Introduction to Muhammad Iqbal's *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*

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Muhammad Iqbal's *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* emerged out of intellectual developments in both India and the wider Islamic world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Given the legacies of Islamic civilization and polities in India, these two arenas were often linked and were reinforced by the varied and widespread impact of European colonialism. When Iqbal wrote, a substantial proportion of the world's Muslim population lived under British colonial rule.[1] With the European penetration of the Near East from the late nineteenth century onwards, the defence of Islam and its recasting as a religious faith became central to Arabic thought.[2] Iqbal's *Reconstruction* was part of this ongoing narrative of redefining Islam in response to colonialism. It followed on from the work of self-consciously 'modernizing' figures from outside and within India such as Jamal al-din Afghani (1839–97) and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98) amongst others.[3] The increasing religious communalization of public and intellectual life in colonial India was also a distinguishing feature in the era in which Iqbal lived. Reconstructions of both Islam and Hinduism were key features of Indian cultural life in this period, and Indians rethought the basic categories of their religious systems and practices.[4] The ferment in Indian intellectual life was not limited to those who sought to recast the category of religion alone; Indian liberals appropriated and recast Western liberalism on their own terms and, in so doing, sometimes anticipated later intellectual developments in European liberalism itself.[5] Thus, Iqbal's *Reconstruction* was also part of the vibrant intellectual landscape in South Asia during the colonial

period, in which an engagement with Western bodies of thought in a wide range of areas, including religious thought within distinctive traditions and narratives of civilization, was de rigueur.

The key word 'Reconstruction' in the title has connotations of rebuilding and renewing, using a mixture of pre-existing and new materials. For Iqbal this project consists of balancing the tasks of reform and revision with the forces of conservatism so as not to reject the past entirely.[6] The word 'reconstruction' therefore calls attention to the complexity of the project undertaken in the text, and in any project to rethink the foundations of religious thought in relation to modernity and its consequences. Here the title of the last lecture, "Is Religion Possible?," is significant in that it refers to religion in general rather than Islam in particular. While Iqbal's major preoccupation was with Islam, at times he sought to outline how other religions shared its predicament in the modern world. Islam becomes an acute manifestation of the problems religions as a whole face in relation to modernity's processes of secularization and disenchantment and its 'scientism', that is, "science's belief in itself [and] the conviction that we can no longer understand science as one form of possible knowledge, but rather must identify knowledge with science."[7] In the *Reconstruction*, Iqbal discusses how Islam and Christianity faced analogous problems in their early histories and suggests that Islam was passing through a period similar to "that of the Protestant revolution in Europe." For him, this 'revolution' and its outcome was an instructive lesson.[8] The decline of organized Christianity in the modern world was a cautionary tale for Iqbal, one that partly reinforced his own sense of the urgent need to reconstruct Islam.[9] In addition, European colonialism brought the disruptive effects of modernity to the Indian subcontinent and areas of the Middle East in all their intensity and complexity within a short span of time.[10] For this reason, colonialism deepened the problematic nature of Islam's and Hinduism's relationships with modernity and further complicated their tasks of religious reconstruction.

Cosmopolitanism

A striking feature of *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* is the depth of its cosmopolitanism, as expressed, for example, in the wide range of its references to texts and thinkers from across different traditions and epochs. In part, this intellectual cos-

mopolitanism is a consequence of British colonialism itself, which brought together diverse areas and regions in ways that enabled not just the circulation of goods and commodities but also texts and ideas in multiple languages and translations. This circulation of ideas and texts created what Kris Manjapra and Sugata Bose have called "cosmopolitan thought zones" for Indian thinkers who engaged with the works of writers and thinkers from all over the world.[11] Iqbal's work bears the imprint of this cosmopolitanism. It weaves together references to the Qur'ān and approximately forty-nine writers (both Muslims and European), blending them together in relation to key philosophical problems and themes.[12] He also draws parallels between the intellectual situations of Muslim and Western thinkers, for example, by suggesting similarities between al-Ghazali and Kant in terms of their "apostolic" missions.[13]

Thus, Iqbal's *Reconstruction* emerges from the cosmopolitan thought zones and global conversations that underpinned Indian intellectual life as a style and way of thinking in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In order to put thinkers in different traditions in dialogue with each other, Iqbal de-temporalizes the history of thought, presenting these thinkers as if they were contemporaries who discuss the same philosophical and metaphysical questions. In this way, the "pursuit of conversations across lines of difference" (as Manjapra puts it) becomes central to the way the book positions Muslim religious thought in its encounters with Europe.[14] By de-temporalizing the history of the engagement between Islam and European thought, Iqbal presents the encounter as a conversation among intellectual equals, lifting it above the hierarchies of power created by European colonialism. In this way, the style and methodology of the book creates a kind of anti-colonial cosmopolitanism in which intellectual self-assertion, grounded in learned reading, is key.[15] However, this sometimes means that the text reads as if cosmopolitan eclecticism were an end in its own right. The display of wide reading, the suggestion of linkages, or what Iqbal calls "unsuspected mutual harmonies,"[16] and the dense, convoluted texture of the book exceeds the imperatives of argumentation. At times the *Reconstruction* is in danger of being overwhelmed by irresolution, as it weaves together fragments of texts in relation to a wider set of concerns that are sometimes obscured by the richness of its own cosmopolitanism.[17]

