Reconstructing the Muslim Self: Muhammad Iqbal, Khudi, and the Modern Self

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ABSTRACT: Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), one of the 20th century's most influential Muslim thinkers, theorized a radically new understanding of Islamic selfhood. For Iqbal, the self (*khudi*) was marked by an individuality that made it distinct and inherently equipped to overcome colonial incursions. Iqbal put this down to Ibn 'Arabi's (1165-1240) "Neo-Platonist doctrine of sheep" of *wahdat-al-wujud*. This article examines the ways in which Iqbal's ideas of the self derive from a specifically modern, Western notion of the self that has its history in Rene Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* – a modern selfhood entailing independence and uniqueness, and which became the standard in Europe after the 18th century. It is a self whose worth is measured by what it produces, and by its relationship to the world as a creator. When Iqbal writes that "man becomes unique by becoming more and more like the most unique individual [God],"[1] this paper investigates how Iqbal's approach to the Muslim self is thought through Western categories – beginning with the self, but extending to the pan-Islamic nation (the *ummah*), and nationalism – and how such an imagining delimits his very (re)construction of Islam, thereby further imbricating "Islam" within Eurocentric power-knowledge. The article reflects on the importance of examining perhaps *the* foundational theoretical assumption of the modern Muslim experience – Muslim selfhood – and how such an examination is essential for the process of decolonial thinking to begin.

Art thou a mere particle of dust?
Tighten the knot of thy ego;
And hold fast to thy tiny being!
How glorious to burnish one's ego
And to test its lustre in the presence of the Sun!
Re-chisel, then, thine ancient frame;
And build up a new being.
Such being is real being;
Or else thy ego is a mere ring of smoke![2]

INTRODUCTION

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) was perhaps the greatest of all Islamic modernists, not least because his level of mastery of Western philosophy, in addition to his deep familiarity with the Islamic tradition, was unparalleled by other great Islamic modernists such as Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) and Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928).[3] For Iqbal, as was the case for all Muslim reformers, there was a deep sense of disquiet regarding the political and economic ascendancy of the West over the Muslim world, manifested in the colonization of vast swathes of Muslim lands beginning in the 18th century. The question troubling Muslim thinkers was "what had gone wrong?" Muslims, it was believed, had been divinely promised "victory"[4] (whether political, economic, cultural, or technological) over the rest of the world, and history had largely borne this out – until, of course, European powers exceeded the Islamic world and colonialism took root in formerly Muslim-led lands. India was no exception, and it became one of the central colonial projects.

For Western-educated Muslim intellectuals, the Islamic world's current civilizational inferiority was due to the West's embracing of reason and the Muslim world's ostensible discarding of it. Reason, they argued, was the very aspect of Islam that had made it so great in the past. Unlike the mainstream of Muslim reformers, however, Iqbal did not advocate a wholesale (re)adoption of reason. Iqbal proposed a complicated approach to the problem of intellectuality that included both intuition and spiritual awakening, aspects marginalized in Western discourses on modernity. But for Iqbal, the root cause of Muslim "debasement" lay in its approach to the "self." Iqbal's thought was dedicated to addressing this as a means for re-empowering the Muslim self.

Iqbal argued that under the influence of Neoplatonism – the system of metaphysical speculation that had been inherited from Plato, through Plotinus, and incorporated early on in the history of Islamic thought's engagement with ancient Greek thought – Muslims, and in particular the Sufis, conceived of the self as something that had to be overcome and ultimately annihilated. In the active pursuit of such an ideal, these "pantheistic" Sufis, as he called them, who taught the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* ("oneness of being") exemplified for Ibn 'Arabi and his school of thought, became more concerned with hairsplitting arguments and less concerned with "action" and "achievement," which were the basis of past Muslim greatness.[5] The significance of Sufism lay in its "mystical," supposedly antirational nature, and therefore in its position in the dichotomy between reason and irrationality – where the West was seen as embodying modernity and reason. Eventually, their entire lives became that of "quietism" and "decadence," and finally, Iqbal argues, this far-reaching influence led to the downfall of the Islamic world vis-à-vis the West.[6] Iqbal was dedicated to counteracting the influence of this type of Sufism. While acknowledging the contribution of Greek thought to the Muslim world, Iqbal ultimately argued for an anti-classicism that was a reflection of the spirit of the Quran. "While Greek philosophy very much broadened the outlook of Muslim thinkers, it, on the whole, obscured their vision of the Quran…. The spirit of the Quran [is] essentially anti-classical."[7]

As representatives of "old" and the "new" Sufism, Iqbal commended the life-affirming and active Sufism of Rumi (1207-1273) (whom he considered to be his spiritual guide), while warning against the "intoxicated" and "inactive" Sufism of Hafiz (1325/6-1389/90). Regarding the latter, he said "Beware of Hafiz the drinker,/His cup is full of the poison of death."[8] Iqbal was concerned with reinstating the self which had been "gambled away" by previous generations of Muslims.[9] In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, which Iqbal considered to be the most significant of all his works, he quotes the Quranic verse, "Verily We proposed to the Heavens and to the earth and to the mountains to receive the trust, but they refused the burden and they feared to receive it. Man alone undertook to bear it, but hath proven unjust, senseless!" Here Iqbal interprets "the trust" as the trust of personality (self/ego),[10] while historically it was interpreted either as the trust of *tawhid* or obedience to God.[11] Iqbal makes a fundamental break from the traditional interpretation in an effort to revitalize Muslims towards action.[12] For Iqbal, the discovery and cultivation of the ego marks the pinnacle of religious life.[13] Unlike in "pantheistic" Sufism, which emphasizes the dissolution of the ego, or *fana*, and only after which the self in the higher sense can be adorned with the Divine attributes (which is also known as *baqa*, and the final end of the path), for Iqbal the strengthening of the ego with the divine principle is the true end (without recourse to the notion of *fana*) as it allows man's fulfillment of his God-given role as His vicegerent on earth. Iqbal thus conceives of man[14] as being independent, creative, in charge of his own destiny, constantly evolving, life-affirming, active, modern, and yet religious.

