

# Muslim Modernity: Poetics, Politics, and Metaphysics

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*The truth of the matter is that the latter-day imperialism is but a mask for the crusading spirit, since it is not possible for it to appear in its true form, as it was possible in the Middle Ages. The unveiled crusading spirit was smashed against the rock of faith of Muslim leadership which came from various elements, including Salahuddin the Kurd, Turan Shah the Mamluk, who forgot the differences of nationalities and remembered their belief, and were victorious under the banner of Islam.*

(Sayyid Qutb 1964: 160)

*The Bush administration's response to bin Laden's Jihad operations did, in fact, lead to an American-led crusade—not a religious crusade to destroy Islam, but a political one intent on modernizing the region.*

(Michael Palmer 2007: 228)

I start with two citations: first from *Milestones*,<sup>1</sup> Sayyid Qutb's manifesto written in 1964, and the second from *The Last Crusade*, a book by Michael Palmer, published in the United States in 2007. These are the two extremes that frame the discussion of Islam in the United States and, to some extent, in the rest of the world. Both these authors, however, share certain striking visions. For Qutb, the nature of Western aggression has changed from the naked form of dominance to something more complex which has replaced the 'unveiled crusading spirit' that underwrote the crusades. For Michael Palmer, it is this crusading spirit that must posit itself as what it is. His idea of Americanism must use the naked force – as a secular crusade – to forcefully modernize the Islamic world. Note that for Qutb, the crusaders were defeated by the guidance and faith of a Muslim leadership transcending national identities, as both of his examples are non-Arab, historical figures of political Islam. Similarly, for Palmer (2007), the Western national divide must also give way to what he calls Americanism in order to defeat the common Islamist enemy. He laments that the 'political divisions in the West continue to undermine [...] efforts in Iraq'

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(2007: 246). What is fairly obvious in this brief analysis is the striking similarities of these two extremely conservative visions from the Islamic world and the United States. Needless to say, in this binary structure a large mass of the Western and Islamic populations – people who do not subscribe to a Manichean worldview – is silenced.

Specifically since September 11, for the United States, Islam has become a major subject of study in the American academy, as well as in the popular domain. This recent interest in Islam and the Islamic world has now developed its own vocabularies, its own logic, and its modes of explication, all attempting to reduce modern Islam in metropolitan languages in order to make it comprehensible. In this frenzy to explain modern Islam, the voice of the modern Muslim subject is silenced and written out of history as the act of articulation is taken over by those who speak in place of the Muslim subject. There is, therefore, a need to study Islam in light of its own textual, cultural, and political signifying practices. Such an approach will not attempt to reduce the Muslim world through a purely Western theoretical construct, but it will rely on texts, praxis, and modes of self-articulation existent in the Muslim world itself. A project of this sort will attempt to answer the important questions about Muslim modernity that seem to be the focus of most of the metropolitan works about Islam.

Using South Asian Muslim literary, political, and religious texts, this essay will attempt to discuss Islam and modernity within the framework of the larger Islamic world, but with a close look at the Muslim culture of the Indian Subcontinent. My main emphasis will be the means of identity formation, general and specific, and modes of encountering, inhabiting, and challenging Western modernity as articulated in literary, political, and religious texts.

It is impossible to understand Muslim modernity within a specifically Western view of history, according to which the end of history is achieved in the form of liberal democracies, free market economics, and composite nation-states. To understand Muslim history and Muslim modernity, the temporal structure of history's movement must be complicated to include multiple histories and multiple historical trajectories. To illustrate this point, as it is crucial to my discussion, a brief reference to Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2004) views on history is helpful. In describing two histories of capital, History 1 and History 2, Chakrabarty opines:

To the extent that both the distant and the immediate pasts of the worker—including the work of unionization and citizenship—prepare him to be the figure posited by capital as its own condition and contradiction, those pasts do indeed constitute History 1. But the idea of History 2 suggests that even the very abstracting space of the factory that capital creates, ways of being human will be acted in manners that do not lend themselves to the reproduction of the logic of capital. It would be wrong to think of History 2 (or History 2s) as necessarily precapitalist or feudal, or inherently incompatible with capital. If that were the case, there would be no way humans could be at home—dwell—in the rule of capital, no room for enjoyment, no play of desires, no seduction of commodity. (2004: 67)

