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Nation as a Neo-Idol: Muslim Political Theology and the Critique of Secular Nationalism in Modern South Asia

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Received: 30 August 2018; Accepted: 5 November 2018; Published: 13 November 2018



Abstract: Modern perspectives on nationalism tend to privilege structuralist readings which approach nationalism as entailing economic and political restructuring, thereby overlooking the necessary role of human factors in the functioning of nationalism. Religious opposition to secular nationalism is then condemned as backward, reactionary, fundamentalist, or ideological. However, a different understanding of nationalism is uncovered when the role of human factors in nationalism are scrutinized. Toward discerning the role of human factors in nationalism and its relation to religion in general, I turn to Liah Greenfeld's analysis of social psychology of nationalism as a secular ideology. In exploring the effects of nationalist ideology on religion, I return to the earliest Muslim debates on nationalism in South Asia between two critics of nationalism, Muhammad Iqbal and Abu'l A'laa Mawdudi, and their opponents, Abul Kalam Azad and Husayn Ahmad Madani.

Keywords: nationalism; political Islam; religion and politics; South Asia; India; Pakistan; British colonialism; political theology; religion; revivalism; Islamism; neo-traditionalism; fundamentalism; Mawdudi; Iqbal; Azad; Madani

Whereas secular nationalism emerged in the West as an indigenous and therefore organic development, its rise in the Muslim world was predicated upon the importation of Western models. Accordingly, while some Muslims readily adopted nationalism as an ideological basis for national struggles against colonialism, founding new polities on this basis; others rejected it on theological grounds as antithetical to Islam due to nationalism's secular commitments. The critique waged by the latter camp has played a central role in defining the course of modern Muslim politics. From within the Muslim perspective, given the perpetual presence within Muslim history of a certain religious consciousness that remains ever on guard in warding off or purging Muslim societies from foreign influences, the modern confrontation of some Muslims with secular nationalism should come as no surprise and should have been seen as inevitable. However, the privileging of structural aspects of modernization by nationalism studies, and social sciences at large, has prevented modern disciplines from fully appreciating the nature of Muslim confrontation with nationalism and the ensuing difficulties of modern Muslim politics. It is, nonetheless, possible to make better sense of the said clash while remaining within the perspective of nationalism studies by moving away from structuralist readings in favor of analyses that highlight the role of human factors in nationalism and its parallels with religion. When approached from this angle, it becomes possible to better appreciate the logic and rationale advanced by two Muslim critics of secular nationalism in South Asia, namely, Muhammad Iqbal and Sayyid Mawdudi, whom I will present as political theologians given that they directly link their theology to politics, and construct their political thought upon a theological basis. In presenting Iqbal and Mawdudi as political theologians and approaching them in the perspective of nationalism studies, I also hope to contribute to bridging the gap between nationalism studies and religious studies toward a multidisciplinary approach to the study of religion and politics. In this exposition, I will confine

myself to what Raja calls “the first phase of Indian Muslim nationalism” aimed at “the articulation of Muslim particularity and exceptionalism” (Raja 2010, p. xvi). In scrutinizing the human dimensions of nationalism, I will first turn to Liah Greenfeld’s analysis of the psychology of nationalism.¹

Greenfeld was trained as a sociologist and anthropologist, but as her career progressed she turned her attention to political science, particularly the study of nationalism. In this disciplinary transition, sociological and anthropological motifs continue to inform her investigations on nationalism, and constitute one reason why she grants due attention to human factors at work in nationalism. Her approach contrasts with the conventional approaches in nationalism studies, especially at its origins. The study of nationalism has been saturated with structural analyses of nationalism’s development emphasizing economic and political modernization, a process which tracks as its necessary concomitant the development of the modern nation-state.² For sociologists in the tradition of structuralist-functionalist school, for example, nationalism emerges as a result of industrialization which breaks up the pre-modern society of orders, thereby necessitating a nationalized (read, centralized) political economy spearheaded by the nation-state. To perpetuate its existence and smooth functioning, the nation-state then formulates and promotes nationalism as an ideological justification for maintaining social solidarity and the state’s integrity (Gellner 2008). In their turn, Marxist analyses view nationalism as the result of the rise of capitalist economies and the bourgeois class, and for this reason, are wont to equate nationalism with false consciousness and superstructure—secondary and illusory effects (e.g., culture, arts, and religion) of economic processes (Özkirimli 2000, p. 27). Regardless of their preferred method, all structural analyses approach nationalism foremost as a socio-politico-economic system organized in the form of the modern nation-state (Greenfeld 2006, pp. 65–66). In this view, nationalism—along with industrialization, capitalism, and popular sovereignty—forms a primary constituent of modernization and equated with progress. To be sure, structural factors are essential to nationalism, especially in its relation to the state; however, structuralist analyses are methodologically unequipped to make complete sense of why some Muslims reject nationalism as antithetical to Islam, even as some of them have been more than willing to adapt the structure of the modern nation-state. In the structuralist view, any religious opposition to nationalism is reduced to an opposition to economic and political modernization, science, and historical progress. Religious politics is then customarily condemned and dismissed as backward, regressive, and fundamentalist. Such hasty dismissal of religious politics is a primary reason why structuralist readings of modernity were caught by surprise by the religious resurgence around the globe in late twentieth century. This is because a whole other dimension of nationalism was overlooked in the process. For altogether different factors come to light when nationalism is approached not as restructuring of economy and polity, but as a construct, philosophy, worldview, or “a species of political ideology” (Greenfeld 2006, p. 94). From the ideological vantage point, instead of scrutinizing structural factors, the inquiry into nationalism attends to, inter alia, the role of human factors. It is the human or the anthropological element in nationalism which helps to make better sense of nationalism’s relationship with religion.

In the case of colonial South Asia, structural factors were undoubtedly operative and influenced the development of the various Muslim responses to nationalism; however, the nature of the Muslim responses cannot be fully grasped without considering the more human factors at play. One reason for this should be plainly obvious: religion itself cannot be fully fathomed within structural and structuralist analyses. In fact, religious studies would be unable to make sense of religion without

¹ Among other notable nationalism experts who highlight the human side of nationalism are Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith. Benedict Anderson, for instance, asserts (modern) nations as “imagined communities” given the undeniable role that collective imagination plays in regard to how a nation is conceptualized and sentimentalized in peculiar ways (Anderson 1991). Anthony Smith in his turn attends to the role of ethnicity and religion in nationalism, highlighting the inter-connections among national and religious symbols, memory, heroes, and the past (Smith 1988, 2003).

² The studies by Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* (2008), Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1991), Hechter’s *Internal Colonialism* (1975), and Nairn’s *The Break-up of Britain* (1977) are a few examples of structural analysis of nationalism.

accounting for the human dimensions of religion—e.g., prophets, saints, worship, ecstatic experience, or charismatic authority, spirituality, moral agency, and so on.

Whereas pre-modern Europe was committed to Christian ways of thinking and living, nationalism supplanted Christianity from its place of pride as the primary determination of European conceptions of anthropology, sociology, and politics. “Nationalism is an essentially secular form of consciousness,” observes Greenfeld, “one that, indeed, sacralizes the secular” (Greenfeld 2006, p. 93).³ For Greenfeld, nationalism is secular because it lacks a “transcendental orientation,” and instead perceives the world as “autonomous and ultimately meaningful in its own right” (ibid., pp. 93–94). As for sacralization of the secular, we have here a transvaluation of Durkheim’s view of religion as reflecting the social as the sacred over against the profane. Sacralization is an act of investing something with exceptional, extraordinary, or ultimate value, and anything so valued must then also be safeguarded against being devalued or undervalued. Exceptional valuation entails setting of boundaries around the sacred so as to protect it from being profaned by its other. Accordingly, if the sacred seeks to ward off the encroachment of the secular upon its territory, the secular in turn seeks to ward off the encroachment of the sacred upon its sphere of influence. In other words, both religion and nationalism are concerned with guarding the sanctity of their respective realms. This does not at all mean for Greenfeld that nationalism can be equated with religion. Nationalism for her is not another religion; rather, it should be “compared to a *type* of religion, such as monotheism, representing as it does a set of fundamental principles that can be realized in a variety of dissimilar and often incompatible doctrinal systems” (ibid., p. 94). Nationalism’s comparability to high-level, more abstract traits of religion means that

nationalism shares with transcendental religion certain central qualities that make it their *functional equivalent*. Both ... are ways to interpret—that is, invest with meaning—otherwise meaningless reality ... [Both] are order-creating cultural systems (ibid., p. 94; emphasis added).

As a consequence, nationalism has successfully “replaced religion as the basis of individual and collective identity in the modern world” (ibid., p. 94). In other words, while nationalism as an ideology does not share religion’s metaphysics or theology, it behaves and leads human collectivities to behave in a religious fashion (as a “type of religion”). Greenfeld notes that investing the material world with ultimate meaning makes nationalism “far more intensely spiritual than that of any of the prenational social formations” (ibid., p. 97). Nationalism is the “soul itself” of modern society (ibid.). While Greenfeld does not elaborate the meaning of national “spirituality” or “soul,” it can be inferred that she intends to indicate the unconscious, deep-seated, spirit and sentiments with which people relate to their nation and state.