The Iqbalian man is in relation to God, not as "nothing," but as His servant (*'abduhu*). He is constantly moving towards perfection as the Perfect Man. This idea was significantly, though very differently, elaborated upon by al-Jili (1366-1424). Man's responsibility is as God's creative agent in the universe, "recreating" it in ever-increasing perfection, and thereby bringing about *freedom* from colonial rule, as has been noted by Javed Majeed.[15] This article is thus an examination of Iqbal's (re)construction of the Muslim self – with the ultimate end of freedom and the ways in which he borrows from a modern, Western understanding of selfhood, and its implications for his "Islamic project." "Hallaj and Prophetic Perfection; God, Man and Society," is an overview of Iqbal's philosophy and how it relates to the self; while "Contentions" is a critical appraisal of Iqbal's thought in relation to decolonial thinking.

HALLAJ AND PROPHETIC PERFECTION; GOD, MAN AND SOCIETY

The life and thought of Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922) has been the object of much reflection and debate in Islamic history. Many Sufis argued that Hallaj had successfully annihilated his self and that it was the divine principle speaking when he stated, "*Ana al-Haqq*," ("I am the Truth.") Iqbal felt that this was a mistaken interpretation which was the result, initially, of Neoplatonism, and later on of Ibn 'Arabi's school of thought. This school emphasized the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, or the "unity of being." This pantheistic philosophy entailed that everything is immersed in God. Through this interpretation, God's pure transcendence was diminished.

In contrast to interpreting Hallaj's utterance from such a perspective of *'itissal*, or union, "[Louis] Massignon…succeeded in showing that in the theology of Hallaj, God's pure transcendence is maintained."[16] Iqbal, used this interpretation to support his thesis on the individuality and personality of the self. He wrote,

> *The contemporaries of Hallaj, as well as his successors, interpreted [his] words pantheistically, but the Fragments of Hallaj, collected and published by the French Orientalist L. Massignon, leave no doubt that the martyr saint could not have meant to deny the transcendence of God. The true interpretation of his experience, therefore, is not the drop slipping into the sea, but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and permanence of the human ego in a profounder personality.*[17]

According to Iqbal, this type of spiritual direction was exemplified by the Prophet, who is the exemplar par excellence in Islam: "The Quran says of the Prophet's vision of the Ultimate Ego [God]: 'His eye turned not aside, nor did it wander.' […] [According to this ideal] the moment we fix our gaze on intensity [or God], we begin to see that the finite ego must be *distinct*, though not *isolated*, from the Infinite."[18]

Most importantly for Iqbal, given his philosophy of "action," which shall be addressed more fully a little later, "the psychological difference between the prophetic and the mystic types of consciousness" is that "the mystic does not wish to return from the repose of 'unitary experience'; and even when he does return, as he must, his return does not mean much for mankind at large. The prophet's return [however] is creative. He returns to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to controlling the forces of history, and thereby to creating a fresh world of ideals…."[19] The most Perfect Man is the most perfect vicegerent, whose function is as master of the world, of the universe, of all things.

For Iqbal, man's function is to attain to an ever-increasing individuality and freedom, which can only be achieved through proximity, or "realization" of that proximity, to God:[20] "The Ego attains to freedom by the removal of all obstructions in its way. It is partly free, partly determined, and reaches fuller freedom by approaching the Individual who is most free – God. In one word, life is an endeavor for freedom."[21] This proximity is in a sense a "proximating" of God, which derives from the famous tradition *takhallaqu bi-akhlaq illah*, "Create in yourselves the attributes of God," that is, "man should attain more and more nearness to a unique God. Thus man becomes unique by becoming more and more like the most unique individual."[22] Such an individuality is not the case of the "drop slipping into the sea," but it is to become a shining pearl in the bosom of the sea, which is superb in its individual luster, but at the same time could not have come into being without the sea. As Iqbal writes in *kulliyaat-e iqbaal urduu*, "If I am an oyster-shell, then in your hand is the brightness/honor of my pearl,/if I am a pottery-shard, then make me a royal pearl!"[23] Thus the individualities of God and man exist in a dynamic and creative tension in Iqbal's philosophy, a tension that he does not resolve entirely satisfactorily.[24] As part of man's creating in himself the attributes of God, one of the main qualities that he achieves is that of "creator," which again he gains through proximity to the Ultimate Reality: "Of all the creations of God [man] alone is capable of consciously participating in the creative life of his Maker."[25] However, in order to overcome the tension between the "creator man" and the "Creator God," Iqbal says that God consciously limited His omnipotent will: "It [this limitation] is born out of his own creative freedom whereby he has chosen finite egos to be participators in his life, power and freedom."[26]

