of post-reformation Protestant textual practice

00:08:31

enjoy widespread, do not universal acceptance.

00:08:35

Believers read scriptural texts in isolation from their commentarial traditions and often without expert guidance.

00:08:43

This is that point, Abdu, going back to the first sources.

00:08:49

Quran and Hadith are widely translated into vernacular languages, confronted by a difficulty or a question about religious doctrine or practice, a layperson

00:09:00

is likely to turn to scripture.

00:09:03

So I think we see that some of those ideas, that Protestantization process captured in this quotation from Abdu, and we also see it in how Abdu practiced fit, how he interpreted the law.

00:09:20

And I talk, I discuss in the book, probably the most famous example is what's known as the Transvaal Fatwa,

00:09:30

which Abdu issued in 1903 in response to a series of questions from Muslims living in South Africa, asking whether Muslims living in Transvaal are permitted to eat meat slaughtered by Christians, whether they're permitted to wear a European hat, European style hat,

00:09:54

whether Shafi'is, so followers of the Shafi'i school of law, are permitted to pray behind Hanafi imams.

00:10:04

And in his response to those questions, Abduh, he exemplifies the kind of method that he's talking about in his quote.

00:10:16

So in response to the question, which is probably the most contentious one, about

00:10:21

whether Muslims can eat meat slaughtered by Christians.

00:10:27

He effectively discards the accumulated tradition of jurisprudential reasoning on this question, and he returns to the scriptural evidence.

00:10:37

So he cites the verse from Surah Al-Ma'idah, permitted for you is the meat of the people of the book.

00:10:46

And in fact, the one jurist that he cites is not from his own

00:10:51

Hanafi school, but is the Maliki jurist al-Qadi ibn al-Arabi.

00:10:58

So in that sense, Abduh is representative of this Protestantization of modern Islam that Kisha Ali and others have identified.

00:11:09

One of the things that I really wanted to draw attention to in the book, however, is that this Protestantization of modern Islam, if we're going to call it that,

00:11:20

has a deeper spiritual, mystical dimension.

00:11:28

So Rayhan's talked about how my background is really in the study of Sufism.

00:11:33

And what I wanted to do in the book is to show how thinkers like Abdu and other reformers of the 19th and 20th centuries were, in many respects, engaging creatively with and very knowledgeable of

00:11:50

the post-classical Islamic intellectual tradition, and particularly with the Sufi tradition.

00:11:59

So I've put here on the PowerPoint, the mystical background to Protestantizing, renewal being one of the themes.

00:12:09

And I'm gonna talk through these points today.

00:12:14

So what I want to suggest is that for many of these reformers,

00:12:20

The return to the sources that Abdu refers to is enabled by a mystical experience that through a direct encounter with the divine, the sacred, often with the prophet, especially with the prophet Muhammad, these thinkers believe themselves to be able to unlock the meaning of the scriptural texts.

00:12:48

Likewise, I want to suggest in the book that the program of renewal of Tajdid, the renewal of Islam and the renewal of Islamic societies that these thinkers are advocating is rooted in a more fundamental program of self-renewal, renewal for self on a moral and spiritual level.

00:13:13

And this is a theme which

00:13:16

which I trace from the early modern period.

00:13:22

I also try to show how the claim on the part of many of the reformers or their followers that they are, or what's called the mujadid, the person responsible for the renewal of religion in their century, in their time, that this claim is often

00:13:45

made on the basis of the spiritual experiences that these thinkers have claimed to undergo themselves.

00:13:54

And as I've said, the mystical dimension of these programs of renewal reflects, I think, these thinkers' close engagement with the post-classical intellectual tradition, particularly in its Sufi form and particularly this school of Ibn Arabi, who's probably the most

00:14:14

influential Sufi thinker of the post-classical Islamicist.