Greenfeld’s reading of nationalism as a type of religion find parallels in the studies of a minority of voices in nationalism studies. As early as 1926, Carlton Hayes saw nationalism as rooted in humanity’s inherent “religious sense” that he defines as “a mysterious faith in some power outside of himself” (Hayes 1926), and went on to compare nationalism to idolatry (Moses 1975, pp. 263–64). Anthony Smith has insisted on nationalism as a secularized religious form equipped with the conceptions of the sacred communities, holy lands, glorious pasts, and ancestral sacrifices: “[t]hese became the stuff of the new religion of authenticity that is nationalism” (Smith 2003, p. viii). More recently in sociological perspective, Mark Jurgensmeyer’s reading of both nationalism and religion as “ideologies of order” closely tracks Greenfeld’s reading. For Jurgensmeyer, both religion and nationalism offer respective coherent and meaningful visions of the world enshrined in social orders and practices seen

³ Greenfeld is not alone in her strong reading of the secular’s religious attitude toward itself. Speaking of the development of the secularization theory and its failure to ascertain the fate of religion in modernity, Swatos and Christiano call the Durkheimian readings of religion’s structural function of social integration and solidarity “‘religion’ of secularization”. They also quote Jeffrey Haden’s remark that the “idea of secularization became sacralized” in social scientific circles (Hadden quoted in (Swatos and Christiano 2000, p. 2).

as necessary manifestations of their respective visions (Juergensmeyer 2010, p. 266).⁴ Accordingly, Juergensmeyer classifies religion and nationalism as species of the same genus (Juergensmeyer 2010, p. 265). Meaning-making, order-creation, cultural system, social order, and ideology are all terms associated with identity formation. The stronger the linkages between these processes and structures, stronger the identity attachments associated with them. For this reason, there are two overall grave repercussions that result from instituting a nationalistic ideology of order in the midst of an existing one. To institute a new order means to destroy the existing one. Structurally, old economies and polities are demolished to make room for modern structures. Ideologically, new identity uproots the old ones, which is a more agonizing, immediately felt, and personal process. The total effects of the displacement of one ideology of order with another one make for conditions of anomie. For Greenfeld, the transition to nationalism for a society of orders necessarily accompanies anomie, especially among the old elites who are bound to suffer an identity crisis due to the loss of status, prestige, and power (Greenfeld 2006, p. 69). Not all anomie-stricken will take the painful transition lying down. Some will resist the change and fight back. We can then extrapolate that, as two species of the same genus, religion and nationalism think and behave in similar ways, occupy the same niche, compete for some of the same resources, hunt on the same grounds, thus bound to encroach upon one another's territory. Accordingly, they also portray a similar psychology or spirituality.

On the relationship between nationalism and religion, I advert to two notable manifestations of national psychology or spirituality characteristic of the national "spirituality" in Greenfeld's discourse: *national dignity* and *competition*. Greenfeld observes that nationalism carries a high "dignity quotient" or "dignity capital" due to its conferring equality upon all of its members, regardless of class, race, status, gender, or religion. In Greenfeld's explanation,

The main reason for national conflicts—and for conflicts within nations—is wounded pride or threat to dignity. National identity, which derives from the membership in a sovereign community of equals, is a dignifying identity. This is what distinguishes it from most other identities—all other inclusive identities, cutting across status lines—what makes it so attractive (explaining the spread of nationalism over much of the Earth's surface) and what makes national mentality so competitive. Nations are in constant pursuit of prestige, always on the look-out for signs of superiority to others or at least equality to those whose superiority is recognized . . . (Greenfeld 2016, pp. 131–32).

In a democracy, for instance, the rich and the poor, the president and the grocer, all have one vote. This explains nationalism's ready appeal to the masses, and incidentally, it also explains its clash with religion, as religion in general too can confer dignity, prestige, egalitarianism, and a sense of superiority on its adherents. Along with national dignity comes the spirit of competition, especially in relation to the modern capitalist economy of sustainable growth. Both of these result from the secularization (or, sacralization) of the material world which invests worldly activity, and material riches and success, with hitherto exceptional value as a matter of principle. A nation's dignity capital augments with increased economic and political strength in the international arena, where nations compete with one another economically, militarily, and politically, trying to accumulate more dignity capital for themselves. Greenfeld, thus, identifies the spirit of competition as inherent in nationalism (Greenfeld 2016, p. 5).

The preceding exposition leads us to an obvious, and perhaps a startling conclusion, that if nationalism in its ideological mode resembles religion, then religion in its ideological mode must resemble nationalism. Hence, those religious followers for whom religion extends beyond the private

⁴ Juergensmeyer's article interrogates the relationship between religious nationalism and violence, and concludes with a cautionary note about the "dangers" of the "marriage" between religion and nationalism. While significant in its own regard, this caution need not detain us here as I am not at the moment concerned with the legitimacy of Muslims' religious engagement with politics.

sphere are likely to find themselves in confrontation with nationalism. For what are considered to be the ideological religious interests of some will clash with the national interests of others. In this scenario, religious and national interests meet one another as competitors. As Juergensmeyer has it: “Because both religion and secular nationalism are ideologies of order, they are potential rivals” (Juergensmeyer 2010, p. 267). On the ideological plane, then, nationalism becomes religion’s Other. Accordingly, related to national dignity and competition are two social pathologies—implied but not explicitly discussed by Greenfeld—that tend to accompany nationalism: *otherization* and *exceptionalism*.

Spiritually, the sentiments of exceptionalism and the process of otherization necessarily follow from their *axiological contradistinction* as each claims for itself *exceptional* value (exceptionalism), subject to *exceptional* structures and regulations, and seeks to carve out an *exceptional* space or context for its operation with the exclusion of its other (otherization). Sociologically, exceptionalism and otherization are two manifestations of the consciously constructed imaginary of social difference—characteristics, factual or imagined, that help distinguish one group from the rest. Nationalism heightens a group’s sense of social difference in contradistinction to other groups, and, as a result, induces in themselves sentiments of national pride, prestige, confidence, distinction, and the like. It then follows that an intensification of the sense of national dignity, unchecked by higher spiritual or humanist ideals, can transform into the myth of national exceptionalism (‘we are uniquely different, hence, superior to the rest’). Otherization and exceptionalism, however, suffer from a paradox: asserting oneself as distinct and exceptional simultaneously confers on others the same distinction, thus opening up the possibility of the others’ reassertion and claim of the same against oneself. In other words, otherization and exceptionalism are reflexive, mutually reciprocal processes that in turn react upon the otherizing agent who then himself becomes the otherized. Reflexive otherization thus triggers a competing impulse to national exceptionalism among nations. The urge to outdo and get ahead of other nations so as to augment national dignity, most often by accumulating economic, military capital, and/or cultural achievements, is irresistible. The competitive spirit among nations, however, is not limited to nation-states, but affects nationalism at all levels, including ethnic nationalisms within a state. Nationalism’s competitive spirit is, however, also bound to clash with not only other nationalisms, but with all such ideologies that might resemble it, such as religion. For as a type of religion and an ideology of order nationalism is bound to encroach upon those areas of operation where religion too operates. For instance, to the extent that both make a diametrically opposite demand of a citizen-believer (say, to commit an act forbidden by the other), only one can be obliged, thereby both compete in testing the citizen-believer’s loyalty. On certain occasions, the citizen-believer must then choose between loyalty to the nation or loyalty to religion. Observe Greenfeld’s acknowledgement: “Islam, which, with its glorious history, contributes most to the dignity of the Arab and Persian nations [and by extension, all Muslims], is seen as their distinguishing ethnic characteristic” (Greenfeld 2016, p. xx). Islam holds high dignity capital for many Muslims than nationalism, and in the moments of competition, some citizen-believers will choose religion over secular nationalism.

1. Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Pragmatic Rejection of Democratic Nationalism

The origins of the self-conscious Muslim discourse in South Asia on what can be considered proto-nationalism—as the explicit discourse on and a movement of nationalism had not yet arisen—can be traced to the context following the 1857 Rebellion. The Rebellion began as a mutiny in the ranks of the British-Indian army in one town (Meerut), but quickly spread among the general public, mostly concentrated in northern India. In the aftermath of the Rebellion’s failure, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) emerged as the chief spokesman and apologist for Muslim involvement in the ensuing violence. Khan identified two primary causes of the Rebellion: structurally, the deleterious effects of political and economic modernization resulting in the destruction of local industries, and the resulting poverty and unemployment; and culturally, indignities suffered by the natives at the hands of British officials’ disdain of native cultures, customs, and religions—an assertion of colonial otherization and

exceptionalism.⁵ After the Rebellion, the British–Muslim relationship was marked by a process of double otherization: while the British presented themselves as exceptional and *the* (master) Other of all the natives, Muslims were seen by the British as exceptionally troublesome, that is, as the exceptionally dangerous Other given that the Muslims were recently deposed from their longtime rule in the region (Qureshi 1985, p. 241, note 3). Whereas Indians of all stripes participated in the Rebellion, the British singled out Muslims as the primary perpetrators, and the main threat to the British rule in South Asia. The punishment of Muslims was severe, extensive in scope, and devastating in its consequences (Faruqi 1963, pp. 10–16; Qureshi 1985, pp. 263–64; Narang 1972).⁶ As a result, Muslim decline in the region reached its utmost limits as the Muslims suffered all manners of indignities previously unimaginable in their history in the region. The targeting of the Muslims as a single homogeneous community—without regard to their regional, class, caste, and sectarian differences—reacted upon them in asserting their own initial defeatist exceptionalism: Muslims as a uniquely disadvantaged and vulnerable community in South Asia. Thus began a new era of Muslim thinking born of a deep anxiety about its disadvantageous position in regards the Hindu majority, and whose articulation was championed by Khan. Khan’s program of politico-economic preservation of Muslim community went hand in hand with his opposition to and Muslim contradistinction (auto-otherization) with the rest of South Asia (‘we, the Muslim minority, are exceptionally different than the rest, especially the Hindu majority’). The greatest impetus to Muslim auto-otherization came with the birth of Indian National Congress (hereafter, INC) in 1885.

After the Rebellion, the second significant milestone in the development of Muslim nationalism in South Asia was the establishment of the INC by a majority-Hindu elite with the participation of a few Muslims. The INC’s founding objective was to present the interests of India’s educated class before the British government (Griffiths 1946, pp. 135–36). INC quickly emerged as the largest and the dominant political organization, one claiming to represent all Indians, and would go on to spearhead the national movement for independence from colonial rule. The general direction and ideas of the INC projected a future secular order dominated by Hindus, and this inadvertently defined the tone and direction of Muslims’ relationship to nationalism and the Hindu majority. Sayyid Ahmad Khan led the charge against the INC as he chastised it for promoting democracy in India. Khan argued that democracy functions well in a society consisting of one *nation* (*qaum*), or in a society with multiple nations (*qaumain*) with each nation enjoying more or less parity with others. India could not be considered a single nation, as INC claimed, because it housed *many nations* (*qaumain*) (Malik 1982, p. 347).⁷ In a democracy, Hindus’ numerical strength put Muslims at a permanent disadvantage as a minority, thereby forcing them in an unfair competition. Khan mentions four bases on which a democracy could be established: numbers, wealth, fixed allotted proportions, and proportional representation. His calculations told him that Muslims were disadvantaged on all four counts against Hindus (Malik 1982, pp. 348–49). Consequently, Khan announced in no uncertain terms:

I do not think my people [*qaum*, meaning Muslims] so well-trained, and therefore I do not wish to run a [democratic] race with them [the INC] The object of the promoters of the

⁵ Later evaluations of the Rebellion and its aftermath more or less concurred with Khan’s assessments. See, for instance, (Hunter *The Indian Musalmans* (1876), chp. 4; Nehru’s *Discovery of India* (1989), pp. 295–302).

⁶ Hundreds of Muslims were rounded up on the suspicion of sedition activities, forced through quick military trials, and accorded capital punishment, including being blown to smithereens by cannons. In addition, “large scale confiscation of lands, deforestation and the destruction of local forts to erase habitats of resistance, mass burning of villages, razing of cities, and the hanging and deportation of rebels” (Lakshmi 2007, p. 14) were carried out, and bodies of the rebels left hanging from trees (Lakshmi 2007, p. 218). Indignities of the worst kind as vengeance against the Muslims have been documented, for example: sewing pigskin into Muslim corpses; besmirching Muslims with swine blood, and mutilating Muslim corpses (Qureshi 1985, p. 263).

⁷ Muslim reservations over a democratic polity were mirrored by some Hindus as well. For example, the Maharaja of Banares argues (in 1888): “Democracy is an occidental idea. A Hindu cannot comprehend it as long as he is a Hindu. It is against his religious belief. So long as Hindus remain in Hindustan, you cannot succeed in extending the democratical idea” (Griffiths 1946, p. 136).

National Congress is that the Government of India should be English in name only, and that the internal rule of the country should be entirely in their own hands. (Malik 1982, p. 357).

Consequently, Khan rejected the INC “in any shape or form whatever—which regards India as one nation” (Malik 1982, p. 394). India was, in fact, “inhabited by two different nations,” and promoting democracy could only “create animosity between them” (Malik 1982, p. 363). Realizing Muslim incompetence in the context of the unfolding British-led nationalization, Khan proceeded to support British rule in South Asia as a safeguard for Muslim interests against the Hindu dominance, in essence acknowledging British exceptionalism.

British exceptionalism and an ascendant Hindu Other thus marked the two factors that decisively determined the birth of Muslim exceptionalism and the course of Muslim responses to nationalism thereafter. Khan’s reservations *viz a viz* the Hindu majority became a permanent fixation on Muslim politics in the region, and later formed the primary negative impetus for Muslim separatist movement demanding Pakistan starting in 1930s (Malik 1982, p. xi). Khan’s political critique rested solely on political and economic considerations as it was not grounded in theoretical or ideological premises, nor does he convey any sense of a threat to Muslim religious identity in relation to nationalism.⁸ His political calculations and vision were, however, rooted in something deeper still: a burning desire to regain lost Muslim dignity and status—if not dominance and rule—born of a widespread Muslim condition of anomie, informed by nostalgia of bygone Muslim power, especially the prestige enjoyed by the nobility (*ashrāf*) to which Khan belonged. The dynamics of anomie continued to preponderate in Muslim anxieties in the region, and eventually gave rise in 1906 to the INC’s Muslim rival, the All-India Muslim League, which was not only founded by, but whose leadership remained dominated by the affiliates of (Khan inspired) the Aligarh movement until the creation of Pakistan in 1947 (Becker 2013, pp. 64–67).

Later Muslim intellectuals retained Khan’s pragmatic reservations in regards to Hindu dominance and democracy, but diverged from Khan’s approach in two distinct ways. Whereas Khan opposed the INC and supported the British rule, composite nationalists like Azad and Madani supported the INC and opposed the British. In contrast, Iqbal and Mawdudi rejected both the INC and the British rule in favor of Muslim autonomy, and went on to articulate a trenchant critique of secular nationalism.

2. Azad and Madani’s Theological Argument for Composite Nationalism

In the interwar period, nationalism exploded on the world stage as old empires were broken up and from their wreckage new nations were born. Alongside this international chaos, universal ideologies of socialism and communism at the same time rejected nationalism as an atavistic force detrimental to the socialist ideal of transnational solidarities, and instead called for a supranational world without nation-states. In this background, Muslim peoples across the globe too felt the urge to liberate themselves from colonial rules, and the ensuing freedom struggles took on nationalist forms. Many Muslim nationalist movements underscored, with varied commitments and intensity, two pillars of their distinct national identities: ethnicity and Islam. As a result, religion and politics, theology and nationalism, spirituality and freedom struggle were integrated in ideological visions of Muslim nationalisms worldwide. Muslims in colonial South Asia too had to face up to their dual identity of being Indians and Muslims. In the midst of the unfolding anticolonial struggle, this meant to reckon with Indian politics and Muslim religiosity. The first such deliberate reckoning was attempted by Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958).

Whereas Khan indefatigably campaigned for Muslims to keep their loyalty to the British, Azad’s first goal in regard to nationalism was India’s independence and the ouster of the British as the irreconcilable, exceptional other. Azad launched his political theology through a weekly newspaper

⁸ This is not to say that Khan had no theology of his own. In fact, his reinterpretation of Muslim theology in light of modern science made him a highly controversial figure, and made him many enemies.

The Crescent (Al-Hilal) in 1912. For democracy to function well in India, it was necessary for all native religions to work together against the British rule. Interfaith solidarity was a necessary precondition, and one whose necessity needed to be explained, especially to the Muslims. Toward this end, Azad presented Islam as a universal, pluralist religion that acknowledges the common source of Truth from which all religions derive their inspiration, and in which all religions were united. In effect, Azad was attempting to soften interfaith otherization and Muslim religious exceptionalism. Extreme forms of interfaith otherization would forbid Muslims from solidarity with other religions. Azad's theology thus sought to make it possible for Muslims to participate in interfaith solidarity on religious grounds (Mushir-ul-Haqq 1967, pp. 95–98).⁹ In other words, political engagement was sanctioned as a religious act, in effect, sacralizing politics. To further strengthen his argument, Azad expounded a “covenantal theory” (in Aziz Ahmed's coinage) of nationalism. He retrieved a forgotten document of early Muslim history known as the Treaty of Medina (*Mīsaq-i Madīnah*) contracted between Prophet Muhammad and the Jews. The document includes language declaring the Muslims and Jews to be of “one ummah”, which Azad translates as *one nation*. As Azad's argument goes, if the Prophet could form a single nation with the Jews for a common cause, Indian Muslims should unhesitatingly enlist themselves in the nationalist struggle (Ahmed 1967, p. 189).