Thus, the universe is not static and complete, but rather is forever evolving. "It is not a block universe, a finished product, immobile and incapable of change. Deep in its inner being lies, perhaps, the dream of a new birth."[27]. It is man's role to direct the universe to ever-increasing perfection, which he does through the pull of love / desire, without which he becomes as though "dead": "Life is latent in seeking, / Its origin is hidden in desire, / Keep desire alive in thine heart /Lest thy little dust become a tomb. / Negation of desire is death to the living. / Even an absence of heat extinguishes the flame."[28] Through this constant movement, man molds his very destiny: "Do not fetter thyself with the chains of Taqdir [destiny], / for with this canopy of heaven there is a way out. / If thou dost not believe rise and discover that no sooner hast thou released thy feet findest thou a free field."[29] In this way the Iqbalian man is the one who manifests God's decree. "The *Momin* (believer) is himself the destiny of God, so that when he changes his own self, his destiny also changes."[30] As Iqbal writes, "*Abdudhu* [the servant of God] is the fashioner of Destiny…."[31]

Iqbal criticizes pantheistic Sufism because of its failure to recognize this creative, active and destiny-fashioning role of man. Regarding this state of mind, Iqbal writes, "We find a strange similarity in Hindu and some of the Muslim thinkers who thought over [the] problem of the self. The point of view adopted by Sankara in the interpretation of the Gita was the same that was followed by Ibn 'Arabi in the interpretation of the Quran."[32] That is, its state of mind is one of inaction, fatalism, and quietism. The Iqbalian man, on the other hand, is constantly striving and has within him the state of creative "tension" through which he constantly perfects himself: "Personality is a state of tension and can continue only if that state is maintained…. Since personality, or the state of tension, is the most valuable achievement of man, he should see that he does not revert to a state of relaxation."[33]

In this conception of "higher" Sufism, as he calls it,[34] Iqbal envisions the "human ego [as] rising higher than mere reflection, and mending its transiency by appropriating the eternal."[35] Action is the very basis of life – it is the way of the Prophet and of God Himself.[36]

Thus, through the untiring action of Iqbalian man, society's wellbeing is ensured and maintained. "The fate of a people does not depend so much on organization as on the worth of and power of individual men."[37] Without such an effort, society becomes decadent – which is the current state of Muslims, according to Iqbal.

Through the inner, creative tension of man, an evolutionary picture of his ascent is put forward by Iqbal, which borrows from Bergson's *élan vital*[38] and Nietzche's will to power, whereby the fundamental driving force of humanity (and all of existence, in fact) is the achievement of endless perfection. "In his inmost being man, as conceived by the Quran, is a creative activity, an ascending spirit who, in his outward march, rises from one state of being to another: 'It needs not that I swear by the sunset redness and by the night and its gatherings and by the moon when at her full, that from state to state shall ye be surely carried onward.'"[39] Thus "the joy of the journey is not in the arrival, but in the perpetual tramp…. Ceaseless effort and not repose is what gives zest to life, and so Iqbal prefers humanity in its imperfect state."[40] Illustrated in Iqbal's own words, "Man marches always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality which 'every moment appears in a new glory.' "[41]

Iqbal saw in the constant striving to realize the perfection of the individual epitomized by Hallaj's *ana al-Haq*, as described earlier, the ideal of the nation itself. Annemarie Schimmel notes, "In a group of quatrains in his posthumous work (*Armaghan-i Hijaz*), the ideal nation is that which realizes *ana'l-haqq* in its striving, i.e. which proves to be creative truth, a living, active reality which witnesses God's reality by its own national – or supranational – life."[42] This is an idea that seeks to reconcile the opposition between Iqbal's perfect man being an individual, and his responsibility to society. Indeed the Iqbalian man is at once separate from society and inextricably bound to it. This conception of man and society is mirrored in Iqbal's notion of man's relationship to God, as a simple verse summarizes his entire attitude to the problem: "The men of God do not become God,/but they are never separated from God!"[43] In this way, the Iqbalian man, in his never-ending creativity – which is rooted in man's inextricable relationship to God – continually recreates himself and his society, thereby, inevitably, shedding the shackles of colonialism.

CONTENTIONS

It is important to reflect on why Sufism – and specifically Ibn 'Arabi's school of Sufism – is singled-out for critique by Iqbal as the *cause célèbre* for explaining the Muslim world's "falling behind" the West. To address this, let us begin by considering Iqbal's education. While he did receive primary education in a Quran school, his subsequent formal education was almost entirely modern and Western. In *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India*, Sanjay Seth examines how modern, Western education – with its very different epistemology and attendant subject formations, as compared to indigenous forms of knowledge in (pre)colonial India – contributed towards (re)shaping Muslim subjectivities.[44] To be sure, Seth shows that there wasn't a wholesale displacement of indigenous modes of knowing; however, a significant rupture did occur, resulting in a rethinking of indigenous learning. It is within this intellectual milieu, which included such important figures as Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, that Iqbal should be located. In other words, *Indian intellectuals thought through, against, and in relation to modern, Western ideas and categories of politics, philosophy, culture, and religion*.