00:14:21

So as well as suggesting or arguing these things, and on the basis of that argument, I also want to highlight what I see as the connections or the continuity between programs of reform and renewal in what I'm calling the early modern period, so from the 17th

00:14:43

through to the early 19th century and the perhaps more familiar, well-known modern reformist movements of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

00:14:55

And to show really how many of the themes and the concepts that thinkers like Abdu are employing are already there in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

00:15:09

And so the book covers, among others, these

00:15:13

reformist movements.

00:15:16

And in each case, I look at how they conceptualize Tajshid renewal and how they engage with the pre-modern intellectual tradition.

00:15:31

So to return to Abdu, one of the interesting things about Abdu is that he has a background himself in Sufism and

00:15:43

Those of you who read Abdu's biography will have come across this idea that he was very heavily influenced in his youth by an uncle of his called Sheikh Jadwish Khidr, who was an affiliate of the Shadli order of Sufis.

00:16:08

And likewise, Abdu

00:16:11

had this intensely close relationship with the famous activist Jamal Al-Din Al-Rafani, who himself was highly conversant in the philosophical and mystical traditions of post-caste Islam, particularly within the Persian world.

00:16:35

And Abdu's first treatise

00:16:41

before, as it were, he turned to the more rationalist modernism of his later career, for which he is famous, is this text, which he wrote in 1874, although I don't think it was published until Ridda published it in his biography of Abdu.

00:17:03

And this text is .

00:17:11

So the treatise on where the debt is something like mystical inspirations on the theories of the rational theologians and the Sufis on divine philosophy or if you could say on metaphysics.

00:17:33

And this treatise, it's not an especially original text

00:17:39

but it shows a deep familiarity with that post-classical Islamic tradition.

00:17:44

So with the philosophy of Avicenna and his interpreters, Abdu, for instance, rehearses Ibn Sina's famous proof of the existence of God.

00:17:59

And Abdu also displays his sympathies with the Sufi position on various metaphysical issues, and in particular

00:18:09

he seems to align himself with the monistic metaphysics of the school of Ibn Arabi.

00:18:16

For Ibn Arabi and his followers, existence is 1.

00:18:23

Existence in its purest and most intense form, which he calls al-Mujud al-Mutla, unrestricted existence, is identical with God.

00:18:33

And the existence which we see all around us

00:18:38

the things which we feel all around us are limited reflections or manifestations of that one pure divine existence.

00:18:49

And from this, we get the concept which is deployed by Ibn Arabi's later interpreters of , the unity of existence.

00:18:59

So this is the phrase that Ibn Arabi school is most often associated with, which is a kind of monism.

00:19:07

claim that there is only one being.

00:19:10

And Abdu, as I've said, indicates his sympathy or his adherence to this view.

00:19:16

He says here, he's talking about, this is in the context of his discussion of God's being as being necessary and the being, the existence of the world as being contingent.

00:19:31

The world depends upon God for its existence in order to become

00:19:37

actualized and so the God is the cause of the existence of the world and he says that every contingent thing every contingent thing is an aspect of

00:20:05

is one aspect of its cause it has no existence except for the existence of its cause so there is nothing in essential real existence except a single unrestricted existence essence sorry

00:20:31

whose multiplicity is only through the multiplicity of its aspects, of the perspectives on it, and which has absolutely no restriction.

00:20:39

And this is the necessary existence.

00:20:41

This is where Jibrul Majjood.

00:20:43

So he's saying that there is, in fact, no existence except God, and everything else is simply perspectives or aspects of the being of God.

00:20:58

So this is very much classic

00:21:01

school of Ibn Arabi type stuff that Abdu is referring to here.

00:21:07

Another key concept within the school of Ibn Arabi is the idea of Al-Insen and Kam, the perfect human being.

00:21:14

So this is the idea that, so for Ibn Arabi and his followers, God, as I've said, manifests himself within creation and in particular,

00:21:27

He reveals himself through his names and attributes, the names and attributes by which he is described in the Quran.

00:21:36

And for Ibn Arabi and his followers, the human being, in its perfect, most essential form, is the most complete locus of manifestation of these divine names and attributes.