The most important aspect of this particular theorization of history is certainly that it, as Chakrabarty (2004: 67) suggests, 'gives us a ground on which to situate our thoughts about multiple ways of being human and their relationship to the global

logic of capital'. I suggest that it is such a nuanced approach to history that will help us answer the complex question of Muslim modernity, for instead of suggesting that Islam is counter-modern or pre-modern, we can then theorize and describe the particulars of Islamic modernity as a different form of existence in the world of high capital. In fact we can trace the tensions between Islam and the West within this model of multiple histories. It is not that Islam has a separate history, but that Islam has refused to completely erase its own 'History 2' for the sake of 'History 1': the march of global capital. Furthermore, in most of Islamic thought and politics, the History 2 actually remains the main narrative that responds and reacts to History 1.

It is for this particular approach to world history that European colonialism becomes one of the most significant experiences in the history of the Islamic world. Albeit scholars like Palmer (2007: 235) believe that the 'Islamic world fell behind the West because of its own problems, problems inherent *within* Islam', and not because of colonialism, Western colonialism did create a historical situation in which the universalist drive of the West – History 1 – developed a conflictual relationship with Islamic ideas of selfhood and belonging, Islam's History 2. Hence, as Western modernity was introduced into the Islamic lands under a colonial mandate, the resistance to its Western-ness also became inscribed within the cultural, political and religious debates of the Islamic world. Within the Indian context, for example, the establishment of the East India Company's ascendancy prompted Shah Abdul Aziz, the leading *Mujtahid*<sup>2</sup> of his time, to issue the following Fatwa in 1803:

In this city [of Delhi] the *Imam al-Muslimin* wields no authority, while the decrees of the Christian leaders are obeyed without fear [of the consequences]. Promulgation of the command of *kufir* means that in the matter of administration and the control of people, in the levy of land-tax, tribute, tolls and customs, in the punishment of thieves and robbers, in the settlement of disputes, in the punishment of offences, the *kafirs* act according to their discretion. [...] From here to Calcutta the Christians are in complete control. (Metcalf 1982: 46).

Quite a lot can be gleaned from this one response to the establishment of the East India Company administration in parts of nineteenth century India. Note that Shah Abdul Aziz's opinion is clearly jurido-political. A new power has established itself in parts of India and its writ has become the law. How should the Muslims live under such changed circumstances? This juridical opinion draws on the idea of a Muslim sense of belonging to a polity based on the concept of *Darul-Islam*, the abode of peace. What the *Mujtahid* must define for Muslims of India is whether or not India – due to the rise of the East India Company's political power – can still be considered a part of the *Darul-Islam*, for if it is no longer an abode of peace then it has, for all practical purposes, slid into *Darul-Harb*, a state of war in which the Muslim responsibilities are different. As is obvious from Aziz's fatwa above, in his opinion India of 1803, or at least parts of it, could no longer be considered *Darul-Islam*, for the laws were now being promulgated by the *kafirs*. My point here is not to trace the historical impact of this particular *fatwa* or its validity, but rather, to highlight the complexity of Muslim responses to the rise of colonial power.

As the colonial powers take control of the Muslim lands, the Muslim scholars must discuss this change in juridical terms for the lay Muslims: for the Muslims