Azad's political theology was appropriated and further buttressed by the Association of Indian Scholars, the largest Muslim religiopolitical organization at the time, representing the Deoband school of thought, led by Husayn Ahmad Madani, a leading religious and influential figure at the time.¹⁰ In 1938, Madani penned a tract entitled *Composite Nationalism and Islam*¹¹ which complemented Azad's covenantal theory. After Madani's articulation, the theory became associated with the designation ‘composite nationalism’ (*muttaḥidah qaumiyyat*). In the tract, Madani reiterates Azad's basic anti-British animus: the British rule was the greatest danger to India as it rested on the policy of divide and rule, hence, it must be ousted for the sake of Indian unity (Madani 2005, pp. 16–18). The mainstay of Madani's exposition of composite nationalism centered on semantics of the Arabic locutions in the Qur'an that approximate the meaning of ‘nation’—his rationale being “only an Arabic language dictionary can interpret the Koranic words and hadith [statements of the Prophet]” (Madani 2005, p. 56). In Madani's reading, *qaum* is *any group of people, usually a group of men, excluding women; millah* (Urdu *millat*) means *religious community*; while ‘*ummah* (Urdu *ummat*) connotes *religious community of a (monotheist) prophet* (Madani 2005, pp. 56–77, 80–90). The point of Madani's semantic analysis is that *qaum* as the most general category in the semantics of ‘nation’ can consist of any number of *millahs* and *ummahs*. Furthermore, Madani too references the Treaty of Medina and likens it to an earlier form of composite nationalism (Madani 2005, p. 113). Given that God in the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad in the Treaty have employed *quam* in reference to communities that include Muslims and non-Muslims, cooperation with non-Muslims for common causes becomes legitimate in national affairs (Madani 2005, pp. 66–87). In addition to the theological argument, Madani also advances a pragmatic argument: as the colonial powers have used nationalism to sow discord among various Muslim nations in order to weaken them and rule over them, Muslims should appropriate nationalism

⁹ At this stage in his career, Azad was a proponent of establishing a Muslim caliphate in an autonomous zone within India. After the abolishment of the Caliphate in 1924, and the failure of the Khilafat Movement as a result, Azad relented on his quest for an Indian caliphate. For details, see (Mushir-ul-Haqq 1967; Hardy 1971), for example.

¹⁰ The Association of Indian Scholars (*Jam'iyyatul 'Ulamā Hind*) was founded in 1919 as a religiopolitical organization by the affiliates of the largest network of seminaries in South Asia, the Sunni school of Deoband, in order to provide religiopolitical leadership to the Muslim masses.

¹¹ The tract was a response to a debate between Madani and Muhammad Iqbal. In December 1937, Madani had made a statement about the contemporary fact of modern nations predicated upon territorial nationalism. Iqbal criticized Madani's statement as woefully misguided and regrettably ignorant of the true Islamic perspective on nationalism. Madani clarified that his intention in making the said statement was not to assert the normative nature of territorial nationalism, but that he intended to acknowledge territorial nationalism as a historical fact. After Iqbal's death on 21 April 1938, Madani penned his final thoughts on the matter in *Composite Nationalism and Islam* in 1938.

as a weapon to combat the sordid scheme. Therefore, in India, composite nationalism was the antidote to colonialism (Madani 2005, p. 99).

Composite nationalism stands in stark contrast to Khan's position as Azad and Madani downplay religious difference, avoiding intense otherization of other religions, and elevating the common elements among different groups. At the same time, the conspiratorial side of their analysis intensified the otherization of the British—a logical outcome of their drive for independence. In stressing their contradistinction to the British and advocating for secular nationalism, Azad and Madani did not consider secular nationalism as threatening Muslim religious identity. Azad and Madani together defined the contours and arguments of Muslim political theology in favor of secular nationalism. Part theological, part philological, and part pragmatic, the importance of their argument lies in finding a passage from theology to politics, thereby laying the foundations of modern Muslim political theology and religious nationalism. This development was a logical consequence of the colonial context and the religious background of South Asian Muslims. For before a post-colonial national polity could be instituted, masses had to be convinced to lend support to nationalism and struggle for the national cause. Given the racial, linguistic, regional, and sectarian diversity and divisions of South Asian Muslims, it was necessary for Muslim intellectuals to make the case for nationalism before their Muslim audience in religious terms. To make a religious case for Indian nationalism meant Islamization of nationalism, or what is the same, nationalization of Islam. I thus consider composite nationalism to be a softer form of religious nationalism in the sense defined by Juergensmeyer as “the attempt to link religion to the idea of the nation state” (Juergensmeyer 2010, p. 271). Before the abolishment of the Ottoman Caliphate, Azad and JUH were involved in efforts to establish an Indian caliphate in an autonomous zone within the Indian state.¹² This was full-fledged religious nationalism. However, after the abolishment of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, Azad and JUH softened their stance in favor of the INC's vision of a secular nation-state, but went on to justify even this position on theological grounds. Supporting secular nationalism on theological grounds is a softer form of religious nationalism. While the structural demands of nationalism were more than appealing to many Muslims like Azad and Madani, the implications of nationalism as an ideology and its practical implications were too odious for some to adopt in totality. Composite nationalists were therefore opposed by the counterargument advanced by Muhammad Iqbal and Sayyid Mawdudi. In John L. Esposito's analysis,

if Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) had been the traditionally educated Muslim who sought to make modern Western liberal thought acceptable to Islam, Muhammad Iqbal was a modern Muslim, with a Western education, who reinterpreted Islam in conjunction with Western thought to show its relevancy as a viable alternative to Marxist and Christian European ideologies. (Esposito quoted in (Mohomed 2014, pp. 325–26)).

3. Iqbal's Critique of Secular Nationalism

Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) has been hailed as an eminent modern Muslim poet and philosopher. Educated in law at University of Cambridge's Trinity College (1906), and in philosophy at Maximilian University of Munich (1908), Iqbal articulated a philosophical and poetic vision of Islam, along with a critical evaluation of the achievements and limits of Western civilization, with an explicit attack on nationalism. By his own admission, Iqbal was among the first ones to broach the topic of nationalism in India (Iqbal 1973).¹³ Along with Mawdudi, Iqbal entered the debate on nationalism in late 1930s at the height of the worldwide fervor of nationalism. This was the time when Arab Muslims had rebelled and colluded with the European powers against the Ottoman rule over their lands. In addition, the

¹² Azad articulated the basic argument of this attempt in his *The Caliphate Question (Mas'ala'-i Khilāfat)* published in 1920.

¹³ “I have been repudiating the concept of nationalism since the time when it was not well-known in India and the Muslim world” (Iqbal 1973).

Turkish leadership itself had dismantled the institutional framework of the centuries-old Muslim Caliphate, shocking South Asian Muslims and galvanizing many of them for the restoration of the Caliphate. The international fervor of nationalism was reflected in the national fever at home in South Asia as the nationalist movement continued to make gains. Faced with a burgeoning nationalist movement spearheaded by Hindu revivalists, socialists, and Muslim theologians affiliated with the Association of Indian Scholars, all promoting a nationalist vision, Iqbal criticized secular nationalism from a spiritual perspective.

Iqbal's basic philosophical outlook is explicated in his famous lectures, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. In his basic theological insight, Iqbal presents God as the Ultimate Ego (equally, Self, or Consciousness) whose incessant creative activity issues forth individual egos or selves, carrying different intensities of consciousness from the minutest of subatomic particles and quanta to human self-consciousness, all of whom go to make up the universe. From this follows Iqbal's basic statement on anthropology: issued forth as a result of divine creativity, the human ego is essentially spiritual, unencumbered by the limitations of time and space, and therefore, imbued with the divinely-induced tendency toward free and creative activity. The greater fulfillment of man's spiritual essence translates into the greater realization of one's ego-potential (*khudī*), whose climax is an *affective*¹⁴ union with God in the form of religious experience. I say *affective* and not mystical or religious so as to avoid conflating Iqbal's sense of spiritual experience with the traditional mystical modes. In Iqbal's sense, affective experience still retains the intense emotionality that accompanies religious experiences, yet, at the same time, the affective holds a necessary and intimate relation with the rational. In the second instance, the human ego is also earthbound due to its biological constitution and terrestrial existence, thereby destined to operate within the limits of space and time. History, as the activity of earthly forces, therefore, forms the arena proper for the realization of human ego-potential as exemplified by the examples of the prophets in the Qur'an.

Explaining the unity of the spiritual and the historical in the mission of Prophet Muhammad, Iqbal notes that the Prophet

returns [from religious experience to the ordinary world] to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals . . . [I]t is the awakening, within him, of world-shaking psychological forces, calculated to completely transform the human world. (Iqbal 2012, p. 99).