00:21:51

This is what it means to be al-insa al-kan, the perfect human being.

00:21:57

And for Ibn Arabi's followers in particular, the Prophet Muhammad has a special status as the most perfect, Al-Aqmal, the most perfect of the perfect human beings or the one true perfect human.

00:22:14

So according to the school of Ibn Arabi, it's the Prophet Muhammad who most perfectly encapsulates or manifests the divine

00:22:22

names and attributes.

00:22:24

And this is an idea which Abdou, too, seems to evoke here in .

00:22:30

So he uses this term perfection and perfect when he's talking about the prophet.

00:22:38

He says, When the world reached this level in the acquisition of knowledge, God sent among them a perfect prophet.

00:22:46

You can see there at the end of the second line is the third of the first quote.

00:22:54

Of the highest degree of perfection.

00:22:57

End of that line.

00:23:01

So the prophet is the Akmal, the most perfect of human beings and of prophets.

00:23:08

And later on that same page, he says, it's clear to any sane or rational person

00:23:13

that the world needs, and he uses the term, a regular temple, the perfect man, in order to give instruction.

00:23:24

And interestingly, he says, and due to the requirements of the world and the ordering, the of its causes and its levels, its moretic.

00:23:33

This is, again, is a very Sufi, a bit Arabi way of talking.

00:23:38

The levels of existence, the hierarchy of being is a very key concept.

00:23:43

So Abdul is clearly familiar with this tradition of intellectual Sufism and is engaging closely with it here in his early work.

00:23:56

Now with that in mind, let's turn back to that quote from the Albert Horani translated in Arabic Thoughts in the Liberal Age that I began to talk with.

00:24:08

And I particularly want to look at the latter part of the

00:24:13

quotation where if I return to it, Abdu says, his aim was to prove that seen in this light, religion must be accounted a friend to science, pushing man to investigate the secrets of existence, summoning him to respect established truths and to depend on them in his moral life and conduct.

00:24:37

Now the way that Qurani has translated it here,

00:24:41

and the overall context of the passage indicates that this statement is to be understood as a kind of classic statement of modernism.

00:24:51

that we have to weigh knowledge in the balance or in the scales of reason.

00:24:56

Religion must be accounted a friend to science.

00:25:01

The secrets of existence are presumably the laws governing the universe, that kind of thing.

00:25:06

which are accessible to science, in which religious thought must be brought into harmony with.

00:25:13

But then, with Abdu Sufi background in mind, let's look again at those terms, particularly these terms, the secrets of existence, as Hourani has translated it.

00:25:28

I mean, to me, coming as someone who works with Sufi texts, who reads a lot of Sufi texts,

00:25:36

You see and this means something else than the laws of nature.

00:25:41

So to me, immediately it evokes this tripartite classification of knowledge that Ibn Arabi gives at the beginning of his encyclopedic work, where he says there are three kinds of knowledge.

00:25:57

There's rational knowledge, there's empirical knowledge, which he calls

00:26:05

of states, and there's mystical knowledge, or the knowledge of secrets, Ulum al-Astra.

00:26:12

And this term, Asrara, to me, indicates something like that.

00:26:16

So Ibn Arabi says, the third kind of knowledge is the knowledge of secrets, which is the knowledge that is above the level of the intellect, and the knowledge that the Holy Spirit breathes into the heart.

00:26:28

It is particular to the prophet and the saint, the Nabi and the Wali.

00:26:35

And if we think about how Abdu characterizes the prophet as something like the perfect man in Sufi terms, then this term asrar seems to me to indicate that he is still working with these Sufi type concepts and that when he says he's seeking the secrets or the mysteries of existence,

00:27:04

He's claiming to be able to achieve that on the basis of a kind of connection to the Prophet, a kind of sainthood.

00:27:12

And I'll sort of give examples of others who do this in a moment.