The cosmopolitan thought zones of Indian intellectuals extended beyond the Britain-India axis created by empire. A number of influential Indians travelled, worked, and studied in the continent of Europe, especially in Germany, and Iqbal was one of them.[18] The *Reconstruction* makes substantial reference to German thinkers, including Kant, Hegel, Goethe, and Schopenhauer, as well as French thinkers like Bergson and Descartes. The experience and motifs of travel are central to Iqbal's work, as well as to the texts of a number of major nationalist thinkers in India. The *Reconstruction* reflects something of the qualities of a travelling identity and the restless but creative mobility that characterized the outlook of many Indian writers and thinkers during the colonial period.[19]

Indian intellectual life in the colonial period was generated out of a set of institutions revolving around newspapers, law courts, public meetings, and learned societies. This gave rise to a range of speaking styles, debating techniques, and models of rhetorical persuasion, ranging from legal and theological disputation to political polemic.[20] Iqbal was a major poet in both Urdu and Persian and also a trained lawyer. The first edition of the *Reconstruction*, entitled *Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930), was based on a series of lectures he gave in India at Madras, Hyderabad, and Aligarh at the invitation of the Madras Muslim Association. The second edition (1934), which is the text used here, added a seventh lecture called "Is Religion Possible?" This additional lecture was delivered by Iqbal to the Aristotelian Society in London in December 1932. The book retains the style of exposition appropriate to a lecture. It reads like notes designed for oral delivery rather than a finished text. Iqbal's poetry shows a strong command of the form of the rhyming couplet, and his distinctive voice emerges from the interplay between the tightness of that form and the innovative nature of his subject matter.[21] In the *Reconstruction* the absence of this discipline of writing in couplets with carefully measured meters produces a more fluid, open-ended work in English. Instead of a polished aesthetic artifice, we have a text in progress.[22] The open question in the heading of the final lecture, "Is Religion Possible?," is therefore appropriate for a project that by its very nature cannot be concluded. This is also in keeping with Iqbal's contention that there is no finality in Muslim law and that the founders of Islamic law never claimed "finality for their

reasonings and interpretations."[23] In its form and style the *Reconstruction* dramatizes what Iqbal calls the "principle of movement in the structure of Islam," a principle that he attempts to recover as the basis of his reconstruction of Islamic thought, not least in his stress on the "dynamic outlook" of the Qur'ān.[24]

Iqbal's *Reconstruction* also draws on and continues earlier traditions of cosmopolitanism that pre-dated British colonialism. This parallels re-enactments of other forms of vernacular cosmopolitanism by thinkers and writers in the Indian subcontinent, such as Nehru.[25] In Iqbal's case, this earlier cosmopolitanism consisted of the long history of interaction between Islamic philosophy and science and Greek thought, which began in earnest with the 'Abbāsid Caliphate in the early ninth century.[26] As we have seen, the final lecture in the *Reconstruction* was based on a talk he gave to the Aristotelian Society in London. In his work as a whole, Iqbal reflects on this history as he explores and reconstructs relationships between Islam and the West. In particular, he focuses on the impact that Neoplatonism had on the development of Islamic mysticism, which he argued played a role in the decline of Islamic civilization.[27] In the *Reconstruction*, Iqbal is keen to draw attention to Islamic Hellenism in order to rebut Eurocentric notions of history. He stresses the creativity of Islam's engagement with Greek thought, showing how Muslims added to and transformed Hellenistic learning. In his earlier English work, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (1907), he argued that this partly stemmed from the very nature of that engagement, which took place through processes of translation. Because "careless translators" of Greek philosophy introduced "a hopeless mass of absurdities" in the texts, the commentaries on Greek philosophy by thinkers such as Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and others became "an effort at discovery, not exposition. . . . They had largely to rethink the Philosophies of Aristotle and Plato."[28] A similar point has been made by contemporary scholars, who characterize the translation activity that brought together Islam and Greece as a consciously creative act,[29] rather than (to use Iqbal's words) an act of "servile imitation."[30] Translation both in the sense of re-creating texts by converting them from one language to another, and of merging different conceptual languages and cultures into each other, was a key intellectual strategy of Indian thinkers and writers in the colonial period, as well as of Muslim thinkers in the wider Islamic world.[31]

Reconstruction relies on works in translation and translates passages from other texts as well.[32] More broadly, the *Reconstruction* is an act of translation as the discovery and creative rethinking of modern European thought within a re-defined Islamic framework. Its approach dramatizes and continues the earlier cosmopolitanism of Islamic Hellenism as an earlier episode in the interaction between the evolving categories of Islam and Europe.