This statement holds the key to Iqbal's integration of spiritual anthropology, political theology, and critique of nationalism. As the arena of realization of the spiritual quest, the historical movement presents repeated encounters with finite "forces of history" aligned with "fresh world of ideals" and, as Iqbal mentions later, "fresh loyalties" (Iqbal 2012, p. 116). In other words, the spiritual quest in its evolution ascends from stage to stage, creating new ideals demanding fresh loyalties. In this journey, earthbound historical forces represent challenges to be overcome and transcended, and nationalism is one such challenge. Failing to transcend the national ideal and loyalty deviates the spiritual quest, thereby arresting the ultimate realization of human ego-potential and, by extension, Muslim identity. This implies that nationalism presumes an anthropology of its own, one which, on the one hand, remains indifferent to man's spiritual essence, and, on the other hand, misinterprets him as a national being, mistaking servitude to the nation as the climax of his ego-potential.

Iqbal's anthropology stands in stark contrast to the nationalist anthropology, as Iqbal presents the human individual as a spiritual being capable of transcending all earthly limitations. Accordingly, as

¹⁴ Iqbal resolved that the older forms of religious experience associated with long-term association with mystic orders, structured upon the master-disciple relationship, were now outdated and impractical for modern sensibilities and lifestyles, and that the Muslim world was in need of rational and discursive approaches to God-man relationship. See Iqbal's preface to his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. For Iqbal's discourse on spiritual anthropology, see the first lecture, "Knowledge and Religious Experience", of the *Reconstruction*.

“an emotional system of unification it [Islam] recognizes the worth of the individual as such, and rejects blood-relationship as a basis of human unity. Blood-relationship is earth-rootedness. The search for a purely psycho-logical foundation of human unity becomes possible only with the perception that all human life is spiritual in its origin. Such a perception is creative of fresh loyalties without any ceremonials to keep them alive, and makes it possible for man to emancipate himself from the earth”. (Iqbal 2012, p. 116).

For Iqbal, nationalism is materialistic in that it is “associated with the body and the world of dimensions” in its relation to its geographical [and, let us add, linguistic and racial] factors (Majeed 2009, pp. 78–79). “Earth-rootedness” pulls humans down and pegs them to the world of gross matter, which divides humanity along earthly concerns. For humanity to unite together, nothing less than the infinite spiritual ideal will do. A corollary of the spiritual ideal is the spiritual equality of all humans which determines the “psycho-logical foundation of human unity,” that is the unity of human spiritual origins, which in turn determines the spiritual “worth of the individual as such.” Herein lies the foundational difference between Iqbal’s anthropology and secular nationalism. Iqbal’s spiritual anthropology locates the basis for the universal dignity of all human beings without regard to earthly factors. Spiritual universality then leads to a universal vision of society and politics, whereas nationalism can never offer dignity to all humanity due to its particularity, nor can it truly attain universality as universal nationalism is oxymoronic. Ali Qasmi thus aptly labels Iqbal’s vision a “spiritual democracy encapsulating the whole world” (Dharampal-Frick et al. 2010, pp. 27–28), while Masud describes Iqbal’s vision as a “framework for the theology of modernity focused on the autonomy of self” (Masud 2014). In Iqbal’s words, “Islam does not aim at the moral reformation of the individual alone; it also aims at a gradual but fundamental revolution in the social life of mankind, which should altogether change its national and racial viewpoint and create in its place a purely human consciousness” (Iqbal 1930) as opposed to a national consciousness. In other words, Islam is inherently supranational and nationalism must not be allowed to arrest its supranational potential. Taken as a premise, Iqbal’s spiritual anthropology logically projects a political theology as its necessary consequence.

Iqbal was not against a healthy form of patriotism in the sense of one’s affection for one’s homeland. He held this sense of patriotism as incumbent on every Muslim as expressed in a famous Muslim proverb: ‘love of one’s nation [*vatan*] is part of faith.’ So much so that one should be willing to lay down one’s life for one’s homeland. However, nationalism that Iqbal here criticizes is one that claims the nation as “a principle of human society and as such, it is a political concept” (Iqbal 1973). To assert nationalism as a political concept is to underscore its ideological dimension. Thus, as a political principle or an ideology, nationalism becomes the foundation for organizing the whole of public life that eventually affects the private sphere, including spirituality, and in Iqbal’s perspective, a change in spirituality is a change in a Muslim’s essential identity. In other words, where nationalism becomes the organizing principle of collective life, religion must necessarily withdraw within the narrow scope of privacy, and cut off from the totality of life, withers away and dies. In contrast, Iqbal asserts that Islam is “an ethical ideal plus a certain kind of polity . . . a social structure regulated by a legal system and animated by a specific ethical ideal” (Iqbal 1930). This is because in “Islam God and the universe, spirit and matter, church and state, are organic to each other” (Iqbal 1930). Nationalism, in contrast, “suggests a dualism which does not exist in Islam” (Iqbal 2012, p. 123). To reject nationalism’s religious/secular, private/public, and spirituality/politics dualisms amounts to rejecting secularism. In the Islamic sense, “[a]ll that is secular is, therefore, sacred in the roots of its being,” Iqbal proclaims. If nationalism is “essentially a secular form of consciousness,” as Greenfeld noted, then it is antithetical to Islam as conceived by Iqbal. Hence, when “Islam will be reduced to an ethical idea with indifference to its social order as an inevitable consequence,” the eventual outcome will be “irreligiousness.” It is

due to nationalism's extension in both private and public, and its accompanying effects on religiosity, that critics like Iqbal see nationalism as competing with Islamic ideals and loyalty (Ansari 1961).¹⁵

Once taken root among a people, nationalism engenders a social pathology. For, absent the religious tie, a principle of national unity still needs to be discovered, recourse is then taken to the distinctions of race, language, and land, all of which inevitably sow seeds of hatred, animosity, and exclusion, not only among nations, but among different communities within a single nation.

Both nationalism and atheistic socialism, at least in the present state of human adjustments, must draw upon the psychological forces of hate, suspicion, and resentment which tend to impoverish the soul of man and close up his hidden sources of spiritual energy . . . Surely the present moment is one of great crisis in the history of modern culture. (Iqbal 2012, p. 149).

Stated differently, the great crisis of nationalism is spiritual, a result of its social pathology.

When Iqbal turns to nationalism in his spiritual-theological perspective, he discerns the functioning of the modern nation as an idol or a deity, as it competes with divine authority and loyalty. This is nowhere more conspicuously expressed than in Iqbal's poem "Nationalism" (Iqbal n.d.).¹⁶ Iqbal opens the poem with a hermeneutical insight:

In this age the wine, the cup, even Jam is different
The cup-bearer started different ways of grace and tyranny
The Muslim also constructed a different Haram [sacred sanctuary] of his own
The Azar [idol maker] of civilization made different idols of his own
Country [*vatan*], is the biggest among these new gods!
What is its shirt is the shroud of Din [religion]

Jam abbreviates Jamshed, the name of a mythical Persian king who possessed a wine glass through which he could observe the world. Jam is thus a trope for political authority or the sovereign, whereas his wine glass—a crystal ball of sorts—is indicative of a hermeneutic lens or medium (that is, method or theory) through which the world is perceived. A medium (or an intermediary in religious terms) by its very nature filters the content, thereby, influences perception. At the same time, Jam is equated with the cup-bearer indicating the function of political authority in serving different manners of intoxications to its subjects to confound reality for them so as to keep them tame and domesticated. Modern sovereigns have thus concocted a new intoxicant to deceive the masses to ensure the perpetuation of their tyranny. Nation (mistranslated here as "country"),¹⁷ and by extension nationalism, is the neo-intoxicant of the modern age in its political function. In its religious function, given its ideals and demand for ultimate loyalty, the nation is the neo-idol of the modern age. Nation is thus a false god contending for the status of 'divinity' that, in a monotheistic tradition, is properly reserved for and deserved only by God—the caution here is reminiscent of the Decalogue's prohibition against graven images. Consequently, to fall prey to the tricks of nationalism amounts to replacing the religion of Islam. What then ought to be the Muslim position and response to nationalism? Iqbal vociferously exhorts his Muslim reader thus:

Your [Muslim's] arm is enforced with the strength of the Divine Unity [tauḥīd]

¹⁵ It should be noted that during a brief earlier period in his life, Iqbal did promote Indian patriotism. Consider Zafar Ansari's observation: "Except for a very brief period in his life, Iqbal pitted himself in opposition to nationalism. It is only in his first collection of poems, *Bang-i-Dim* [sic., *Dara*], and only in a few poems of the first period (i.e., prior to 1905) that we see him in the garb of an ardent Indian nationalist. These poems eloquently speak of his love of the nationalist variety for the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and its people. The fatherland occupies the central place in his mind and religion is mentioned as a divisive factor in the nation." Iqbal changed his views on nationalism during his stay in Europe from 1905 to 1908, where he observed firsthand the deleterious effects of nationalism in Europe (Ansari 1961).