00:27:18

And Abduh also says in this quotation, Qurani translates as established truths, which

00:27:31

Seems a bit odd when you think about Abdu and his rather radical reformist program.

00:27:38

He's trying, you might think, to overthrow certain kind of established ways of seeing things.

00:27:46

Again, putting a kind of Sufi studies of an Arabic hat on, this term to me evokes

00:27:57

the more philosophical terminology that Ibn Arabi and others within his tradition and within the broader Islamic philosophical tradition are working.

00:28:07

So the , the truth, the realities, the plural of , this is something like the essences of things, the real nature of things, the quiddities of things.

00:28:18

And the term in Ibn Arabi's world, his way of writing and speaking,

00:28:27

particularly evokes this concept.

00:28:33

These are the fixed essences of things, of phenomenal existence, as they exist in an unrealized form in God's knowledge before God has given them phenomenal existence.

00:28:49

And I have a passage here from Ibn Arabis for Sus al-Hekam, his other major work.

00:28:56

where he says that the God himself is the same as that which indicates his self and his divinity, and the world is nothing other than his manifestation.

00:29:06

The world is nothing other than God's manifestation in the forms of these ai and pervita, these sometimes they're thought of as something like platonic forms, these essential natures of things whose existence will be impossible without God.

00:29:26

He takes on diverse forms in accordance with the realities, the and states of these entities.

00:29:33

Now, I'm not claiming that Abdu is using these terms in this passage in this Ibn Arabic type way, but I do think it's there in the background, and it's still there in the background in his later, more modernist work.

00:29:53

And I think the same could be said

00:29:55

for instance, of the leading Islamic modernist of South Asia, Said Ahmed Khan, who was probably even more than Abdu, a close reader of Ibn Arabi, particularly of Ibn Arabi's Fusus al-Hikam, and incorporated his language and his way of seeing the world, particularly into his early work, into his Islamic commentary on the Bible.

00:30:23

but you can see it there in his later writing as well.

00:30:31

So to take a step back a bit, as I've said, the title of the book is taken from this concept, Tajdid, renewal.

00:30:45

The concept of Tajdid is taken from the Hadith Corpus,

00:30:52

So there's this hadith in Sunan Abidawud, which is one of the six canonical collections of hadith recognized by Sunni Muslims, which I call the Mujaddid hadith.

00:31:05

God will raise up for this community at the head of every century one who will renew its religion for it.

00:31:13

Manujaddid Dina Halaha.

00:31:19

I think it's significant

00:31:21

that there is this concept of renewal that's there within the Islamic tradition.

00:31:28

So another sort of implicit argument that I'm making in the book is that the idea of reform or renewal is not simply a reaction to Western modernity, but there's this mechanism for reform and renewal that's there within the

00:31:51

Islamic tradition and which is utilized throughout Islamic history.

00:31:58

And so Tashdid, I think, is the term that perhaps has the more indigenous flavor to it rather than the term Islam reform, which tends to be associated with Abdul and his school.

00:32:16

So as I said in the introduction,

00:32:19

One of the suggestions that I'm putting forward, let's put it like that, is that claims to undertake, to be undertaking renewal, the renewal of religion, or to be the Mujaddid, to be the one that God has raised up at the beginning of the century, are often linked to mystical experiences or special experiences that these reformers report.

00:32:49

So the book begins with this vision or dream that one of the disciples of the Syrian Sufi and jurist Abdulrani Nabulisi reports about his master.

00:33:07

So Nabulisi was from Damascus.

00:33:12

He lived from 1641 to 1731, very long life, a very prolific writer.

00:33:19

very well known for his work on dreams.

00:33:23

He has a book on the interpretation of dreams.

00:33:27

Very important as a commentator on Ibn Arabi.

00:33:30

So he's one of the major commentators on Susan Hekam, but also an important jurist, a Hanafi jurist, who wrote a number of treatises mainly in response to another movement of reform

00:33:49

which go back to the 17th century in Istanbul and which had spread by his time to Damascus and to Syria more generally.