of the colonized spaces, interacting with the colonial powers is a politico-religious process which can only be normalized if the Muslims' own view of the world – their History 2 – can be accommodated in this negotiation. This view of *Darul-Islam*, of course, is based on the history of Islamic jurisprudence. It is this history that comes into conflict with the new mandate brought in by the colonial powers. This return to the basic texts of Islam is what I (for lack of a better term) call the metaphysics of Muslim colonial experience. The loss of political power in the Muslim lands also shifts the balance of political power from the Muslim ruling elite to the *Ulema*, the religious scholars. Abdul Aziz's *fatwa* is one such example of the exercise of this power by a scholar. In fact this power to guide and sometimes dictate Muslim life, as the *Ulema* had no power within the colonial political realm, became normalized within the reform institutions created by Muslims in India. In one case, the *Ulema* of *Darul-uloom Deoband* 'assumed a position of great authority through their pronouncement of *fatawa*' and 'at the conclusion of its first century, the school counted a total of 269, 215 *fatawa* that had been issued' (Metcalf 1982: 146) by Deoband's *Daru'l-ifta*, the Office of Juridical Opinions.

A *fatwa*, it must be noted, is not a verdict; it is rather a juridical opinion given by a religious scholar about an issue of Islamic faith. Traditionally, only the rulers could, after having sought the opinion of the *Ulema*, implement one particular *fatwa*. The way the scholar reaches an opinion is also very important to understand, for the process always involves a comparative study of the question according to the dictates and precedence available in the entire history of Muslim jurisprudence.<sup>3</sup> Hence, a *fatwa*, a priori, juxtaposes any new influences in the Muslim society – European History 1, for example – with the living texts and praxis of the Muslim History 2. Fazlur Rahman (1982: 8) defines this as *ijtihad* as follows, 'The effort to understand the meaning of a relevant text or procedure in the past, containing a rule, and to alter that rule by extending or restricting or otherwise modifying it in such a manner that a new situation can be subsumed under it by a new solution.'

The important aspect of this definition, and this is a more enlightened definition as compared to the one offered by the Taqlid school scholars, is that any new knowledge or issue in Islam can only become a generalizable current rule after it has been compared to all the available historical precedence and rules contained in the core texts of Islam. Therefore we can argue that there is a logical progression in retrieving a juridical opinion about any modern issue. As a rule, the scholar takes the issue as a proposition and then looks for any pre-existing rules about the same question in the two most respected sources of the Islamic jurisprudence: the Qur'an and the Sunnah.<sup>4</sup> If there are clear rules provided about a practice in the Qur'an, then that takes precedence over any other source.

For cases that have no direct precedence in these two sources, the scholar then uses *qi'yas*, or analogy. It is in this process that the scholar might use more of his own knowledge and imagination, but even this will be guided by the core texts and core concepts of Islam. What this brief discussion of the juridical process highlights clearly is that for the Muslim sense of belonging, in this world all aspects of Muslim life must pass through this process of filtration through, what I have called, the 'Muslim metaphysics'. Shah Abdul Aziz's *fatwa*, then, is a historical example

of Muslim response to the colonial mandate. As modernity came to Muslim lands under this mandate, then modernity must also pass through the same metaphysical filter to be either rejected or subsumed within the Islamic system.

This metaphysic, the tendency to test Western knowledge against the intrinsic criteria of Islam's own sense of belonging to the world – Islam's history 2 – prevails at all levels of Muslim thought and praxis. In fact, I would dare to suggest that this comparative consciousness could very well be termed the Muslim 'political unconscious.'<sup>5</sup>

It is this political unconscious that plays a major role in the articulation of a Muslim identity in the colonial and postcolonial world, and it permeates not just the religious textual production but also the literary texts and the political tracts. In the case of India, this sense of a different Muslim history, and hence an exceptional Muslim identity, is accentuated after the Indian Rebellion of 1857. For the Muslims of India, the Rebellion was a monumental event: after the rebellion, the nominal Muslim rule – the rule of Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal King – was abolished and India became a part of the British empire, as Queen Victoria adopted the title of the Empress of India. For the Muslims of India, this was the first time that they did not have a Muslim political authority – even a nominal one – under which they could claim to live a Muslim life. It is in this attempt to define a viable Muslim political identity under the British that the idea of Indian Muslim exceptionalism takes hold, an idea that can be generalized to the rest of the Islamic world under colonialism as well as in the current phase of high capital and neo-imperialism.