A fascinating illustration of the way in which Iqbal accepted Western constructions of Islam and Muslims is expressed in a handful of letters. Iqbal writes about his feeling of

being torn between his "constitutional" inclinations towards the traditional Sufism of his forefathers, and what he understood to be the "true" Islam of the Quran and the Prophet of Islam. In the above-mentioned letters (referred to by Javed Majeed in his study of Muhammad Iqbal[45]), Iqbal writes of his natural disposition towards the *fana* of Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism, which he had so resolutely dismissed in his writings. However, Iqbal was "*constrained by the needs of the time* to define himself against the notion of fana."[46] While Javed Majeed puts this down to Iqbal's "*willed* alienation from the tradition he defines himself against,"[47] it is important to examine Iqbal's intellectual formation to further the argument that thinking in the modern world is significantly modulated by Western paradigms.

It is noteworthy that Iqbal's doctoral dissertation, "The Development of Metaphysics in Persia," in many ways reproduces Orientalist ideas about Sufism as an aberration inserted into the "dry," "legalistic," "desert" religion of Islam. He writes in the introduction of his dissertation-turned-book, "The student of Islamic Mysticism who is anxious to see an all-embracing exposition of the principle of Unity, must look [at] the Andalusian Ibn al-'Arabi, whose profound teaching stands in strange contrast with the dry-as-dust Islam of his countrymen."[48] In other words, Iqbal accepted Orientalist constructions of Islam and Muslims, thereby positioning himself *within* a discursive formation as far as his reconstruction of Islamic thought. The argument is therefore, in keeping with Talal Asad's reflections on the problem with the idea of "agency," as "the structuration of conditions and possibilities." That is, the ways in which one is delimited from the start by practical and epistemological conditions necessitate that an Iqbal, a Tagore, or a Gandhi do things a certain way, and the "consciousness with which one does them" is really of another order.[49] It is in this way that Iqbal's little-known ambivalence towards his own adopted position vis-à-vis traditional Sufism can be better understood. This also sheds light on Iqbal's understanding of Sufism, since Sufism was constructed as an accretion to Islam by Orientalists. In this regard, Tomoko Masuzawa writes in *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*:

> *Seen through the mystic kernel of Sufism, all the parochial and miserly laws, childish dogmas, and ceremonial encrustations that have constituted orthodox Islam seem to fall away. In effect, through deep contemplation, this kernel would come to seem something other than Islam proper, or Islam in the usual sense.*[50]

To be sure, Iqbal was not alone among the modernists in casting aspersions on Sufism for bringing about the decline of Muslim civilization. Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Rashid Rida all singled out Sufism for blame.[51] What made Iqbal different from other Islamic modernists was the fact that he did not – at least not at the outset – seek to dismiss Sufism tout court. Rather, his reconstruction of Islamic thought was in significant ways a reconstruction of Sufism, a reimagining and reinvigoration of Sufism, which he called "higher Sufism," and a reassessment of the role of the self within Sufi metaphysics.

In traditional Sufi cosmology, the self/soul (*nafs*) is graded according to three levels: the soul that commands to evil (*nafs al-'ammara*); the self-reproaching soul (*nafs al-lawwama*); and the soul at peace (*nafs al-mutmainna*). The soul, according to this understanding, attains the highest level through striving to do good deeds – in obedience to God – which, by the methods of spiritual realization handed down from master to disciple, ultimately allows one to train the soul so that it becomes in tune with the divine. For Iqbal, this amounted to a denial of the essence of what makes humans human, and also what he argued was the crucial

aspect of the Quranic narrative: that, when God offered the "trust" [*amanah*] to the heavens and the earth and the mountains they refused; but when He offered the trust to man, he accepted (Quran 33:72). This trust, according to Iqbal, was the trust of "egohood," whereas, according to traditional Islamic cosmology, the trust was considered the trust of *tawhid*, and of upholding the precepts of the religion.[52] It would appear to be clear that Iqbal is making a radical break from the historic Islamic tradition. The idea of "egohood" or "selfhood" is *instrumentalized* for the sake of (re)producing Muslims as active agents of change in the world.

To consider Iqbal and his relation to Rumi, Hafiz and Hallaj, we must recall that Iqbal considered Rumi to be his spiritual-guide, while he described Hafiz as his "cup is full of the poison of death." He regarded Hallaj as embodying the meaning of egohood. Although it has been suggested that Rumi's poetry lends itself more readily to being read in terms of Islamic morals, whereas this is much less the case with Hafiz,[53] the question here is regarding the extent to which Iqbal was reading these poets, including Hallaj, *through* Orientalism. It is pertinent that his appreciation of Hallaj and his (apparent) affirmation of "the individual ego" was through Massignon's studies on Hallaj.[54] As for Hafiz and his wine,[55] the following from William C. Chittick is significant:

> No doubt when Hafiz speaks of wine, he means wine. The question is, "What is wine?" All Sufi thought goes back to a cosmology and metaphysics. In order to understand the nature of wine, we must refer to the philosophical and metaphysical beliefs of the Sufi poets who employ the image. For example, Sufi thought of the school of Ibn al-'Arabi […] holds that the things of this world are not just things, rather they are created by God, derived from God, and ultimately Self-Manifestations of God, loci of His Theophany, places in which He reveals the "Hidden Treasure," mirrors in which the Beauty of the Beloved can be contemplated. God, or if one prefers, "Absolute and Nondelimited Being" (*wujûd-i mutlaq*), is the Origin of all creatures, of all relative and delimited existents.[56] […] If Sufis speak of their beloved, they may not be referring only to God, but they also are not referring to "so-and-so" as such, but only insomuch as she is a reflection of the true Beloved. Wine likewise may be wine, and music, music. But if so, they are only dim reflections of true Wine and true Music.[57]