00:34:01

And the are associated typically with a more puritanical view of religious practice.

00:34:07

And so writes treatises on music, on coffee drinking, on

00:34:16

visiting saint's shrines, responding to the critiques of these practices by the Qadiz.

00:34:26

So in this account of his vision, Bayt Amani, this disciple, he says, The Sheikh Nabulasi turned to me as he was taking the hands of his disciples and said, 'I saw a vision that the four corners of the Kaaba

00:34:45

had collapsed to the ground.

00:34:47

I rebuilt them all as I was standing there without touching them with my hands.

00:34:53

And Betamani then comments, and this text by the way was completed in the year or so before Nabulisi died.

00:35:03

So it's one that Nabulisi read over.

00:35:09

He comments, surely this is a sign of his renewal

00:35:14

of Islam is Tajdid Amr al Islam.

00:35:19

And so I take this as a starting point, and it's a theme which recurs throughout the book, the ways in which religious, mystical visions, sorry, of this kind have been utilized and taken as the basis of a claim to the undertaking renewal.

00:35:37

So in the second chapter, I turn to the famous

00:35:42

reformist Sufi thinker of Delhi, Shah Al-Allah, and I discuss the 47 vision which he claims to have experienced during his time in the Haramain in Medina and Mecca in the 1430s, so around the same time.

00:36:06

I look at a movement or a collection of movements

00:36:11

known as the Tariq al Muhammadiyah, the Muhammadan path, which in various ways claim to have some special mystical connection to the Prophet Muhammad and through visions of Muhammad to be able to understand the inner meaning of Islam and therefore to be able to renew the religion.

00:36:35

And I also look at the Shi'i context and

00:36:40

also at the Sheikh Ahmad al-Ahsa in the Shaki movement.

00:36:48

So these mystical experiences are not only used as the basis for Tajdid, but part of the exercise of renewal, as we saw with the Abduh quote at the beginning,

00:37:05

involves this claim to be undertaking a fresh interpretation of the scriptural sources in order to arrive at the correct interpretation of the law.

00:37:15

So Ijtihad as opposed to Taqlid.

00:37:20

And this is a theme which again crops up among a number of the reformers that I look at.

00:37:27

The claim to be able to undertake Ijtihad to interpret the law

00:37:33

on the basis of mystical experience.

00:37:37

So this is an example from a text that was produced in Fez around 1720 by Ahmed Ibn Mubarak As-Sij al-Masi al-Lamati, and it's a hagiography of his Shaykh, his Sufi master, Abda Aziz al-Daba.

00:38:05

And he quotes Aziz saying, Understand, God give you success, that the friend of God or the Saint, the Wali, who's received illumination (Al-Wali al-Maftur al-Ahi, the one who's received a mystical illumination, a fatah, an opening) knows the truth and what's correct.

00:38:33

nor is he confined to any one school of religious law, nor is he confined to any one of the four orthodox schools of law in Sunni Islam.

00:38:46

If all the schools of religious law were nullified, I like this quote, he'd be able to bring back, he'd be able to bring the divine law, the Sharia, back to life.

00:38:56

He'd be able to undertake the Ihya, I underlined that, Ihya of Sharia.

00:39:02

he'd be able to give new life to the Lord.

00:39:05

This is a term ehyad, that's used synonymously with Tashid.

00:39:12

How could this be otherwise?

00:39:13

The prophet, God's blessings and peace be upon him, is never absent from him for the blinking of an eye, nor does he ever emerge for an instant from the vision of God.

00:39:24

Great is his glory.

00:39:26

Consequently, he knows the purpose of the prophet and the purpose of God.

00:39:31

with regard to his religiously binding prescriptions and other things.

00:39:34

So he knows the akam, he knows God's, the way in which God categorizes different actions into permitted or forbidden or mandatory or recommended or disapproved of.