Religion and Science

Iqbal's engagement with Islamic Hellenism as an earlier form of Muslim cosmopolitanism has another more critical dimension to it, which is relevant to the way the book deals with the relationship between science and religion. While making an analogy between the Qur'ān and Plato's *Republic*, Iqbal argues that the intellectual revolt against Greek thought by some Muslim thinkers, especially against the speculative nature of Aristotelian logic, paved the way for the experimental and empirical attitudes that underlay the development of modern science.[33] He further argues that "a careful study of the Qur'ān and the various schools of scholastic theology that arose under the inspiration of Greek thought disclose the remarkable fact that while Greek philosophy very much broadened the outlook of Muslim thinkers, it, on the whole, obscured their vision of the Qur'ān." Because they read the Qur'ān "in the light of Greek thought," it took earlier Muslim interpreters of the text "over two hundred years to perceive—though not quite clearly—that the spirit of the Qur'ān was essentially anti-classical."[34] The *Reconstruction* is therefore also a critical intervention in Islamic Hellenism, seeking to re-interpret the Qur'ān as compatible with science, thereby continuing to secure Islam against one of the effects of Hellenism in the past in order to modernize Islam in the present.

With regard to science, the *Reconstruction* is an amalgam of different narratives. One strand of the text, as mentioned, views the Qur'ān as "anti-classical," exemplifying a "general empirical attitude" towards Nature and the "actual" and "concrete" which made its followers "the founders of modern science." For Iqbal, Muhammad stood between the ancient and the modern world, with the source of his revelation belonging to the former but the spirit to the latter.[35] Another strand in the *Reconstruction* argues that while in the past Sufism did "good work in shaping and directing the evo-

lution of religious experience in Islam," its current representatives are not capable of "receiving any fresh inspiration from modern thought and experience."[36] The *Reconstruction* is partly an attempt to provide this inspiration, and in doing so, it selectively appropriates material from Sufism for its own project.

Thirdly, the *Reconstruction* tries to show that a "scientific form of religious knowledge" is possible, and that religious experience and faith have a cognitive value and content.[37] It sees religion (and not Islam alone) and science as compatible, arguing that both "may discover hitherto unsuspected mutual harmonies" in the wake of recent developments in physics. In Iqbal's view these undermined "materialism"; the foundations of Newtonian physics could now be criticized, and "the empirical attitude which appeared to necessitate scientific materialism has finally ended in a revolt against matter," thereby opening up the possibility of the validity of religion's understanding of reality and its "spirituality."[38] For Iqbal, humanity is in need of "a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis."[39] In his view, a reconstructed Islam and its spirituality, redefined in relation to the claims of science, can meet those needs.

However, Iqbal does not explicitly define what "spiritual" means, and in exploring the relationship between science and religion his narratives are intricate. There is no structured argument addressing the question of religion and science; instead, Iqbal makes evocative analogies such as seeing prayer as "a necessary complement to the intellectual activity of the observer of Nature," and he recasts "the scientific observer of Nature [as] a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer."[40] Similes and analogies of this kind remind us that Iqbal was primarily a poet. The first page of the *Reconstruction* outlines the key existential and epistemological questions that he believes religion, philosophy, and "higher poetry" explore. While Iqbal draws distinctions between these three areas of intellectual endeavor, he himself combines all three in different ways and with varying degrees of success in his oeuvre. His poetry might be described as philosophically reflective verse that aims to reconstitute Islam, while the *Reconstruction* is less a scholarly monograph or a systematic treatise, than a self-consciously visionary book that is stylistically distinc-

tive, even idiosyncratic. Moreover, Iqbal refers to ideas coming to thinkers "like a poetic inspiration," and he argues that the Qur'ān regards inspiration "as a universal property of life"; the growth of plants, the evolution of animals, and humans "receiving light from the inner depths of life, are all cases of inspiration."[41] As we have seen, he thinks that Sufism requires "fresh inspiration," and the *Reconstruction* aims to provide this. Notions of poetic inspiration, then, inflect the presentation of ideas in the book as well as the content of those ideas. They also reinforce the eclecticism of the book, by mixing different modes of writing and thinking in ways that make ideas like "inspiration" cut across the distinctions between them.

