

## Preface

We must reread Iqbal. For a time we could imagine him forgotten, consigned to the oubliettes with the other figures of Islamic 'modernism' from the beginning of this century. But he had to come back.

There are effectively some transient 'modernisms' which try to adapt a secular tradition to the fashion of the day. They create themselves within an immediate present, which they then find it hard to survive. There are others which start with a major detour, a return to sources, in order to discover how to be truly faithful to them in a novel historical situation.

Iqbal's thought is of this second character, a rare and powerful realisation of the genre in fact. Along his millenarian journey, he manages to establish a mutual and fruitful exchange between thinkers and texts that are quite distant from each other: Nietzsche and Bergson, Hallaj and Rûmi, and between those and still others, taken up in the context of rereading the Quran.

So we still need to read Iqbal, each in his or her own way. Those of us for example – yesterday readers of Bergson, today of Heidegger – who are looking for an understanding of lived time, of historicity, beyond the objective, spatialized fixation of cosmic time, would find it worthwhile to reconsider all of that in the light of Iqbal's reinterpretation of the Quranic conception of 'destiny'. And similarly, we readers of Nietzsche would benefit from the Iqbalian understanding of the overman, coming on the heels of the 'perfect man' of the Sufi tradition.

Such ideas are current preoccupations in the contemporary West. But we also have shared reasons, Western, Muslim and Eastern merged together, in reading this remarkable man. Because our dialogues are troubled by a deep and mutual distrust. This distrust is partly derived from our own uncertainty regarding our identity, which sometimes gives us a feeling of insecurity under the gaze of others. It's this feeling that can lead to a sort of hyper-confidence, tightening around a rigid identity, and the belligerent rejection of the other as the bearer of evil. To seek out and define oneself using references found in the other's tradition becomes impossible, becomes treasonous.

But we all need to redefine ourselves, and we have a great deal to learn from one another in this search for a renewed self. This is why our current situation of frozen and distrustful relations is catastrophic for everyone.

In this atmosphere of suspicion and anger, it is a joy to hear the voice of Iqbal, both passionate and serene. It is the voice of a soul that is deeply anchored in the Quranic Revelation, and precisely for that reason, open to all the other voices, seeking in them the path of his own fidelity. It is the voice of a man who has left behind all identitarian rigidity, who has 'broken all the idols of tribe and caste' to address himself to all human beings. But an unhappy accident has meant that this voice was buried, both in the general forgetting of Islamic modernism and in the very country that he named before its existence Pakistan, whose multiple rigidities – political, religious, military – constitute a continual refutation of the very essence of his thought.

But we all need to hear him again, citizens of the West, Muslims, and those from his native India, where a form of Hindu chauvinism rages in our times that exceeds his worst fears. Souleymane Bachir Diagne has done all of us an immense favor in making this voice once again clear and convincing.

This small book has pulled off the gargantuan task of presenting Iqbal's thought in all of its actuality, by making us feel once again the constitutive tensions that this thought sought to resolve: between the affirmation of man and openness to God, between fidelity and movement, between the falsafa and the sense of the real, between universalism and belonging. Better still, by reclaiming this thought within the context of today's concerns, Bachir continues the movement that is essential to the Iqbalian approach; he brings together voices that are quite far apart in time and place, to the place where they can once again speak to each other. And this is of great benefit, as they have a lot to say to each other. We are all deeply grateful to him for it.

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