In other words, "wine" must not be read simply as an intoxicating drink; rather, it is to be seen significantly as symbolizing God Himself. The question being raised here is, in the end, perhaps a simple one: *To what extent was Iqbal reading Hafiz literally instead of symbolically?*

Iqbal's critique against "pantheistic" Sufism,derives from his idea that the spirit of Quran is *anti-classical*. It is therefore worth considering what he means by this. Did he mean that the spirit of the Qur'an is against pantheism? That it is against metaphysical speculation of the kind that was adopted by Muslim philosophers and mystics (the two designations typically being applicable to the same individuals)? That it is "radically monotheistic," as has been portrayed by Orientalists? Perhaps Iqbal means to suggest all of the above?

A second question that also arises is: To what extent was Iqbal (unconsciously) drawing on a Eurocentric understanding of the relationship between ancient Greek thought and Muslims; an understanding that suggests there was a fundamental opposition (or incompatibility) between "Islam" and Greek philosophy, whereby Muslims preserved and carried down ancient Greek thought as though they were mere vessels, without adding or subtracting anything? That is, Muslim thinkers played no role in interpreting and re-presenting Greek thought within their own intellectual milieu, for that would run counter to

the Eurocentric thesis of European exceptionalism: *Greek thought was inherited in its entirety, unaltered, and intact from its ancient origins, by the true heirs of such knowledge – modern Europe.*

This thesis is of course to a large extent continued – albeit unconsciously – in the very manner in which "the Western canon" is taught at universities around the world, with very little consideration given to complicating the study of "world history." Where world history is taught, European history is still seen as separate from the rest of the world.[58] It is also important to consider that Orientalists, in the process of attempting to discover the "original" language(s) of Europe, constructed Greek "polytheism" as a fundamentally creative force in history, whose heir was Western Christianity. The monotheisms of Judaism and Islam were seen as opposed to creativity, with Islam being seen as the least creative of the two (Judaism, at least, was productive of Christianity, or so the logic went).[59]

Iqbal's inversion of the traditional Sufi understanding of the self and his emphasis on the centrality of the self for human achievement and being are significantly informed by a modern, Western understanding of the self going back to Descartes. This, therefore, departs significantly from a traditional Islamic understanding of the self. Like Descartes, Iqbal posits "being" in man, and not in Being as such, as it is the case in premodern Islamic metaphysics, thereby diminishing the function of God as the source of all being. Iqbal makes the point that the ritual prayer (*salat*) in Islam symbolizes both negation and affirmation,[60] which of course is also at the root of the Islamic doctrine: *La ilaha illa Allah*, "No god but God." However, it may be argued that the negation being first (*La ilaha*, "No god"), it must mean a denial of the self first and foremost, and only then can there be an affirmation (*illa Allah*, "but God"), which, according to traditional Sufi metaphysics, is done by God Himself. And so the human self is from the very beginning non-existent.

Also like Descartes, Iqbal's point of departure is the self, as he writes: "To exist in pure duration is to be a self, and to be a self is to be able to say 'I am.' Only that truly exists that can say 'I am'…. But our 'I-amness' is dependent and arises out of the distinction between the self and the not-self."[61] He goes on to describe the Ultimate Self (God) as existing by Himself without any need of the other selves, while of course these other selves are in need of Him. The "proof" of God that he formulates is reminiscent of Descartes' "*cogito ergo sum*" whose radical skepticism allowed him to begin from his own "thinking" self, and then go on to prove God's existence.[62] In this case, being is posited in one's self, prior to that of God. In the end the doctrinal formulation – according to Iqbal – would appear to read: "*Man says*: No god but God."

As far as Iqbal's use of the word "pantheistic" with regard to Ibn 'Arabi's school of thought, it is significant to remember that this was for a long time the kind of language used by Orientalists. In his path breaking work, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes:

> *The basic doctrine of Sufism, especially as interpreted by Muhyi al-Din [Ibn 'Arabi] …is that of the transcendent unity of Being (wahdat al-wujud) for which he has been accused by many modern scholars as being a pantheist, a panentheist, and an existential monist…. All of these accusations are false…because they mistake the metaphysical doctrines of Ibn 'Arabi for philosophy and do not take into consideration the fact that the way of gnosis is not separate from grace and sanctity. The pantheistic accusations against the Sufis are doubly false because, first of all, pantheism is a philosophical system, whereas Muhyi al-Din and others like him never claimed to follow or create any "system" whatsoever; and, secondly, because pantheism implies a substantial continuity between God and the Universe whereas the Shaikh [Ibn 'Arabi] would have been the first to claim God's absolute transcendence over every category, including that of substance.*[63]

Also consider the following lines from Ibn 'Arabi's magnum opus, *Futuhat al-Makkiyyah*:

> *Each individual among the Folk of Allah has a ladder specific to him which no one else climbs. […] All this takes place because the servant and the Lord always remain together in the perfection of the existence of each in himself. The servant always remains servant and the Lord Lord throughout this increase and decrease.*[64]

The intention behind pointing to these passages is to shed light on the extent to which Iqbal was informed – whether consciously or unconsciously – by Western, Orientalist constructions of Sufism and Islam; and how this subsequently impacted upon Iqbal's re-formulation of the self, or *khudi*.