It is for the reader to decide whether Iqbal is successful or not in reconciling religion and Islam with modern science. Inevitably, given the difficulty of the task, this aspect of *Reconstruction* is complex.[42] In attempting to reconcile the two, Iqbal's overall aim is to bring Islam and Europe together in a global narrative of intellectual endeavor. As he puts it, "European culture, on its intellectual side, is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam."[43] The *Reconstruction* tries to validate earlier Islamic thought with and through modern European philosophy and science. Its aim is to recover a repressed narrative of Islam's contribution to a progressive modernity, now presented by Europe as uniquely European as well as unprecedented. In doing so, its methodology is to treat an idea as a "complex whole," whose "inner wealth" unfolds over time; an idea "reveals the possibilities of its application with advancing experience, and sometimes it takes more than one generation of thinkers before these possibilities are exhausted."[44] In Iqbal's intellectual history of Islam and its relation to the West, there are no fully formed ideas but only anticipations of ideas that are in continual process of being re-thought. For example, he refers to how the "idea of degrees of Reality" appears in the writings of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi Maqtul, how this is "worked out on a much larger scale in Hegel," and then "more recently" in Haldane's *Reign of Relativity*.[45] So, too, Ibn Khaldun is seen as a forerunner of Bergson and as anticipating the "modern hypothesis of subliminal selves."[46]

Thus, Iqbal's history of Islamic thought in relation to the West centres on relationships of foresight, hindsight, and anticipation.

Iqbal also strives for a mutual illumination between ideas formulated in the different contexts of Islam and Europe. Earlier bodies of thought are deployed to illuminate and resolve aporias in the work of later thinkers, as when he suggests that Nietzsche's "failure was mainly due to his intellectual progenitors such as Schopenhauer, Darwin, and Lange whose influence completely blinded him to the real significance of his vision." Iqbal suggests that Nietzsche's "mental history is not without a parallel in the history of Eastern Sufism," and by placing him in this history, he tries to provide a new perspective on his "failure" and the difficulties of his thinking.[47] Here anticipation becomes a form of appropriation and refashioning that aims to release a thinker's work from the constraints of the context in which he is usually placed.

Iqbal's concern to connect Islamic civilization with modern science also emerges from the way in which, in one historian's words, "the disparagement of the Muslim past by Europeans and Hindus contributed significantly to the intellectual alienation of Muslims in the later nineteenth century."[48] Another historian has stressed how a powerful "Orientalist triptych contrasting the achievements of ancient Hindu civilisation with the destruction and stagnation of the Muslim Middle Ages and the enlightened rule and scientific progress of the colonial modern age," was put in place in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century India.[49] This narrative is evident even in otherwise rigorous works like B. Prashad's edited volume, *The Progress of Science in India during the Past Twenty-Five Years*, published four years after the *Reconstruction*. This text reflects the increasing confidence of the Indian scientific community in the subcontinent from the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as its growing recognition abroad, for example, with C. V. Raman's Nobel Prize for Physics in 1930.[50] However, in its introductory section, "Scientific Work Up to the End of the Nineteenth Century," the subsection on "Scientific Work in Ancient India" is immediately followed by another section on "Development of Scientific Work in the 18th and 19th Centuries," without any reference to the Muslim period. In the introduction, the author cites from the works of Orientalists on science in ancient India and refers to "to the unsettled state of affairs and lack of security in the country resulting from repeated foreign invasions and constant changes in government" in the twelfth century that led to the de-

cline of science in the subcontinent. The revival of science in the last two centuries is attributed to scientific and learned societies and scientific officers in the various services and survey departments of the colonial state.[51]

Iqbal's *Reconstruction*, like Sayyid Ahmed Khan's writings before him, is a riposte to this powerfully marginalizing narrative that became increasingly central to the historical consciousness of a significant part of the Indian intellectual and learned community during the colonial period. It also parallels and echoes the rise of conceptions of 'Hindu science' at the time, in which ancient Hindu thought is presented as prefiguring the discoveries of contemporary science and as anticipating modern Western thought.[52] It is, however, in contrast to Gandhi's critique of science as playing a crucial role in an oppressive colonial modernity, which was especially influential in the 1920s and 1930s.[53] In spite of the importance of conceptions of science and technology (such as railways and the telegraph) in the legitimization and practices of colonial rule and in colonial self-perceptions,[54] the *Reconstruction* eschews any critique of both in relation to processes of colonialism in the subcontinent. It also avoids any engagement with Western medicine, which was so influential in underpinning colonial representations of and interventions in the subcontinent.[55] Just as Iqbal distances himself from the folk practices of Sufism, so too he shows no interest in the syncretism of popular indigenous sciences such as the unani and ayurvedic medical systems.[56] The *Reconstruction* does not engage with technological developments as such, or with the practical importance of science and technology. Its overall emphasis is on the theoretical nature of physics, and its impact on understandings of matter, space, and time, as well as larger themes such as evolution. It attempts to show how both were prefigured by earlier Islamic thought, for example in the case of physics by Ash'arite atomism,[57] and how they might be reconciled with spiritual views of the world. The overall tenor, content, and scope of the *Reconstruction* is therefore different from the concrete details of Prashad's *The Progress of Science*, which although nationalist in tone (especially in its references to ancient Indian learning in the introduction and in a few of the other chapters) covers developments in the fields of mathematical research, chemical research, geology and geography, agricultural science, veterinary research, dairy husbandry, archaeology,