This tendency to make sense of a Muslim life under direct British control finds itself centered immediately in the Muslim letters after the 1857 Rebellion. To challenge the exclusion of Muslims from the new dominant regime forms the first struggle of the Muslim elite: the quest for inclusion into the new order, an inclusion that can only be affected through the language of loyalty. Hence, while for some *Ulema*, Shah Abdul Aziz for example, the new change of rulers transforms India into *Darul-Harb*, for poets and scholars after the Rebellion, the main concern is to find ways of coping with this change. It is this tendency to see the world around them as hostile and dangerous – both physically as well as spiritually – that informs Muslim cultural production. It is also important to note that for the Muslims of India, this struggle is not just in the domain of culture: it is always political. In that sense, the rise of Muslim exceptionalism in India is on a different trajectory than the culturist leanings of Indian nationalism that Partha Chatterjee (1993: 6) explains in the following words:

By my reading, anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and spiritual. The material is the domain of the "outside," of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. [...] The spiritual, on the other hand, is an "inner" domain bearing the "essential" marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. This formula, is, I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalism in Asia and Africa.

In essence, this resort to cultural nationalism allows Chatterjee to theorize the possibility of a native agency even when the material domain is under the political control of the colonizing powers. But for the Muslims of India, save a few exceptions, this negotiation within the material domain could not be divided into public and private, for being a Muslim, in a way, means inhabiting both the public and the private – the spiritual – at the same time. One cannot be a Muslim in private and a modern British colonial subject in the material world: in order to be a good Muslim, both the private and the public aspects of one's Muslimhood must coincide and coexist. Hence, for the Muslims of India, a purely spiritual approach to cultural nationalism was not possible, and this conundrum is resolved – in politics and poetics – by forcing modernity to allow a space for a purely Muslim identity. In fact, the early Muslim Urdu novels are a good representation of this attempt to articulate a Muslim life under foreign rule. There is, however, a tendency to go back into the history of Islam to retrieve the myths, stories, and instances of particular Muslim behaviors that do form the basis of many Muslim writings under colonialism and even in today's world, which suggest that as a global community, the Muslims are not only a spiritual community, but a larger community of culture that draws on shared supranational historical mythologies both in works of fiction and in every day writings.

I suggest that Muslim particularity and its interface with the colonial power was the main concern of the novels of Deputy Nazeer Ahmad, the first major Indian Urdu novelist.<sup>6</sup> Ahmad is the first author who converts Muslim storytelling from an epic mode to the mode of a realist novel by incorporating two important aspects of the novel, as suggested by Ian Watt (1957: 26), 'time and space'. Nazeer Ahmad narrates the realistic experiences of his real-life characters across a political landscape governed by the British, and in doing so articulates an imaginative idea of Muslim particularity and exceptionalism within the Raj. Hence, the Urdu novel from its very inception is a didactic tool to consider the particularity of Muslim experience in British India. The novels of Nazeer Ahmad, therefore, focus on the lives of particular individuals and on their negotiation of the British power structures. It is important to note that for Nazeer Ahmad, as well as for later novelists, the two modes of inclusion into the British system are either heroic or mundane.<sup>7</sup> Nazeer Ahmad's first novel, *Miratul Urus*,<sup>8</sup> traces the mundane aspects of material success in the new politico-economic system, while his later novel *Ibn-ul-waqt* [The Time-Server], traces the impact of an expedited, heroic entry into the British political and cultural realm.

Considering *Ibn-ul-Waqt* a representative novel of Nazeer Ahmad, Saleem Akhtar (2004: 36), the editor of *Majmua* [Collected Works of Nazeer Ahmad], suggests the following about its immediate context:

Nazeer Ahmad finished this novel in 1888. By then the Rebellion had ended and the English government had become an irrefutable reality. The defeat had wiped the Muslim minds of any delusions of power and government and the deeds of the Mughal Empire had become the tall tales of Arabian Nights. The Muslims were left only with a few customs and traditions that they considered instrumental in saving their national pride. [...] It is within this

context that Nazeer Ahmad matured as a literary figure, and hence he was champion of utilitarian<sup>9</sup> literature.