As mentioned earlier, Javed Majeed writes that Iqbal saw his project as being one of "redefining Islam in response to colonialism,"[65] as a means of achieving the freedom, independence and self-creation that could only be achieved with the removal of colonial powers from Muslim lands. Iqbal had a pan-Islamic vision. But what does it mean to say: "Life is an endeavor for freedom."?[66] What is the freedom that is being sought? It is of course fundamentally a freedom from colonial rule; this is the central concern of Iqbal's writing. He is not so much concerned with the perfection of the human self as he is with *perfecting* selves, who, in their constant striving to re-create the world, ultimately free society from the bondage of colonial rule. Iqbal derives this from Nietzsche whose idea of human perfection in the Overman is an endless process of realization, perfection as a never-ending quest.[67]At the same time – and somewhat paradoxically, given that Iqbal was not a systematic thinker, – Iqbal was critical of Nietzsche, just as he was critical of modern, Western thought and its excessive reliance on reason, and its inability to relate phenomena with the noumena .[68] Thus, although Nietzsche becomes a central character in his magnum opus the *Javed Nama,* Iqbal sees in Nietzsche the example of a prophetic vision without the *crucial* benefit of divine revelation.[69]

The question, for the sake of problematizing an ideal that is taken for granted, is: Is "freedom" (liberty) necessarily a desirable thing? It is of course an Enlightenment ideal – perhaps the *central* Enlightenment ideal – but why is it a universal given? What does it mean to be free in a premodern society? Sanjay Seth provides some fascinating insights on this as to the differences in the ideal of freedom between ancient Greece and the modern world:

> *The term slave is for us moderns a social category, meaning that we understand "slave" to signify a free man en-slaved, rather than, as for the Greeks, understanding it to denote a form of selfhood. Our idea of human selfhood or subjectivity has, in other words, a certain notion of "freedom" already built into it. Words like freedom make us think of Rousseau and Kant and the French and American revolutions, and of "fuller" conceptions of freedom – not just freedom as non-enslavement but as autonomy, as choosing our ends, and the means towards them. These associations are of course apt, and are part of what I have been invoking in insisting that modern knowledge presumes a form of subjectivity – active rather than passive, and so on. But the "first" sense of freedom – first in the sense of being both logically prior and historically earlier – is freedom in the sense of being merged into the background, lost into nature like animals and slaves, nomos rather than physis. The Greeks did not think that all men possessed this freedom, and thus it was not built into their conception of what it means to be a human self.*[70]

The point here is not that "enslavement" to colonial powers is desirable; and one is also not referring to the "ethics" of slavery in Islam.[71] Rather, the point is this: the modern, Western notion of freedom – from which it is well nigh impossible to extricate our thought – has the notions of "autonomy, as choosing our ends, and the means towards them" already built into it. And this notion of freedom and the attendant idea(s) of subjectivity – the idea of the Muslim self that Iqbal is (re)constructing – rethinks the traditional Islamic idea of "slave of God" (*'abd Allah*), which is the status of all human beings before God, as "the fashioner of Destiny."[72] What I am also suggesting is that the ideal of self-determination only becomes possible in the presence of the discourse of nationalism, whose parameters are set from without. That is, political thinking in a (post)colonial world is always already delimited from the outside.

To elaborate on this line of thought, in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*,[73] Partha Chatterjee provides a "critical study of the ideology of nationalism" as a problem of epistemology and political philosophy,[74] arguing how nationalist thought is inseparable from post-Enlightenment, rationalist notions of knowledge.[75] In accepting Orientalism's category of the Oriental, while granting him a subjectivity that is active and autonomous, rather than passive and non-participating,[76] nationalist thought nevertheless operates "within a framework of knowledge whose representational structure corresponds to the very structure of power [it] seeks to repudiate."[77] That is, while nationalism succeeds in ostensibly liberating the nation from colonialism, it does so through the knowledge systems of a post-Enlightenment West, which continue to dominate and operate unconsciously. Now, while Iqbal described nationalism as being antithetical to Islam,[78] he also famously expressed the need for Muslims in pre-partition India to have a separate homeland. It is for this reason, due to the epistemological structures within which he was situated, that Iqbal had a contradictory perspective. On one hand, he thought territorial nationalism was contrary to Islam, on the other, he saw Islam as a uniform "culture" which all Muslims had to assimilate in order for them to achieve their long lost political vitality.[79]

That being said, Iqbal did not believe in "freedom at any price." He quotes the Muslim scholar of Spain, Tartushi, saying, "Forty years of tyranny are better than one hour of anarchy."[80] Thus, the question which has been suggested in the course of this article is this: Is freedom at the price of delimiting of one's thought desirable? Perhaps this is the double bind of being Muslim in the modern world. Must a pre-modern notion of the Muslim self be subsumed by a modern, Western notion of selfhood?