00:39:49

He knows that because he has this connection, this constant connection to the prophet, this constant vision of the prophet and also in fact

00:39:58

a vision of God.

00:40:00

And this text was an influential text for several of those thinkers within the Muhammadan part, the Tariq al Muhammadiyya tradition, including the Ahmed al-Tijani, the founder of the Tijani order, which became very influential in West Africa.

00:40:20

So we see there that, if we again return to the quotation from Abdu at the beginning,

00:40:28

This urge to move, to escape the shackles of Taqlid can go hand in hand with this claim to mystical experience.

00:40:45

In the book, I also, as I've said, tried to draw connections between later reformers like Abdul or Said Ahmed Khan and the earlier reformers of the 18

00:40:57

and early 19th centuries.

00:41:00

So within the South Asian context, looking at the various ways in which the Shah and his family percolated into different movements of reform, many of them opposed to one another in the later 19th and 20th centuries.

00:41:20

Here I want to return to Nabulisi, the Damasin Sufi,

00:41:27

and to highlight three themes which, in a sense, lay the ground for the modernist reform project of Abdu and others in the late 19th century.

00:41:42

And here there's been a lot of work done on Nabulisi in recent years, decades, and

00:41:53

Several scholars, particularly Reinhard Schulzer, have argued that Nabulisi represents an autopthonous indigenous Islamic enlightenment way of thinking in the 18th century.

00:42:09

So I'm partially drawing inspiration from that work, Samer Akash and others more recently.

00:42:18

And Schulzer

00:42:21

and this is something I've been sort of working on since the book, or thinking about more closely, since publishing the book.

00:42:28

Schulzer tries to establish a relationship between mysticism and enlightenment thought.

00:42:39

That's the context of his article.

00:42:41

I don't go into the idea of enlightenment in the book.

00:42:45

Because he says mysticism puts the individual at the centre.

00:42:51

It privileges subjective experience and it involves a kind of empiricism, in this case a kind of mystical experience, but nevertheless it prioritizes experiential knowledge over rational knowledge or tradition.

00:43:15

And Nabulisi, I discuss his

00:43:20

and hierarchies of ways of knowing.

00:43:25

And in Abulasi, we see this quite clearly.

00:43:30

And again, this is Schultz's argument, that through his claim to mystical experience, Abulasi puts himself at the centre of the universe in the way that

00:43:46

Charles Taylor and others talk about this massive subjective turn of the modern age.

00:43:56

Nabulisi, I've spoken already a bit about his responses to the Puritanism of the Pardizadalis, and this manifests itself in various ways, and it manifests itself in

00:44:15

kind of emphasis on toleration, which would be picked up by later reformers from a modernist perspective.

00:44:25

So in his treaties on music or in his treaties on smoking, for instance, Nabulisi stresses the significance of intention.

00:44:38

So we can't, you know, we shouldn't

00:44:43

judge our fellow Muslims for doing a certain controversial practice like smoking until we know their intention, the nihia behind it.

00:44:54

And because he says intentions are something which are a matter of the heart, or he calls an amar qalbi, matter of the heart, they're known only to God.

00:45:05

So we should put our judgment to one side and we should

00:45:12

are on the side of thinking well of our fellow Muslims.

00:45:15

And this is a concept which is found in the early tradition.

00:45:22

Fritz Meyers has written on it.

00:45:26

Another kind of quite remarkable, I would say, feature of Nabulisi's writing is his tolerant and positive, in many ways, attitude towards

00:45:42

non-Muslims, particularly Christians.

00:45:44

So Nabulisi has these four travelogues detailing his travels in Syria and Palestine and Hejaz.

00:45:54

And these travelogues feature numerous references to his visits to Christian holy places, to an Armenian monastery in Jaffa where he felt particularly at peace

00:46:11

to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, generally the tone of these descriptions is very positive.

00:46:20

We also have this very nice correspondence that Nebulacy entered into with the Greek Melchite patriarch in Damascus in the early 18th century, where they discuss philosophical questions, the relationship between existence and essence, and it's a very

00:46:40

mutually respectful debate.