anthropology, psychology, zoology, forestry, engineering, physiology, medical research, physics, and botany in India. The chapter on physics in Prashad is equally detailed and specific. Prashad's edited volume grounds specific detail in the territorialization of a nascent nation-state, and its style is very much that of controlled prose. This is in striking contrast to the transnational conception of Islam as a world civilization in Iqbal's *Reconstruction* and its more speculative thrust expressed in a fluid and at times fragmented and improvisational style.

The Category of Islam in Iqbal's Work

So far I have considered aspects of the process of 'reconstruction' in Iqbal's work. The other key term in Iqbal's text is 'Islam', and this is also multifaceted and intertwines multiple narratives.

One of the prominent strands in the *Reconstruction* is the focus on selfhood, or what Iqbal in his poetry called *khudī*. His major Persian poem, the *Jāved Nāmâ*, which appeared in 1932 two years before the *Reconstruction*, dramatized this notion of selfhood, and Iqbal concludes the latter with a long citation on individual selfhood from the poem. Scholars have commented on the transgressive nature of Iqbal's notion of khudī.[58] Throughout the *Reconstruction*, Iqbal uses the term "ego" to render this Persian term. The kernel of his conception of selfhood is the contention that as human selves approach God, rather than losing their individuality (which is what is imagined to happen under some concepts of *fanā* in Sufism, when the individual self merges with the divine), they become more strongly individuated. Iqbal concludes the *Reconstruction* by asserting that "the end of the ego's quest is not emancipation from the limitations of individuality; it is, on the other hand, a more precise definition of it."[59] Reinterpreting the Qur'ān, Iqbal argues that "it is with the irreplaceable singleness of his individuality that the finite ego will approach the infinite ego to see for himself the consequences of his past action and to judge the possibilities of his future . . . whatever may be the final fate of man it does not mean the loss of individuality."[60] Iqbal here applies his master language of individual selfhood to God, who is also described as an "ego,"[61] so that the transgressive charge of the word tudī is in play in his conception of God as well. Both God and human individuals are conceived of in the same terms; the difference between them lies

in the degrees of selfhood they possess. At times there is a slippage between selfhood and God as an ultimate or absolute self, as when he reflects on the properties of selfhood and its "directive energy" in general, by reinterpreting a verse from the Qur'ān that represents God's "creative activity."[62] Iqbal reads the Qur'ān in innovative ways to support his notion of selfhood. He reinterprets 33:72, concerning the burden of trust borne by man, as referring to "the trust of personality" and the "acceptance of selfhood," rather than signifying individual moral responsibility and accountability alone.[63] He also reinterprets 2:36, 7:24, and 20:123 in the Qur'ān in terms of "the emergence and multiplication of individualities, each fixing its gaze on the revelation of its own possibilities and seeking its own dominion."[64]

Iqbal's notion of khudī sometimes amounts to a form of self-divinization, in which there is a relationship of ontological equality between God and the individual human self, both of which are represented in the language of "ego-hood." The human self is variously described as being God's "co-worker," a free personal agent who "shares in the life and freedom of the Ultimate Ego," and an entity that is "consciously participating in the creative life of his Maker."[65] Some commentators have seen Iqbal's concept of God as marking a break from the conception of God as an infinite deity in the Qur'ān, but not all aspects of the concept of God in the Qur'ān are self-evident, as the history of theological disquisition in Islam shows.[66] These elements of self-divinization can be seen to move the Sufi idea of "insān-e kāmil," or "the Perfect Man," into a very different philosophical direction, one focused on the inerasable reality of the individual human self rather than its illusory nature in the face of the Divinity who alone exists.[67] Iqbal also refers to the account of the Prophet Muhammad's ascension, or *mi'rāj*, as referred to in the Qur'ān 81:19–25 and 53:1–21, according to which he stood in the presence of God without being annihilated. For Iqbal this is an instructive emblem of selfhood, and he discusses the significance of this in the *Reconstruction* in terms of the differences between prophets and mystics.[68] It is also worth noting that the *Jāved Nāmâ* is partly modelled on the account of the Prophet Muhammad's ascension or mi'rāj, alongside Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