CONCLUSION

One of the central concerns of this article has been to highlight the extent to which Western categories and ideas are always already, somewhat paradoxically, enmeshed in the thinking of Iqbal. Thus, the project of trying to salvage a pristine Islam (which is the project of today's Salafis and neo-traditionalists alike) is fraught from the start. For, *there is no Islam without specific "contexts"* (to make use of Derrida[81]). The context today calls for examining how a figure such as Iqbal sought to re-empower Muslims in an age where Western notions of the self – politically, existentially, epistemologically – always already tend towards Western modes of thinking and being.

As far as decolonizing Islamic thought, there is the intractable problem of power/knowledge, and its delimitation of what can or cannot be said. This is a very rich area

of research, and it must include the Foucauldian insistence on the possibility of speaking to power – that the creative forces of life always, to some degree, allow for this. As such, to make the claim that "there is no Islam, only colonial, Western interpretations of it," would be as excessive as claiming that "there is a pristine Islam that has no relationship to, with, between, or against everything else." The truth lies, as always, somewhere in that elusive middle ground.

Islam is a process of negotiation with, between, and against the conditions of possibility as they present themselves in each historic-politico-cultural situation. Iqbal's negotiations within his own intellectual milieu – despite their limitations – reveal a deep engagement with his conditions, in order to make speaking, thinking, and writing as a Muslim in a post/colonial milieu possible. This is the challenge for all who seek to think decolonially about Islam in the 21st century.

NOTES

[1] Malik, Hafiz (ed.), *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.), 298.
[2] Muhammad Iqbal's self-translation: quoted in *Javid Nama*, Muhammad Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, A. J. Arberry (trans.) (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966), 15.
[3] There is a certain quality to Iqbal's thought that makes his voice standout over that of other Islamic modernists. This, as has been pointed out to me by Javed Majeed in a personal conversation (March 17, 2014), gives Iqbal a level of "authenticity" that cannot be found with other Islamic modernists. Incidentally, Iqbal Singh Sevea has recently problematized the use of the term "Islamic modernist" with regard to Iqbal, arguing that Iqbal rejected the post-Enlightenment understanding of "natural religion" which is accepted wholesale by Sayyid Ahmed Khan for example. (See Sevea's *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* [Cambridge, 2012].) The reason why I choose to continue to apply the term "Islamic modernist" to Iqbal – as will become clearer during the course of this article – is due to his (unconscious) use of modern categories, and which significantly inflect his Islamic project.
[4] Quran: 48, "The Victory."
[5] Of course, neither Iqbal nor the Islamic modernists in general were the first to criticize *wahdat al-wujud*. The famous Indian reformer of Sufism, Shaykh Ahmed Sirhindi (1564-1624), to whom Iqbal refers favourably (see *Reconstruction* 152), was a very significant critic of *wahdat al-wujud*, proposing instead *wahdat al-shuhud* ("the unity of witness"). What differentiates Islamic modernists from premodern reformers such as Sirhindi is that the former sought to entirely do away with the historic institution, disciplines, practices, metaphysics, and so on, of Sufism.
[6] See Muhammad Iqbal, *Complaint and Answer* (*Shikwa and Jawab-i-Shikwa*), A. J. Arberry (trans.), (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1955).
[7] Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, Javed Majeed (introduction) (Stanford: Standford University Press, 2013), 3-4. Although Iqbal does not explicitly state what he means by "anti-classical," it may be surmised that he was referring to the presence in Greek thought of a plethora of gods – whereas the Quran presents a "radically monotheistic" worldview. It is also important to note that Iqbal was not a systematic thinker, which accounts for the lack of development of many of his ideas, and even, at times, certain internal inconsistencies.
[8] Quoted: *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan, Hafiz Malik* (editor) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 294.
[9] "Earthlings have gambled away the coin of selfhood," Muhammad Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, A. J. Arberry (trans.), (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966), verse: 1959.
[10] *Reconstruction*, p.11.
[11] See below in Contentions for more details.
[12] Again, see below in Contentions for more details.