¹⁶ For a critique of nationalism and the West in general in Iqbal's verse, see Raja (2010, chp. 6).

¹⁷ Iqbal's term in the verse is *vatan*, properly translated as 'nation,' and in the seventh couplet, Khalil correctly translates *des* as "country;" thus distinguishing *vatan* from *des*. I am surprised, therefore, to see *vatan* translated in this verse as "country" instead of 'nation'.

You are the followers of Mustafa¹⁸ [Muhammad], your country is Islam
 You should show the old panorama to the world
 O Mustafa's follower! You should destroy this idol

Iqbal comes to oppose nationalism ("country" [*des*]) to Islam, and presents Islam as the proper Muslim alternative to nationalism. Iqbal is thus exhorting his readers to a battle between Islam and nationalism. This theological hermeneutic divides the world into two ideological camps: pure monotheism (*tauḥīd*) versus all other ideological manifestations destructive of monotheism. To adopt nationalism in all earnest is tantamount to sinning against God, and the destruction of Islam. Accordingly, Iqbal's recommendation to the Muslims is to destroy the neo-idol in order to save their religion in its totality. Iqbal ends the poem thus:

God's creation is unjustly divided among nations by it
 The Islamic concept of nationality is uprooted by it

Iqbal saw nationalism not only as a threat against the Muslim world's sorely needed unity, already divided among nations, but also a shattering of human unity. On this point Iqbal agrees with Madani that nationalism was deployed by the West as a weapon to divide Muslims into warring camps. However, unlike Madani, Iqbal's prescription does not call for appropriating nationalism as a weapon against the West. Iqbal saw nationalism by its very nature as earthbound hence limited, therefore, divisive and exclusionary, unequipped to serve the cause of restoring Muslim or human unity.¹⁹ Iqbal's idealist philosophy dreamt of a universal theological humanism. In contrast to nationalism and racism, Iqbal's vision approaches Prophet Muhammad as "a universal figure, rather than an Arab."²⁰ Prophet Muhammad was thus a universal prophet bearing the universal monotheistic message of Islam. As Majeed notes, upon God's oneness Iqbal founds the unity of all humanity, because "all are equal before this universal God, this potential equality can become the basis for a society which in principle transcends race and ethnicity" (Majeed 2009, p. 71). Iqbal's universal political theology and his critique of spirit of nationalism made composite nationalism's arguments unpalatable to him.

Madani's articulation of composite nationalism offered Iqbal a worthy target given Madani's status and importance. In a newspaper article entitled "Islam and Nationalism" (Iqbal 1973), Iqbal begins by appraising Madani's semantics of nation and nationality. Agreeing with Madani's analysis of *qaum* as any group in general, Iqbal underscores the givenness or involuntarism inherent in the idea of *qaum*. *Millat* (Arabic, *millah*), on the other hand, necessarily "stands for religion, a law and a program," "a particular way of life," which makes it a matter of choice; one can convert from one *millat* to another. For Iqbal, *millat* and *ummat* are nearly synonymous in meaning as they are used interchangeably in the Qur'an. Accordingly, "millat or ummat embraces nations but cannot be merged in them" (Iqbal 1973). Owing to this fact, for Iqbal, there can be multiple *qaums* in the world, but only two *ummats/millats*: Muslims (or monotheists in general) and non-Muslims. Iqbal thus concludes, over against composite nationalism, that the basis of a Muslim *qaum* (nation) cannot be other than their *millat* (religion). This is the quintessential and the defining statement in favor of a religious nationalism in Islam. Whereas Azad and Madani's composite nationalism reconciled secular nationalism and theology, Iqbal rejects secular nationalism in toto, but lays down the groundwork for another form of *modern* Muslim nationalism. Long before his debate with Madani, Iqbal had deliberated on the relationship between religion and state in Islam, denying any ideological or functional separation of

¹⁸ Muṣṭafā ('the chosen one') is one of the honorific titles of Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁹ Critics of idealist visions like that of Iqbal's are wont to argue that a worldwide Muslim unity has never really existed in Muslim history. Even if this criticism be granted, nonetheless, the potential of Islam to unify Muslims in a pan-Islamic unity was in fact demonstrated by South Asian Muslims during the Khilafat Movement in which Muslims rallied for the preservation of the Ottoman Caliphate based in Turkey, and for a lenient treatment by the British and her allies of the Ottoman Empire after its loss in the First World War.

²⁰ The idea of Prophet Muhammad as a Universal Human or the Perfect Man (*insān-i kāmīl*) has enduring roots in the Muslim tradition, especially in the Sufi or mystical discourse of Islam.

the two. After noting that the (social and political) essence of the Islamic idea of unity of God (*tauḥīd*) is “equality solidarity, and freedom,” he concludes that the “state, from the Islamic standpoint, is an endeavor to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization” (Iqbal 2012, pp. 122–23). Iqbal thus blunted the secular edge of the nation-state by making it subservient to and an instrument of his spiritual vision, in effect converting the nationalistic ideology to religion and destroying the neo-idol of the nation. However, the form of Iqbal’s state is republican, a democracy and not a theocracy. Hence, structural modernization for Iqbal is accommodated within his spiritualized ideology. Iqbal did not, however, leave a detailed plan of his vision of an Islamic state. That task was taken up by Sayyid Mawdudi.

4. Mawdudi’s Critique of Secular Nationalism

Sayyid Abu’l A’laa Mawdudi (d. 1979) was mostly self-taught since the age of sixteen. In his intellectual quest, he became conversant with both the traditional Islamic and modern Western sciences. At the young age of seventeen, Mawdudi took up the profession of journalism through which he sharpened his rhetorical skills, developing a highly rational and linguistically accessible style of argumentation. Whereas Iqbal sees Islam as primarily grounded in spirituality, Mawdudi sees it as a theological-rational outlook—which nonetheless projects a certain spirituality, yet this spirituality is not ingrained in a mystical or affective (in my sense of the term) experience of God, but on a purely rational understanding of and obedient servitude to God. Mind and thought are central to Mawdudi’s hermeneutic, not spirit or the heart, which seldom appear in his oeuvre. Given the scope of Mawdudi’s oeuvre covering topics related to theology, metaphysics, exegesis, economics, law, politics, and international relations, it is not too far off the mark to proclaim that “Mawdudi would appear to be much the most systematic thinker of modern Islam” (Osman 2003, p. 465).²¹ Along the same lines, he has been hailed as “one of the first Islamic thinkers to develop a systematic political reading of Islam and a plan for social action to realize his vision” and “without doubt the most influential of contemporary Islamic revivalist thinkers” (Nasr 1996, p. 3). One difficulty in dealing with Mawdudi is the contradictory nature of his political engagement before and after the 1947 Partition of India that resulted in the creation of Pakistan. Whereas the early, pre-Partition Mawdudi was an idealist who shunned politics and opposed Pakistan; the later, post-Partition Mawdudi moved to Pakistan, exhausting his energies in Pakistani politics, which include some uncharacteristic compromises on his part. As noted above, my analysis will remain limited to early Mawdudi.

In 1937, Mawdudi began writing a series of articles addressing nationalism and now collected under two volumes entitled *Tehrīk-i Azādi-yi Hind (The Indian Freedom Movement)*.²² Masood Raja counts these writings among the “foundational texts” that paved the way for the formation of “Muslim national identity” in the region. For the present analysis, I will limit myself to the first volume as it contains Mawdudi’s sustained critique of nationalism as an ideological construct and its development in the West. Mawdudi broaches the topic of nationalism by observing that the Indian (read South Asian) Muslims were caught in the throes of an unfolding worldwide revolution—that of nationalism. In South Asia, he attributes the national development to two factors: (a) the advent of British colonialism, (b) and the concomitant effects of structural and cultural Westernization (i.e., modernization) (Mawdudi 2005, chp. 1). Whether as proponents or critics of nationalism, Muslim alertness to nationalism as a foreign, British importation once again underscores the structural factor of contradistinction in national identity.

²¹ Osman’s reference is to William Cantwell Smith’s quotation in Vali Reza Nasr, “Sayyid Abu’l A’laa Mawdudi (1903–1979),” (Esposito 1955).

²² The articles were originally serialized by Mawdudi in his own journal *Tarjuman al-Qur’an*, 1937–1941, later collected in book form in three volumes under the title *Musalman Aur Maujudā Siyāsī Kashmakash (Muslims and the Current Political Struggle)*. The articles were thereafter collected in two volumes entitled *Indian Freedom Struggle (Tehrīk-i Azādi-ye Hind)* along with another pertinent article “*Mas’ala-yi Qaumiyyat [The Problem of Nationalism]*.” My references pertain to the latter collection.