00:46:45

And Nabulisi describes the patriarch as one of our brethren in the quest for detachment from the world.

00:46:53

So he sees him as a kind of fellow traveller on the path of, on the mystical path.

00:46:58

Nabulisi also wrote those treatise which Michael Winter has written on.

00:47:05

in which he responds to an unnamed Turkish scholar, presumably a Fadi Zadali, who had taken a harsh line on the on Jews and Christians.

00:47:18

And in this treatise, Nabulisi argues that Jews and Christians can through the practice of their own religion be led to

00:47:32

a state of felicity of sa'adah in this world and possibly in the next, and that they too will be brought back into God's mercy.

00:47:43

And in one of his other letters, he also talks about how takla is found among Jews and Christians.

00:47:53

And then a theme that we see in Nabulasi, and I sort of trace this through many of the different reformers that I discuss in the book,

00:48:03

For instance, Sha with his sons with their Quran translations is a kind of move towards the democratization of religious knowledge and a kind of egalitarian view on the accessibility of religious knowledge.

00:48:25

And here, for instance, I've put there Nabulisi

00:48:31

writes a commentary on a famous creedal text by the Asherite theologian, Senussi, whom Carla Roy have and others have worked on.

00:48:45

And Senussi has this view that all believers must be able to rationally demonstrate the basis of their faith, that Taqlid in fundamental theological matters is not acceptable.

00:48:59

And Nabulisi very much goes along with this view.

00:49:04

And probably more radically, he also, I've said he's a commentator and interpreter of Ibn Arabi.

00:49:12

He also very unusually tried to popularize Ibn Arabi's thought.

00:49:17

He gave lectures on Ibn Arabi's Fusus al-Hikam at the Umayyad mosque.

00:49:22

He wrote a commentary on the Fusus al-Hikam, which is

00:49:26

explicitly popularizing, he tries to, he goes through every difficult term and tries to explain its meaning to an uninitiated reader.

00:49:44

So just to sort of, again, step back and pull out some of the

00:49:52

arguments that in many ways are kind of implicit in the book.

00:49:55

As I've said, the book is kind of a survey, but I'm trying to make a number of arguments implicitly.

00:50:04

As I've said, the reformist movements of the later 19th and 20th centuries, Abdou and others, I don't see as a radical break with thinkers like Nabulisi, like Shah al-Wah, like

00:50:21

the Muhammadan path movements of the 18th and early 19th centuries.

00:50:28

Modern programs of renewal, I suggest, are rooted in a creative engagement with post-classical Islamic thought, especially, as I've highlighted today, the Sufism of Ibn Arabi, although I also discussed their engagement with Khalam and Falsafa and jurisprudence.

00:50:50

I think one kind of implication of this is that what are often seen as opposed forms of religious thought and piety, mysticism on one hand and scripturalism or a kind of fundamentalism on the other, are not necessarily opposed.

00:51:12

I'm trying to bring out the ways in which, in fact,

00:51:16

they often can be mutually supportive.

00:51:18

The return to the scriptural sources goes hand in hand with a claim to be able to interpret those sources on the basis of one's own mystical experiences.

00:51:32

And now I'll just end with sort of a thought.

00:51:37

Michael Cook in his book, Ancient Religions, Modern Politics,

00:51:42

has this line about the widespread decline or delegitimation of Sufism in modern times.

00:51:52

Sufism, he says, is today by no means dead, but is not at the cutting edge of the developments that concern us.

00:51:59

Instead, its role is mainly that of a target for movements that see themselves as propagating pure Islam.

00:52:06

I've tried today in the talk and also in the book to

00:52:11

show how Sufi ideas remain absolutely centrally relevant to movements of modern reformist Islam, even when Sufism as an institutional form of religion comes under attack.

00:52:29

Thanks very much.

00:52:39

Thank you very much for that wonderful talk.