*Ibn-ul-Waqt* is Nazeer Ahmad's most overtly political novel and openly deals with the post-Rebellion Muslim dilemma of negotiating the British ascendancy. Within this struggle, Nazeer Ahmad also highlights the problems faced by the Muslim reformers, the limits of native assimilation, and the popular view of the Muslims about Westernization. It is in this complicated view of the British system by a native that a more overt representation of post-Rebellion Muslim particularity finds its most coherent and cogent expression. The novel starts with the following declaration, 'Nobody would have noticed it during our time, but the reason Ibn-ul-Waqt got so much notoriety was because he adopted the English ways at a time when learning English was considered *kuf'r* and when using English things was similar to *irtadad*' (Nazeer Ahmad 2004: 51).

This first sentence captures two very important aspects of the Muslim Post-Rebellion condition; it implies that the current views of Muslims are different and furthermore, the story is about a time when Muslims distrusted the British system. Being a British civil servant, this clarification of the narrative time ensures that Nazeer Ahmad's work could not be construed as a critique of the current British policies, while still giving him the freedom to look at the immediate past – of Muslim-British relationships – with a more critical insight. The last part of the sentence is also instructive, for it gives us a representation of the Muslim views of the British in the past. The Muslims of the narrative time of the novel saw an interaction with the British within the general rubric of two cardinal sins: *Kuf'r* and *irtadad*. *Kuf'r* signifies the world outside Islam: all those, except the people of the book, who are in a state of *kuf'r*, or non-belief. Hence, during the narrative time of the novel, the British system and any association with it was, in popular imagination, equal to being in contact with *kuf'r*. *Irtadad*, meaning apostasy, signifies the impact of dealing with the British or using British things or materials: one feared the loss of one's religion. Hence, Nazeer Ahmad informs us that our hero, Ibn-ul-Waqt lived in the times of these two extreme views of the British by the Muslims, and that is why his story became a public scandal.<sup>10</sup>

The novel is set in Delhi and the narrative starts in the middle of the Rebellion. The rebellion provides Ibn-ul-Waqt, a member of a noble family who works for the Mughal court, a chance of heroic entry into the British world by saving the life of a British official. This altruistic act of compassion grants Ibn-ul-Waqt instant access to the British power structures immediately after the British rule is restored. He rescues Mr. Noble and nurses him to health certainly under very dangerous conditions. This post-Rebellion mode of altruistic heroism is certainly based in reality: Sir Sayyid was one such native responsible for saving the lives of two English ladies. What is important about its rendition in fiction is that it provides us a vision of the British expectation of the natives during the rebellion. Even though the East India Company had not done much to create a hegemonic relationship with the natives, in the post-Rebellion world, the only way for the Muslims to prove their loyalty was to prove beyond doubt that they had helped the local British during the rebellion. Hence, with

very limited means of mobility available, the Muslim movement into the British system, especially immediately after the rebellion, was pretty much based on such heroic measures.

As a reward for saving the local magistrate, Ibn-ul-Waqt finds himself to be the center of British attention after the rebellion. He is given land and becomes a personal friend of Mr. Noble, the British official he had saved. Thus, suddenly, Ibn-ul-Waqt, who until then had been a devout Muslim and lived with his extended family, finds himself at the center of the new dominant power in Delhi, and the reward precipitates his move into the British influence. He eventually buys a house in the city and adopts the British ways: living alone in a large secluded house with house servants, wearing English attire, keeping dogs,<sup>11</sup> and entertaining British officials.<sup>12</sup> All these aspects of urban life were considered strictly European, especially keeping dogs in the same house as one lived, and could be culturally read as *irtadad*, apostasy. Now this move into the British system and especially adopting the British ways cannot be sustained unless rationalized through its linkage to the public good: the public imperative. Ibn-ul-Waqt, therefore, on Mr. Noble's insistence decides to become a reformer.

