Tradition is characterised by the dynamics of simultaneous innovation and continuity. The Islamic tradition is a case-in-point where its internal elements are reconstructed through transmission, reception and interpretation. A vast body of texts, rituals and institutions, I contend has been subject to scrutiny and modification by Muslim scholars. Muhammad al-Ghazali’s works are examined, alongside those of his predecessors and peers, in this study for the purpose of establishing the facets of continuity and innovation in his thought. Twentieth century Muslim reformers such as al-Ghazali were heirs of the *turath* (Arabo-Islamic heritage) constructed over a period of 14 centuries. The tendency of *tajdid* (renewal) is implicated in a web of authoritative texts, juristic methods and moral norms.

Calls to revive the practice of *ijtihad* (independent judgement) to interpret Islamic law, enveloping ethics and politics, were motivated by the search for the authentic spirit of Islam in the past. This search was also accompanied by the recovery of the ideal norms contained in the texts of the Shari’ah (the way). Reformist thinking since the eve of the twentieth century has privileged the *maqasid al-Shari’ah* (objectives of the Shari’ah) to varying degrees. In this study, I consider a range of Muslim scholars from the classical period until the present who espoused the ethos of *tajdid*.

Moreover, I seek to propose an alternative reading of tradition contrary to the account of a dynamic modernity and a static tradition. The application of tradition as a concept of interpretation in this study seeks to situate al-Ghazali’s thought in the broader current of *tajdid* part of a vibrant past. I aim to provide a thick description of the works of al-Ghazali as an important example of a reformist venture maintaining the continuity of tradition. Additionally, the examination of a diversity of Muslim scholars aims to illustrate the patchwork composition of tradition in the past and the present.
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