Muslim reform movements have been the subject of scholarly research for some time. Studies have been devoted to the Wahhabis, Uthman Dan Fodio and the Sanusi, and many more to the modern reform movements in India and Egypt, North Africa, Iran and of course Ottoman and Republican Turkey. Less attention has been paid, however, to such movements as have occurred on the periphery, partly because of the relative inaccessibility of direct sources for some regions. The aim of this contribution is to demonstrate the fact that there were important reform movements in Tsarist Russia from the middle of the 19th century on, and in the formerly Dutch East Indies from the beginning of this century, and to discuss the question how we should study such movements.

This paper represents a specimen of the kind of approach in which both the context and the intentions of these movements should receive proper attention; it seeks neither to exaggerate nor to underestimate the religious aspects. It is based on materials brought together in a larger paper prepared for a workshop organized by the Social Science Research Council in Paris, December 1986, on "Transformations in Muslim Communities". Limits of space imposed prevent these materials from being offered here. The periods treated are for Russia the years from around 1850 until 1917, and for the Dutch East Indies the years from around 1900 until 1942.

For the USSR since 1917 see the present author’s "Western studies of Islam in present-day Central Asia (USSR)", in Utrecht Papers on Central Asia. Proceedings of the First European Seminar on Central Asian Studies held at Utrecht, 16-18 December 1985. Edited by Mark van Damme and Hendrik Boeschoten (Utrecht Turcological Series No. 2; Institute of Oriental Languages, University of Utrecht, 1987), pp. 45-67.
Future historians, when dealing with Islamic studies as they developed during the twentieth century, will probably be keen to show how much these studies have been influenced by ideological \textit{parti-pris}. Not only twentieth century Muslims have ideologized Islam: Western researchers too have been liable to take ideological positions which could not be justified merely by scholarly research. Since George Antonius and others we tend to connect the awakening of Muslim societies primarily with rising political resistance, and since Hamilton Gibb we are inclined to interpret the awakening of Muslim minds primarily in terms of modern trends in Islam.

As a result we run the risk of reading back into what took place before World War I and even World War II much of those ideological movements of nationalism and Islamism which have established their grasp on both Muslim and Western minds during the last forty or fifty years. Present-day ideological concerns can very well prevent us first from accurately observing what really went on, and second from offering adequate interpretations of what took place in Muslim societies.

Islamicists professionally concentrate on Islam; on closer consideration, however, the Muslim awakening before World War I was not always a concentration on what Islam was like. It rather seems to have been a growing awareness of the sad condition in which Muslims and Muslim societies found themselves, especially when compared to the West, and of the obvious fact that this poor condition was not up to the norms and ideals of Islam. It was in part with the help of the notion of Islam and the values and norms they derived from it that Muslim thinkers acquired awareness of this condition and looked for ways to improve it. As a result they arrived at a new world view and life orientation, and they arrived at new ways of action.

If Islamicists somehow tend to be fascinated by Islam—whatever the Islam they perceive—, our research into 19th and early 20th century Muslim awakening must try to escape that fascination. Such research must be cleared of ideological biases on our part as much as possible, and certainly of any ideologization of Islam, by either taking it as an entity in itself or, on the contrary, explaining away Islamic qualities by a belief only in the working of infrastructural factors and overlooking the human responses to them.