In forging a response to nationalism, Mawdudi came to realize, as Iqbal before him, that the extent of the challenge was deep and far-reaching. For Mawdudi, Muslims faced a crisis of dual identity of being Muslims and Indians. As Indians, Muslims shared their plight and fate in common with all other Indians. As Muslims, however, they faced a predicament exclusive to themselves, in which no other community in India had any share or concern: that foreign domination (*ajnabi istilā*) had resulted in a tremendous decline in Muslim morals (*akhlāq*), culture (*tehzīb*), lifestyle (*usūl-i ḥayāt*; literally, *principles of life*), and social organization (*nizām-i jamā'at*). As far as Mawdudi was concerned, two options presented themselves to the Muslims: (a) either adopt nationalism (*vatan parasti*) and its quest for independence from colonial domination, remaining indifferent to Muslim cultural autonomy; or (b) struggle to achieve Muslim autonomy (*āzādī*) that enables Muslims to recover their lost power. Mawdudi saw the two options as ultimately leading to two different destinations (Mawdudi 2005, pp. 73–75). Indian nationalism without explicit safeguards for Muslim autonomy was detrimental to the future of Islam in the region—in contrast to Khan, for whom the British were the safeguard for Muslims. Accordingly, faced with the unfolding national revolution, Mawdudi announced his primary objective as the preservation of Islamic identity (*tashakhkhus*) or the “national type” (Mawdudi’s own coinage) by achieving Muslim religious, cultural, and political autonomy, either within or without a national Indian polity (Mawdudi 2005, chp. 10, pp. 194–95). Nasr underscores “identity formation” as an abiding objective of Mawdudi’s revivalism, which must assert its contradistinction to both British and the Hindus: “Islamic revivalism therefore entailed a process of identity formation that could compete with both traditional Muslim identity and secular nationalism” (Nasr 1996, p. 4). Note Nasr’s observation in seeing Mawdudi’s concern with secular nationalism as a competition over identity. For Mawdudi, Islamic identity was predicated on his vision of Islam as a complete system of life.

One of Mawdudi’s general hermeneutic principles was to reinterpret the Qur’anic concept of *jāhiliyyah* in the light of his modern interpretation of Islam as a system (*nizām*).²³ In ordinary Muslim discourse, *jāhiliyyah* connotes the pre-Islamic cultures of ignorance and uncivilized behavior. In this sense, Mawdudi asserts Islam as a system in contradistinction to all other systems (worldviews, cultures, political orders, etc.). In a move reminiscent of Iqbal’s division of the world into the *millats* of Islam and non-Islam, Mawdudi asserts that the world admits only of two systems: Islam and *jāhiliyyat*. His reasoning being that with the advent of Prophet Muhammad, *jāhiliyyat* was eradicated and replaced with Islam as the true, universal, and final divinely-revealed religion. In Mawdudi’s historiography, history witnesses a perpetual confrontation between truth (*haqq*) and falsehood (*bātil*), or Islam (read, monotheistic worldview revealed to the prophets from Adam to Muhammad) and *jāhiliyyat* (Ahmad 2013, p. 334). Mawdudi’s deployment of *jāhiliyyat* approximates the Marxist idea of false consciousness which, in the Islamic sense, leads to different levels of alienation as regards truth, goodness, reality, and one’s essential humanity. Phrased differently, all cultures fall on a spectrum between the two poles of pure Islam (absolute truth, goodness, reality) and pure *jāhiliyyat* (absolute falsehood, evil, unreality). On this spectrum, nationalism with Mawdudi appears closer to the pole of *jāhiliyyat*—an appraisal with which Iqbal would concur.²⁴ Noting Nasr’s reading that “[a]t the heart of Mawdudi’s approach was the belief that religious authenticity was a panacea” (Nasr 1996, p. 54), any association with *jāhiliyyat* for Mawdudi became a mark of religious inauthenticity.

²³ The Arabic *jāhiliyyah* is a nominalization from the root *j-h-l*. The participle *jāhil* means ‘ignorant,’ ‘uncivilized,’ ‘uncultivated,’ ‘uncultured,’ ‘unenlightened,’ ‘uneducated,’ ‘ignoramus,’ and ‘uninformed.’ The nominal form, *jāhiliyyah*, appears in the Qur’an in four references, all of which caution the reader against indulgence in the respective manifestation of *jāhiliyyah*: conjecture (*ẓann*, Qur’an 3:154), judgement (*ḥukm*, Qur’an 5:50), female adornment (*tabarruj*, Qur’an 33:33), and group pride (*ḥamiyyah*, Qur’an 48:26). In most instances in the Qur’an, the meaning of the root *j-h-l* tends to mean ‘ignorance’ in the sense of lacking knowledge, information, or wisdom. Mawdudi’s discourse on *jāhiliyyat* (Urdu) is explicated under a revealing chapter title “Islam: A Comprehensive Culture: The UnIslamic [*Jāhili*] Conception of Separation of Religion and Lifeworld (*dunyā*), and Its Effects on Our National Politics”.

²⁴ For Mawdudi’s discussion on *jāhiliyyat*, see (Mawdudi 2005, pp. 109–18, 379–80).

Framing of nationalism as a form of *jāhiliyyat* helps Mawdudi to otherize nationalism as a modern manifestation of old, pre-Islamic ignorance, instead of a progressive achievement. Moreover, adapting the concept of *jāhiliyyat* frees Mawdudi from “Westernistic image of world history” (in Marshall Hodgson’s coinage)²⁵ that presents the West as modern hence superior, enabling him to interpret the West in Islamic terms, thereby making it possible to demonstrate, at least to the Muslims, the limitations of nationalism. Mawdudi thus observes that the modern *jāhiliyyat*’s view of religion is that of a private affair which only addresses man’s relation with God, and whose sole objective is limited to individual salvation (Mawdudi 2005, pp. 109–10). In stark contrast, Islam is first and foremost an “attitude of mind” (*tarīq-i fikr*) and an “outlook on life” (*nuqṭa-yi nazar*) (Mawdudi 2005, p. 109) that together give rise to a distinct conduct or lifestyle (*tarz-e ‘amal*), and a distinct ritual practice (*madhhab*), culture (*tehzīb*), and a civilization (*tamaddun*) that together constitute a single integrated whole (*majmū‘ah*). The whole order then places before Muslims a collective ideal (*naṣabul ‘ayn*) and a purely spiritual objective (*muntahā-i nazar*). The Islamic order not only addresses man–God relationship, but also organizes man-to-man interactions, and man-to-universe (*kā‘ināt*) relationship. The objectives of Islam demands that Muslims as individuals and as a collective mold their minds in an Islamic cast, and adopt those ideas, values, and lifestyle that retain its harmony with Islam’s worldview and objectives (Mawdudi 2005, pp. 111–14). Hence, the autonomy and independence that Muslims ought to seek must guarantee their control over their own religion and culture, and private and public life (Mawdudi 2005, pp. 125–27). This objective, however, cannot be achieved within the modern paradigm of nationalism owing to its very nature.

Absent a religious basis, observes Mawdudi (as did Iqbal), nationalism nonetheless must rest on some common factor strong enough to overcome the various differences among different communities. The Protestant Reformation rent the previously uneasy conciliation reached between the Roman Catholic Church and (secular) political authority. Unable to reunite upon a common factor, whether religious or secular, the Christian world split into multiple nations. The natural outcome of this development was national competition that revolved around four elements—highlighting nationalism’s social psychology—national pride (*iftikhār*), solidarity (*hamiyyat*), preservation (*taḥaffuẓ*), and “aggrandizement” (*istilā o istikbār*) (Mawdudi 2005, p. 334). Given this framework, nationalism can only give rise to hatred, animosity, and vengeance—the social pathology of nationalism. Taken to its logical conclusion, Mawdudi concludes, the national impulse metastasizes into imperialism, colonialism, and brutal violence, often of the powerful against the powerless (Mawdudi 2005, p. 345). Mawdudi thus concludes that “this madness (*junūn*) of nation worship (*qaum parastī*) is the greatest curse on the world; [and] the greatest danger for human culture” (Mawdudi 2005, p. 345) as it turns humans into predatory animals (*darindah*). This is, for Mawdudi, nationalism’s real, underlying spirit—the spirit of *jāhiliyyat*—which the Muslim proponents of secular nationalism fail to understand.

Toward disclosing the dangers of importing nationalism in South Asia, Mawdudi turns his critical lens against the towering nationalist figure of Indian socialism, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was one of Gandhi’s close confidants and went on to become the first prime minister of post-colonial India.²⁶ Mawdudi notes that Nehru’s first mistake was to presume all of India a single nation comprising a homogeneous unity. Such a presumption conflates, flattens, and equalizes all the myriad differences of race, language, color, religion, and cultures across South Asia. Mawdudi sees Nehru’s second mistake in his faith in Marxist historiography that presumes economic interest as the basis of all politics. Thus, the true basis of difference and division among humans rests upon economics, the haves being one group and the have-nots another. Consequently, religion in this scheme is rendered inconsequential

²⁵ Hodgson speaks of a “Westernistic image of world history” that divides the world into three parts: the Primitives (who supposedly had no history), the Orient (who flourished before the West), and the West, which replaced what came before it in advancement, ushering in modernity (Hodgson 1974, pp. 204–5, and note 11).

