It was argued in the last decade of the twentieth century that political Islam was a new Muslim concept and self-understanding, which emanated from an ideology\(^1\) evolving in the 1930s from the need to distance itself both from the politically-dominant colonial sector and the adherents of Muslim traditions that passed on from generation to generation. And like colonialism and popular religion, political Islam cannot be a monolithic system of cultural expression, but rather should exhibit versatility.

Abu al-A’la Maududi (died 1979) was one of the first to ideologise Islam or islamise the political discourse of the nationalists, developing a system equated with Islam (\textit{nizam} = Islam) compatible with Western ideologies. Central to Maududi’s ideology was a revolutionary movement to be realised through his party, the Jama’at-e Islami (established 1941), with members drawn from an urban milieu.

This new Muslim identity expresses a bipolar field of tension between colonial and indigenous realms.\(^2\) Ideally speaking, each has been accommodating within itself, insofar as conflicts could be settled in an internal arrangement. This provides for social coherence assigning a specific place in the world. In contrast, the new liminal identity resulting from bipolarity is part of the composite social relationships within modern Muslim society: people caught between the boundaries of different sectors, on the borders of indigenous and colonial societies. These groups comprise far less definite, closed, social sectors than segments of different overlapping strata. They are chiefly to be found in the lowest to middle levels of the colonial hierarchy as well as in the intelligentsia. Working for and within the colonial—and later


\[^2\] See Malik: \textit{Colonialization of Islam}, Chap. I.
(post)-colonial—economy, they continue to find themselves in an inevitable normative dilemma.

These groups thus oscillate between the indigenous and the colonial. Ideally speaking, with ambivalence and flexibility in their constitution, they ignore structural differences in traditional and modern economic and social sectors. They thus constitute hermetic layers of identity not normally construed as socially cohesive. Obviously, rapid social change has called into question what had hitherto been obvious, social disintegration leading to intense problems of identification and reorientation, and enhances the necessity of shifting loyalties and religious opportunism.

Having partly broken away from historically evolving lineages and categories of social organisation, such as a learned network, kin group and family, these identities are increasingly dependent upon a network of social relations which are not required when firmly bound by other sets of relationships and social capital. A high degree of social incoherence seems to correspond to an increasing desire for approval and for impact and so for the construction of relations and networks.3

This is aggravated by the fact that the usually distant and unaccountable agents and institutions of the state are themselves incompletely diffused into society. This situation can precipitate an identity crisis, confronted with the question: ‘Do I want to be like I am?’ or ‘Am I a good Muslim?’ As a result of this reflective inquiry and an inner consciousness, a new construction of identity is possible, towards one that asserts: ‘I want to be different!’ This desire for difference leads to a transformation of identity, through catharsis and rebirth. The conflict arising between the multiple identities and different realms of operation such as a modern world of work and a traditional world of living can be resolved in at least three ways:

1. Integration, i.e., adapting or modernising one’s tradition which continues to be articulated in Islamic symbols and terms;
2. Isolation, i.e., enriching or even replacing the world of modern production with tradition;

Or, the most interesting field which, however, is difficult to qualify and quantify

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