However, Iqbal's relationship to Sufism was complex. Alongside critically engaging with Sufi notions of fanā, the *Reconstruction*

also argues that "mysticism has . . . revealed fresh regions of the self," which "modern psychology" would benefit from studying, and for which it as yet has no framework of analysis. As a result, psychology has "not yet touched the outer fringe of the subject," as opposed to Sufi narratives, which "give us at least some idea of a whole universe of inner experience."[69] In Iqbal's view, religious experience gives us "a clue to the ultimate nature of the ego" and uncovers the "inmost individuality of men" [sic]; for him "the climax of religious life . . . is the discovery of the ego as an individual deeper than his conceptually describable habitual self."[70] Iqbal's notion of selfhood, then, is grounded in a complex interaction with Sufi notions of selfhood, breaking from some aspects of these notions, while calling attention to their valuable insights into inner experience and subjectivity. His selective appropriation of Sufi narratives alongside his inversions and re-working of Sufism's key tropes, images, and themes, was part of the productive interplay between continuity and discontinuity in his poetry and in his work as a whole.[71]

Thus, for Iqbal the reconstruction of Islam partly involves the reconstruction of an individuated selfhood within a reinterpreted Islamic framework, in order to ground a modernizing anti-colonial self-affirmation. Such a self embedded in this project is also a riposte to Spengler's view in *The Decline of the West* (1918–23) that (in Iqbal's words) "Islam amounts to a complete negation of the ego" and that it is "thoroughly 'Magian' in spirit and character."[72] Iqbal saw his "main purpose" in the *Reconstruction* "to secure a vision of the spirit of Islam as emancipated from these Magian overlayings which . . . have misled Spengler." Key here for Iqbal is "the way in which the 'I', as a free centre of experience, has found expression in the religious life of Islam,"[73] hence the importance of selfhood to his project, as well as the need to reconstruct aspects of that religious life of the past for a contemporary, Islamicized self.

In Iqbal's work the relationship of self to group identity, and of self to selflessness, is complex and in some interpretations unresolved, perhaps necessarily so.[74] Regardless of this, in the *Reconstruction* Islam is also recast as a way of overcoming the opposition between "the subject and the object, the mathematical without and the biological within." It affirms an individuated "spiritual self"

and the "world of matter," the former in terms of a reconstructed religious selfhood, and the latter in terms of its focus on the empirical, observable, and "actual."[75] Iqbal also sees Islam as "a social experiment," which is "non-territorial in character." Its aim, he argues, is to "furnish a model for the final combination of humanity by drawing its adherents from a variety of mutually repellent races, and then transforming this atomic aggregate into a people possessing a self-consciousness of their own."[76] This particular narrative of Islam echoes Iqbal's view of it as a process of "deracialisation," which he discusses elsewhere, and also as a transnational entity, which, as he puts it in the *Reconstruction*, is "neither Nationalism nor Imperialism but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries and racial distinctions for facility of reference only, and not for restricting the social horizon of its members."[77] This transnationalism is particularly evident in contrast to Iqbal's earlier English prose work, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (1907), with its emphasis on Persia alone. The *Reconstruction*, by contrast, treats religious thought in Islam as uninflected by the geographical or cultural spaces in which it originated and lifts it above distortion by economic factors and linguistic and ethnic conflict. It approaches and reconstructs Islam primarily as a civilizational deterritorialized space, and as such, it echoes the strong pan-Islamist (and at times anti-national) dimension in his major poetry.

Another significant narrative in the *Reconstruction* is that of Islamic law. Referring to the impact of the destruction of Baghdad in the thirteenth century on the Islamic world, he argues that in order to prevent the disintegration of the social order, the 'ulema "focused all their efforts on the one point of preserving a uniform social life for the people by a jealous exclusion of all innovations in the law of Shari'a as expounded by the early doctors of Islam." The problem with this, though, was that "in an over-organized society the individual is altogether crushed out of existence." For Iqbal, the only way to counter the decline of "a people" is to recover the category of the individual, or what he calls, in an evocative phrase, "self-concentrated individuals."[78] Hence his focus on selfhood in his work as a whole. This is accompanied by a narrative of *ijtihād* as "the principle of movement in the structure of Islam."[79] In Lecture VI, he speculates on the historical causes that "reduced the Law of Islam practically to a state of immobility" (he includes as a fac-