Similarly, in real-life politics, any acceptance of a Western idea must pass this test: it must be acceptable according to the teachings of Islam and then it must be legitimated in the name of the people. The idea does not necessarily need to be purely Islamic, but its adoption must not contravene any of the core Islamic teachings. An idea that is perceived to be inherently opposed to the core of Islamic teachings will be practically unacceptable, even if one could prove its benefits to the people. Hence, it becomes obvious that the limit of the liable political and social positions in Islam depends on two factors: the comparative acceptability of an idea and then its implementation for the good of the Muslim community. It is this particular metaphysic that plays an important role in the texts mentioned above and also in the practical communication between the Islamic world and the West. What this makes clear is that the Muslim particularity – the Muslim history 2 – is always alive and provides a comparative matrix to judge the value of anything offered by the West. Coupled with the legacy of Western colonial history, this is a recipe for a very strong opposition to a Western idea, especially if mandated through force. Hence, Islam's mistrust of the West and its politics is not necessarily based on the inherent nature of Islam, but is rather more experiential and philosophical. The past experiences and the Muslims' own sense of self ensure that everything offered or mandated by the West will go through a certain degree of scrutiny before being accepted or rejected.

A good example of this approach to the West is the Muslim responses to the idea of the nation-state, the main signifier of modernity and the modern identity. Quite a few Muslims see the nation-state as a product of the West that serves to divide the Muslim world – or the Muslim *Ummah* – into small nation-states. Those on the extreme of the Islamic political spectrum consider the idea of the nation-state completely un-Islamic. In fact even the moderate and enlightened poets and philosophers have been traditionally very critical of dividing the Muslim world into small territorial nation-states. The great twentieth century Muslim poet, Muhammad Iqbal

(1972: 60), opines as follows in one of his poems, '*Wataniat: Watan Behasiat aik Siasi Tasawwur Ke*' [Nationalism: Country as Political Concept], about the concept of nation-state<sup>13</sup>:

Country is the greatest new god  
 Its tunic is the shroud of religion  
 This idol carved by the new civilization  
 Is the destroyer of the Prophet's house  
 You, whose hand is strengthened by *Tauhid*  
 You Mustafwis<sup>14</sup> whose country is Islam  
 Show this world a hidden sight  
 And smite this idol into dust

Iqbal's approach here is comparative. He is clearly juxtaposing the two competing principles of nationality-forming: the Western nation-state model and the Islamic concept of *Ummah*. For him the Western model is akin to Ibn-e-Khaldoon's *asabiya*, which he terms *wataniat*; both these concepts are similar because they invoke a particularly territorial and thus limited sentiment. For Iqbal, then, the concept of a territorial nation-state is a major threat to the larger Muslim universal. This particular poem is an indictment of the flagship of Western political accomplishment: the nation-state.

This emphasis on the pan-Islamic Muslim identity is strictly political, for the *Ummah*, by definition is the global Muslim community joined by law. Iqbal also draws on the most enduring Islamic myth of *Hijra*: migration. Based on prophet Muhammad's migration from Makkah to Madina, territorial loyalty cannot supersede the loyalty to the *Ummah*, and if life becomes hard in one's territorial abode then one must, like the prophet, leave for a place where one can live according to one's conscience. There are several recorded sayings of the prophet about *Hijra*, which due to their importance in Islamic jurisprudence make it imperative on a Muslim to migrate in the name of God. A larger Muslim universal, therefore, is a necessity for a Muslim to exercise the option of migration. Iqbal's poem also highlights one of the important principles of nationality-forming: 'existence of one or more other groups from whom the group is to be differentiated' (Brass 2005). The creation of this other, Iqbal asserts later in the same poem, becomes the means to rationalize the imperial nation-state's mercantile and exploitative drive. Against the divisions generated by the nation-state, Iqbal reasserts the idea of human unity. At another place in his works, in a poem entitled 'Makkah or Geneva,' Iqbal (1972: 519-520) opines:

In these times the nations have proliferated  
 And the unity of Adam has been hidden  
 The wisdom of the West to divide the people  
 Islam aims only at the nation Adam  
 Makkah sends this message to Geneva:  
 Would it be Union of the People or Union of Nations?