[13] "The climax of religious life…is the discovery of the ego as an individual deeper than his conceptually describable habitual self-hood. It is in contact with the Most Real that the ego discovers its uniqueness, its metaphysical status, and the possibility of improvement in that status," *Reconstruction*, 184.
[14] The term "man" its generic sense is used for the sake of fluidity, and also since this is the term that Iqbal uses.
[15] Javed Majeed, "Introduction," *Reconstruction*, xi.
[16] Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*: *A Study Into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1963), 346.
[17] *Reconstruction*, 96.
[18] *Reconstruction*, 118.
[19] Ibid., 124.
[20] "[W]e are blind, and Thou are present. / Either draw aside this veil of mysteries /or seize to Thyself this sightless soul!" *Javid Nama*, verses: 66-8.
[21] Intro: *Secrets of the Self*, xxi.
[22] *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher*: 298.
[23] See Prof. Francis Pritchett's translation of Iqbal's poetry on her website: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/iqbal/gesuetab.html, accessed March 15, 2014.
[24] This tension in examined in more detail in Contentions.
[25] Quoted: *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher*, 305.
[26] Quoted: Ibid., p.307.
[27] *Reconstruction*, p.10.
[28] Quoted: *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher*, 221.
[29] Quoted: Khalifa Abdul Hakim, "Rumi, Nietzsche and Iqbal," in *Iqbal as a Thinker* in *Iqbal as a Thinker: Eight Essays by Eminent Scholars* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1973), 153.
[30] Quoted: ibid., p151.
[31] Quoted: *Iqbal: Poet: Philosopher*, 210.
[32] Quoted: S. E. Ashraf, *A Critical Exposition of Iqbal's Philosophy* (Patna: Associated Book Agency, 1978), 44.
[33] Intro: *Secrets of the Self*, xxi.
[34] *Reconstruction*, 132.
[35] Ibid., 197.
[36] S. E. Ashraf, 43.
[37] *Reconstruction*, 151.
[38] For an analysis of Bergson's influence on Iqbal see "Bergson and Muhammad Iqbal" in Damian Howard, *Being Human in Islam: The Impact of the Evolutionary Worldview* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 58-64.
[39] *Reconstruction*, 10.
[40] Fazlur Rahman, "Iqbal and Mysticism," in *Iqbal as a Thinker*, 208.
[41] *Reconstruction*, 23.
[42] *Gabriel's Wing*, 350.
[43] Quoted: ibid., 376.
[44] Premodern knowledge – and therefore premodern subjectivity – entailed a fundamental inseparability of the knower and the known. Modern knowledge entails a fundamental separation between the knower and the known, resulting in the subject/object dichotomy that is central to modern epistemology.
[45] Javed Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2009). Majeed reads Iqbal as "one possible landmark for a cosmopolitan critical idiom, in which Islamism and Western critical theory can be considered, not as oppositional discourse, but together, with overlapping concerns, as critiques of and responses to colonial modernity" (Ibid., xxvi). The approach taken in this paper is to question some of the unexamined ways such an Iqbalian "cosmopolitan critical idiom" is always already imbricated in assumptions of modern Western power/knowledge, thereby significantly hobbling the criticality of such an idiom – and even its cosmopolitanism.
[46] Ibid., 29-30, my emphasis.
[47] Ibid., my emphasis.
[48] Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia: A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy*, (London: Luzac and Company, 1908), x.
[49] Talal Asad, "Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions," *SEHR* 5 (1996): *Contested Polities*, accessed October 13, 2013. http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/asad.html.

[50] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 203.
[51] See Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999).
[52] "33:72 *The Trust* is understood as relating to the dictates of faith and belief, as in a famous saying: "Whosoever has no trust has no belief" (Q, Sy). Many relate *the Trust* to obedience (IK, Ṭs, Ṭ, Z), and it is thus understood by most as a reference to the requirements (*far ʾiḍ*) of religion (IJ, JJ, Q, Ṭ), though others see it as a reference to prayer alone (Q). *The Trust* can also be understood as pertaining to the manner in which one manages each aspect of one's being, such as the tongue, the eye, the stomach, one's private parts, etc. (IJ, Q). Thus some connect it to 8:27: *Betray not God and the Messenger, and betray not your trusts knowingly* (M). It is also said that *the Trust* pertains to faith inwardly and performing the requirements of religion outwardly (Aj). Some also allow that *the Trust* refers to the pact or covenant of *tawḥ d* and the witness to God's Lordship taken with all of humanity before they came into this world (Aj) (see 7:172c)." *HarperCollins Study Quran*, forthcoming.
[53] Personal conversation with Javed Majeed, March 17, 2014.
[54] Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, Herbert Mason (translator) (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982).
[55] "Beware of Hafiz the drinker,/His cup is full of the poison of death."
[56] William C. Chittick, "Jami on Divine Love and the image of wine," http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/jamiwine.html, accessed March 28, 2014.
[57] Ibid.
[58] See, for example, J. M. Blaut's *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000). Blaut critiques the work of a diverse group of Eurocentric historians who have significantly shaped our understanding of world history.
[59] See Maurice Olender's brilliant study *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
[60] *Reconstruction*, 92-3.
[61] Ibid., 56.
[62] See Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: In Which the Existence of God and the Distinction of the Soul from the Body Are Demonstrated*, Donald A. Cress (translator) (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).
[63] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (New York: Caravan Books, 1964), 104-5 (my emphasis).
[64] Quoted: William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 219-20 (my emphasis).
[65] Javed Majeed, "Introduction," *Reconstruction*, xi.
[66] Intro: *Secrets of the Self*, xxi.
[67] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Thomas Common (Blacksbug, VA: Thrifty Books, 2009).
[68] "God save us from majesty that is without beauty,/God save us from separation without union!/Science without love is a demonic thing,/science together with love is a thing divine." *Javid Nama*: verses: 1339-42.
[69] *Reconstruction*, 154.
[70] Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 43-44.
[71] To be sure, there isn't a single "ethic," although slaves in the Muslim world had a very different status in ancient Greece, as well as in the modern Europe. See William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[72] This idea of the "fashioner of Destiny" is a significant departure from historic Islamic theological accounts of the relationship between free will and predestination, where the doctrine of Acquisition (*kasb*) was favored as the median position between the two extremes. See *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Tim Winter (editor) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8.
[73] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1986).
[74] Ibid., 1-30.
[75] Ibid., 10-11.
[76] Ibid., 36-39.
[77] Ibid., 38.
[78] Cf. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 112.

[79] Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 179.
[80] Muhammad Iqbal, "Islam as an Ethical and a Political Ideal," http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_iqbal_1908.html, accessed March 17, 2014.
[81] In one discussion Jacques Derrida suggests that "nothing exists outside context." Quoted in *How to Read Derrida*, Penelope Deutscher (London: Granta Books, 2005), 51.