tor here the influence of ascetic Sufism), and endorses the Turkish Grand National Assembly's abolition of the Caliphate/Khilafat, both as an exercise in ijtihād and as grounded in one historical strand of Islamic political thought. In his attempt to strike a balance between conservatism and innovation, he argues that the "claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to reinterpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life is . . . perfectly justified," while also affirming the need for "*healthy* conservative criticism [to] serve at least as a check on the rapid movement of liberalism in the world of Islam."[80] To this end, he suggests the need for a Muslim legislative assembly that combines both members of the ʿulema and those who are not formally trained as such, but are conversant with "modern jurisprudence."[81] For Iqbal, Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s and the abolition of the Khilafat/Caliphate point to how the "renaissance of Islam is a fact," and to the necessity of how "we [presumably referring to himself and his Indian audience] too one day, like the Turks, will have to re-evaluate our intellectual inheritance."[82] An important part of any such re-evaluation was to reconstruct Islam as a "social experiment" in "deracialisation" and as "uniting religion and state, ethics and politics, in a single revelation much in the same way as Plato does in his *Republic*"[83]—the reference to Plato here once again showing how Iqbal intertwines multiple narratives to produce his modernist Islam.

Conclusion

Iqbal's *Reconstruction* remains a key reference point and resource for those who reflect on the place of Islam in the modern world. Ali Allawi, for example, describes it as "the first modern attempt by a committed Muslim to rediscover the vitality of Islam in the light of the evolution of Western philosophical thought and of the realities of the new, West-dominated world."[84] I have suggested elsewhere that there are multiple Wests in Iqbal's work, ranging from pre-modern Christendom to the site of secular modernity, the seat of imperial powers and the place of modern science, as well as the heir of a Hellenistic heritage shared with Islam. The category of Islam in the *Reconstruction* is also multifaceted. In its reconstructed form it signifies (amongst other things): a social experiment in deracialisation and transnationalism with a concomi-

tant legal project in political spirituality; a formative contribution to the inception of modern science; a key narrative (repressed by others) in the development of modernity; a site for the reconstruction of individuated selfhood using religious and mystical experiences of the past; a testing ground for the future of religion in the modern world especially in relation to the truth claims of science; a response to the opposition between subject and object; and a religiously inflected postcolonialism.

This list is by no means exhaustive and the fact that the reader might supplement it is testimony to the open-ended nature of the category of Islam in the book. The fluidity and capaciousness of that category, while dramatizing what Iqbal calls the "elasticity of Islamic thought," the "ceaseless activity of our early thinkers," and its "assimilative spirit," which he re-enacts in the present,[85] also creates its own problems, insofar as 'Islam' can lose its specificity and efficacy by being co-extensive with a range of meanings (although if Iqbal were to present a picture of Islam as a core of clearly defined beliefs, he would be dismissed out of hand as 'fundamentalist'). However, while in Iqbal's work the boundaries between the West and Islam can sometimes be porous, it is not the case, as in the work of some thinkers such as Muhammad 'Abduh, that Islam becomes identical with the dominant ideas of modern Europe.[86] Instead, the style and texture of the text, with its intertwined narratives, its confluence of textual fragments from a variety of currents of thought, and its avoidance (and even celebration of) a lack of textual 'wholeness', calls attention to the problems of relating Islam to the West. This stylistic distinctiveness also foregrounds the difficulties of what Iqbal calls the "immense" task to "rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past."[87] Moreover, the weaving together of fragments and the text's creative irresolution articulates the complex relationship between reconstruction and disintegration. Iqbal opens up spaces for rethinking by dismantling and reconstituting Islam in a non-systemic way. The rubble of past tradition (in part created by Iqbal himself) is selectively appropriated to refashion Islam in the age of modernity. The text's distinctive style and aesthetic prompt a particular kind of reading experience; piecing the text together out of its fragments, while identifying, teasing out, and disentangling its narratives, the reader simultaneously unifies and divides the

text. In doing so, s/he participates in the interplay between reconstruction and disintegration that Iqbal dramatizes and becomes a co-worker in his project.

Notes

1. Francis Robinson, "The British Empire and the Muslim World," in *The Twentieth Century*, ed. Judith Brown and Wm. Roger Louis, vol. 4 of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 398.

2. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1983), 103–4, 112–13.

3. Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857–1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

4. Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

5. C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

6. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (1934; repr., Lahore, India: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1999), 132.

7. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Heinemann, 1972), 4.

8. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 129.

9. Javed Majeed, *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (London, New York, and New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), 66, 77, 96–97, 146–47.

10. For which, see Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 5; Ranabir Samaddar, *Emergence of the Political Subject* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2010), 12.

11. Kris Manjapra and Sugata Bose, eds., *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 2010).

12. For telling examples, see Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 78–80.

13. Ibid., 4.

14. Kris Manjapra, "Introduction" to Manjapra and Bose, *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones*, 1.

15. This strategy of displaying one's reading for the purposes of creating an authoritative persona in the public sphere is also evident in the texts of such major figures as Gandhi and Nehru.

16. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, xxii.

17. Majeed, *Iqbal*, 56–57.

18. Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Lahore, India: Iqbal Academy, 1989), 37–39.