²⁶ The critique of Nehru appears in “The Views of the Nationalists”, (Mawdudi 2005, chp. 10, pp. 199–219).

to social and political development. Mawdudi cautions his readers to beware of Nehru's aim to establish socialism in India and even eradicate religion. In singling out Nehru, Mawdudi's objective is to weaponize Nehru's socialist nationalism against him, and by extension, against the whole vision of secular nationalism as anti-religion, and therefore, anti-Islamic. Mawdudi goes on to warn his Muslim readers that democratic legislation holds the potential to limit religious freedom, as the scope of state's operation and interference is virtually unlimited. To prove his point, Mawdudi enumerates several instances in which INC imposed Hindu culture on Muslim students in the school system: Muslim students were forced to sing an anthem offensive to Muslims; greet others with the Hindu salutations; made to wear Hindu attire; and forced to worship Hindu deities (Ahmad 2009, p. 153).²⁷ By citing such examples, Mawdudi built up a forceful case against nationalism as an anti-Islamic ideology threatening to Muslim's very identity. In the final analysis, Mawdudi concludes that nationalism in its totality is another kind of religion, therefore, in competition with the revealed teachings (*sharā'i ilāhiyyah*) of the prophets (Mawdudi 2005, p. 360). In this statement, Greenfeld's reading of nationalism and Muslim political theology concur on the point that nationalism in its ideological function approximates religion—and by the dint of this dynamic religion in its ideological mode is bound to clash with nationalism.

Weighing in on the South Asian Muslim debate on nationalism, Mawdudi too, like Iqbal, attacks Madani's articulation of composite nationalism.²⁸ Like Iqbal, Mawdudi too highlights Madani's conflation of the Arabic *qaum* as used in the Qur'an with the modern understanding of nation. Mawdudi also notes that the term *qaum* and its English equivalent 'nation' both have their origins in *jāhiliyyat*. He then observes that proponents of *jāhiliyyat* have been unable to transcend the limitations of race, history, tribal affiliation, and the like, when it comes to finding a basis for nationality. Accordingly, the Qur'an never employs the term *qaum* and other terms of similar semantics (*sha'ab* [community], *qabilah* [tribe]) in reference to Muslims (Mawdudi 2005, pp. 379–80). Hence, the conventional terms for 'nation,'—*qaum*, *qabilah*, *sha'ab*, and so on—cannot be attributed to Muslims. Mawdudi proceeds to reject Madani and Azad's equation between the Treaty of Medina and modern composite nationalism. The Treaty did not establish a national state inclusive of Muslims and Jews upon the principle of majority rule, a joint legislature, or a common judicial system. At best, the Treaty can be considered a "military alliance" between the Jews and the Muslims for the common defense of the city of Medina. Hence, Madani's conflation of the Qur'anic and modern terminology is a manifestation of loose thinking that does not stand up to rigorous scrutiny. In sum, the crux of Iqbal and Mawdudi's critique of composite nationalism revolves around two points: (a) the distinctly modern nature of the terms nation, nationality, and nationalism, which bear no real semantic parity with the Qur'anic usage; and (b) the spiritual dynamics of nationalism that lead to devastating spiritual consequences for Islam if the idea were to be adopted by Muslims as an ideological basis for polity.

Mawdudi's critique of nationalism was not limited to intellectual an argument. As any serious ideology, Mawdudi's ideological formulation of Islam was aimed at initiating a revolutionary movement for the purposes of establishing his authentic Islamic society structured upon the model of the modern nation-state, for which he coined the term "theo-democracy" (a representative government limited by the strictures of Islamic law). Accordingly, Mawdudi launched a revolutionary movement, the Jama'at-i Islāmī (the Islamic Party) in 1941. Given his goal of an authentic Islamic society, Mawdudi went on to oppose the separatist Muslim movement demanding the creation of Pakistan as it was spearheaded not by a religious revolutionary vanguard, but by what Mawdudi saw as secular Muslims, unworthy and unqualified architects of an Islamic state. Hence, until the very birth of Pakistan in 1947, the early Mawdudi remained bitterly opposed to the idea. The founding of Pakistan opened up a new chapter in Mawdudi's development. After Pakistan's establishment, Mawdudi moved there

²⁷ Ahmad's references appear in the context of Mawdudi's criticism of the Indian National Congress.

²⁸ For Mawdudi's critique of Madani, see (Mawdudi 2005, chp. 16).

and became entangled with its national politics. At the outset, he considered the Pakistani state to be secular therefore sinful for two main reasons: one, the leadership of the ruling party, the Muslim League, did not constitute righteous leadership (*ṣāliḥ qiyādat*); two, the country's initial constitution was secular. Accordingly, Mawdudi shunned participation in electoral politics in a secular nation as forbidden (Zaman 2015, pp. 412–13). Thereafter, he devoted all his efforts in transforming the Pakistani nation-state into his authentic Islamic state. The nature of Mawdudi's problem thus shifted from a purely ideological articulation opposing the absolute Other of secular nationalism toward protecting the collective identity of the Muslim community to addressing the power politics of statecraft (e.g., drafting a constitution, legislation, elections, and domestic and war policy) opposing the absolute Other of popular sovereignty toward forging the Islamic identity of the nation-state. If the previous idol to guard against was the Western secular idea of the nation, the new idol were the Muslim people claiming sovereignty.

Sovereignty (*ḥākimiyyah*) later became Mawdudi's central political problematic in regards to statecraft, and his innovative interpretation of sovereignty contextualized it as a modern political concept. Mawdudi and his Islamic Party's old purist rhetoric of Islamic authenticity was now couched in terms of sovereignty: absolute sovereignty belongs to God the Law-giver such that vesting sovereignty in any other entity amounted to idolatry (*shirk*). In Metcalf's rendering, "to organize social and political life by other principles would be 'infidelity', exactly as worship of other than Allah would be infidelity" (Metcalf 2007, p. 288). The state of Pakistan, demanded Mawdudi, must be rooted in the principle of divine sovereignty and align all its legislation according to the dictates of this principle.²⁹ Due partly to his party's efforts the Objectives Resolution was adopted by the Constituent Assembly in 1949 which, among other things, declared sovereignty as God's prerogative. As Mawdudi saw it, this made his party's direct participation in electoral politics religiously permissible. In this way, as far as Mawdudi was concerned, the first significant milestone toward the Islamization of Pakistan's secular nationalism was successfully achieved.

5. Conclusions

From the vantage point of modern and colonial knowledge, to equate secular nationalism with idolatry appears a gross exaggeration of diehard fundamentalists. However, in the perspective of Greenfeld's psychological reading of nationalism as a secular ideology, the Muslim charge of nation as a neo-idol no longer seems far-fetched. As ideologies of order, both nationalism and religion mimic each other's functions as they are vested with grand meanings, define values and purposes, protect their interests, proselytize, command loyalty, and most importantly, shape identities. Given that Islam has shaped Muslim identities for fourteen centuries, the rise of nationalism in the midst of Muslim communities was bound to be resisted by Muslims like Iqbal and Mawdudi who discerned its ideological functions. Discerned as a secular ideology, nationalism then appears as a rival to Islam, challenging its transcendental vision and competing for Muslims' loyalty. If egalitarianism constitutes nationalism's great appeal to the masses, Islam's deep commitment to spiritual equality of all humans makes nationalism's offer redundant. Muslims cognizant of and satisfied with the dignity conferred upon them by their religion will find no great appeal in national dignity. However, despite their rejection of secular nationalism, it must be noted that Iqbal and Mawdudi's interpretation of Islam was influenced by modernity, and more so for Iqbal than for Mawdudi. Among other things, they

²⁹ Mawdudi's formulation of the problem of sovereignty has been a point of great controversy, discussion, and criticism. One abiding criticism is that Mawdudi conflates the pre-modern Muslim understandings of sovereignty and state with the modern, Western manifestations, turning the authenticity of Mawdudi's formulation suspect; whereas, in contrast, the Muslim tradition displays a spectrum of meaning of sovereignty: judgment, power, authority, worship. For an appraisal of Mawdudi's idea of sovereignty in relation to pre-modern understanding of the Muslim tradition, see (Zaman 2015). Another notable criticism charges that Mawdudi's anxiety over eradicating popular sovereignty and his obsession with enforcing divine sovereignty denied the populace the right to legislate, that is, engage in politics; hence, "Mawdudi's conception of theocracy is anti-political in nature" (Devji 2013).

were willing to adapt the structure of the modern state, espouse limited democracy, acknowledge the benefits of modern science, and utilize modern technology. But what they weren't willing to do was to surrender their Islamic identity as they understood it. Modernity had to accommodate itself within the ken of their theology, and not the other way around.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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