This unity is certainly political and transnational, for if it were only cultural, then there could be no threat to the larger Muslim culture even if divided into nation-states. Here it should suffice to suggest that Iqbal displays the same kind

of dual approach to modernity that most of the Islamic world faced as it entered Western modernity under colonialism. Al-Ahsan (1992: 29) describes this feeling as follows, 'With the development of nationalism, and in particular the Muslim nation-state, the Muslims seem to have become somewhat confused about where their first loyalty lies – whether primary loyalty belongs to the *Ummah* or to the nation-state'.

Al-Ahsan is particularly writing about the postcolonial phase of Islamic nations. In Iqbal's case, this anxiety was already a part of the elite consciousness. I think this schizoid view of the nation is inherently inscribed in the Muslim encounter with colonialism. As we have seen in the literary works discussed above, the colonial encounter forces the natives to return to a pre-colonial universal myth. In the case of Muslims, this myth does not need creation, for it is present in their history and their daily rituals and cultural symbols. Since Iqbal takes it upon himself to speak to the people, he must then invoke the ideal historical symbol: the *Ummah*. I, therefore, do not see these two competing claims of loyalty as part of a Muslim confusion, but rather as a strength of political Islam: its power to keep its History 2 alive even after the long colonial encounter.

The same privileging of Islam's History 2 can be seen in most of the political texts from the Muslim world, both during and after the end of Western colonialism. In fact, Abul-A'la Mawdudi (1939), one of the most important twentieth century Islamic reformers, discusses the clash of Islam and Western modernity quite frequently in his works. In one particular work, while discussing the plight of Muslims under colonialism, Mawdudi explains this situation in the following words<sup>15</sup>:

The Muslims of today are caught in this dual slavery: In some places they are under the sway of both intellectual and political slavery, and in other places the degree of mental slavery is higher than that of political slavery. Unfortunately, there is not even a single Muslim community in the world that is completely free, intellectually or politically. Wherever they are politically free, they are still mentally enslaved. Their schools, offices, bazaars, societies, homes, and even their bodies, symbolize the power of Western thought, Western knowledge, and Western know-how. They think with a Western mind, see with Western eyes, and walk, consciously or unconsciously, on the paths created by the West. In all it has been imprinted on their minds that truth is what the West considers truth, and false is what the West considers false. (1939: 6)

Mawdudi's analysis of this particular condition of Muslims is expressed within the political climate created by colonialism, the method through which, as I have stated above, Western modernity is introduced into the Muslim world. Hence, for Mawdudi, a blind and uncritical emulation of Western modernity is one of the biggest challenges of the Islam of his time. During his life, Mawdudi offers numerous methods of saving the Muslim way of life – Muslim History 2 – from what he perceives as the pernicious influences of the Western civilization. What is instructive in this brief reference to Mawdudi is not necessarily the veracity of his claims but rather the knowledge that Western modernity is not seen as transparently neutral and universal by Muslim scholars and historians. It is rather a powerful discourse that works by eliminating particularities of Muslim identity, in producing the kind of Muslim subjectivity ideally suited for the hegemonic impulse of colonialism.

Hence, foregrounding Islam's History 2 becomes an important defensive strategy under such circumstances.

This brief discussion of certain specific textual responses to modernity from the Islamic world is enough to suggest that Islam's interface with modernity is never really a politically innocent engagement. It is also clear that Islam has its own specific modernity, which was partially articulated against the dominating impulse of the Western colonial modernity. This experience, coupled with the corpus of religious, literary and political texts, informs the modern Muslims about the larger world and their place in it. No amount of social engineering is likely to erase this particular way of belonging to the world. All attempts at modernizing the Islamic world forcefully, as articulated by Michael Palmer and many of his cohorts on the American right – by attempting to supplant Islam's History 2 with the History 1 – will eventually fail. No total erasure of Islam's History 2 is possible. The Islamic world, on the other hand, will have to find its own way of negotiating and accommodating modernity. It will be a painful process, and it will certainly follow a different temporal trajectory. The Islamic world will also maintain its regional and historical particularities, but in the end the change will have to come from within the Islamic world, rather than the unsustainable interventions mandated from the West.