19. Majeed, *Iqbal*, chap. 5; Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity: Nehru, Gandhi and Iqbal* (Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 150–60.

20. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 32, 134–36; Samaddar, *Emergence of the Political Subject*, 14–16.

21. Majeed, *Iqbal*, 1–39.

22. Although Iqbal's poetry is also process driven; see ibid.

23. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 134.

24. Ibid., xxi, 132, chap. 6.

25. Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity*, chap. 4.

26. For useful accounts, see Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, trans. Emile and Jenny Marmorstein (London: R. K. Paul, 1975); Majid Fakhry, *Philosophy, Dogma and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam* (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 1994); Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

27. For a detailed exposition of Iqbal's Islamic Hellenism, see Majeed, *Iqbal*, chap. 7.

28. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (1907; repr., Lahore, India: Bazm-e Iqbal, n.d.), 22–23.

29. Rosenthal, *Classical Heritage in Islam*, 1–23.

30. Iqbal, *Metaphysics in Persia*, 23.

31. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, and Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, both discuss this in some detail. See also Javed Majeed, "Nature, Hyperbole, and the Colonial State: Some Muslim Appropriations of European Modernity in Late Nineteenth Century Urdu Literature," in *Islam and Modernity*, ed. John Cooper et al. (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998).

32. For details, see M. Saeed Sheikh, "Introduction" to Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore, India: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1999), vi–vii, xv–xvi.

33. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 64, 102–3, 106, 113. As examples, Iqbal refers to works on optics, psychology, logic, and mathematics. For the analogy between Plato and the Qur'ān, see page 132 where he refers to how the latter "considers it necessary to unite religion and state, ethics and politics in a single revelation much in the same way as Plato does in the *Republic*."

34. Ibid., 3.

35. Ibid., 3, 8, 11, 100–101, 103–4, 106–7.

36. Ibid., xxi.

37. Ibid. This narrative is pursued on xxi, 1, 21, 14–18, 149–50. See also 143–44, on "higher religion" as based on experience and as a "genuine effort to clarify human consciousness."

38. Ibid., xxii, 26–28, 33–34.

39. Ibid., 142.

40. Ibid., 72–73.

41. Ibid., 91, 100.

42. Majeed, *Iqbal*, chap. 6.

43. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 6.

44. Ibid., 63.

45. Ibid., 57.

46. Ibid., 112–13, 14.

47. Ibid., 154–55.

48. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 141.

49. David Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

50. For these developments, see ibid., 153–62.

51. B. Prashad, "Introduction" to B. Prashad, ed., *The Progress of Science in India During the Past Twenty-five Years* (Calcutta: Indian Science Congress Association, 1938).

52. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 255–57, 278; Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine*, 169–76.

53. Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine*, 189–90. For an early statement of Gandhi's critique, see M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony Parel (1909; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Gandhi developed the themes in *Hind Swaraj* in his later work, as well as in his *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927–29).

54. Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine*, chap. 4.

55. Ibid., chap. 3.

56. For the popularity of these systems in colonial India, see ibid., 176–85.

57. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 54–57.

58. Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, 42–44; Majeed, *Iqbal*, 24–29.

59. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 156–57.

60. Ibid., 92–94.

61. Ibid., 45, 47–9, 50–51, 57–58, 61–62, 75, 85, 86–87.

62. Ibid., 82.

63. Ibid., 70.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 10, 86–87, 58.

66. M. S. Raschid, *Iqbal's Concept of God* (London: R. K. Paul, 1981), 59–60, 62.

67. Majeed, *Iqbal*, 31–32.

68. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 99.

69. Ibid., 72, 77, 152.

70. Ibid., 145.

71. For a detailed exposition, see Majeed, *Iqbal*, passim.

72. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 87, 114.

73. Ibid., 114–15.

74. Majeed, *Iqbal*, chap. 3.

75. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 7–8, 12–13.

76. Ibid., 132–33.

77. Ibid., 126. For Iqbal's transnational Islam as a process of "deracialisation," see Majeed, *Iqbal*, chap. 4.

78. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 120.

79. Ibid., 120. *Ijtihād* literally means effort, physical or mental, expended in a particular activity. In legal terms it denotes the exertion of a jurist's mental faculties in finding a solution to a legal question and, more broadly, the use of independent reason in interpreting law.

80. Ibid., 134, 121; my emphasis.

81. Ibid., 138–40.

82. Ibid., 121.

83. Ibid., 132.

84. Ali A. Allawi, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilisation* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 52. Allawi's book interacts with Iqbal in other ways;

the prologue begins with an epigraph from one of Iqbal's major poems, 'Shikvâ' ('Complaint'), and ends with a citation from it, while chapter 2 begins with an epigraph from the same poem.

85. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 130.
86. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 144.
87. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 78.