## Notes

1. In Arabic *Ma'alim fi-l-Tariq*. This translation does not provide the name of the translator.
2. A *Mujtahid* is a Muslim religious scholar learned enough and recognized for his learning to give a juridical opinion about the matters of Muslim faith and life. According to Barbara Metcalf, Shah Abdul Aziz is probably the most important and most revered religious scholar in the Indian context; all major factions of Indian Islam traced their institutional legitimacy by establishing a link with Shah Abdul Aziz's teachings. For details see Barbara Metcalf (1982).
3. In fact even during the First Gulf War in 1991, the *Ulema* had differing opinions about whether a Muslim nation – Saudi Arabia – could ask for help from a non-Muslim nation – the United States – in a war against another Muslim state. Dr. Ahmad Deedat, the South African Scholar, then produced a video justifying, through a few verses of the Qur'an, that it was OK to ask non-Muslims' help if the Muslim nations did not have the capacity to do so. The important point about this discussion is that, even in the twentieth century, the policy decisions of one Muslim nation-state still needed rationalization through a scholarly interpretation of core Muslim texts.
4. Sunnah or Sunnat is the tradition of Prophet Muhammad. In a nutshell, it is his practice of the Islamic teaching. Most Muslim scholars consult the books of hadiths – Prophet Muhammad's recorded sayings – in order to find precedence.
5. The term political unconscious, of course, is borrowed from Fredric Jameson. For details on the term itself see Jameson (1981).
6. My discussion of the novel and the Muslim identity is heavily informed by Benedict Anderson's work on the novel and the nation-state. For details see Anderson's (1983/1991).
7. By heroic I mean an action, usually altruistic, that causes instant approval by the British and an immediate entry into the power system. The most often repeated heroic action in the post-Rebellion fiction and reality was the attempt by the native to have saved a British official or any of their dependents during the rebellion. This heroic deed becomes a constant trope in Muslim fiction, especially in terms of explaining someone's sudden rise within the post-Rebellion political system. In real life, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's actions to save two British ladies became the strongest proof of his loyalty to the British in the Post-Rebellion period. Surprisingly,

- even the postcolonial Urdu writers use this trope in tracing the rise of certain Indian Muslim families in post-Rebellion India, one good example of which is Abdullah Hussain's *The Weary Generations*. What I have called the mundane method of vertical mobility is also made possible through loyalty but is dependent mostly on acquisition of education.
8. All citations from Nazeer Ahmad's works are in my translation.
  9. Saleem Akhtar uses the Urdu word *Maqsadiyat*, which literally means something with an aim. I have translated it as 'utilitarian' because it is the utility of literature as a tool for public betterment that is meant by the Urdu term.
  10. According to Aziz Ahmad the main character also makes fun of people like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan who had adopted a 'bicultural' way of life. For details see Ahmad (1967: 36).
  11. In most Islamic cultures dogs are considered unclean and are not permitted in the inner sanctum of the house. Keeping dogs as household pets, therefore, was seen as an obvious example of Westernization.
  12. During the narrative time of the novel eating together with the foreigners was also considered un-Islamic in popular imagination, which was probably a strong Hindu influence on Indian Islam. Nazeer Ahmad and Sayyid Ahmad Khan tried to dispel this prejudice by arguing that as the British were people of the book, breaking bread with them could not be considered a contaminating experience. Sayyid Ahmad also asserted that this practice of not sharing food with non-Muslims was strictly un-Islamic and was caused by a Hinduization of Indian Islam.
  13. My translation.
  14. Followers of prophet Muhammad who was also known as Mustafa.
  15. My translation. This translated passage has also appeared elsewhere in my published work. For details see Raja (2007).

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