



Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea

By Faisal Devji

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Pakistan, founded less than a decade after a homeland for India's Muslims was proposed, is both the embodiment of national ambitions fulfilled and, in the eyes of many observers, a failed state. *Muslim Zion* cuts to the core of the geopolitical paradoxes entangling Pakistan to argue that India's rival has never been a nation-state in the conventional sense. Pakistan is instead a distinct type of political geography, ungrounded in the historic connections of lands and peoples, whose context is provided by the settler states of the New World but whose closest ideological parallel is the state of Israel.

A year before the 1948 establishment of Israel, Pakistan was founded on a philosophy that accords with Zionism in surprising ways. Faisal Devji understands Zion as a political form rather than a holy land, one that rejects hereditary linkages between ethnicity and soil in favor of membership based on nothing but an idea of belonging. Like Israel, Pakistan came into being through the migration of a minority population, inhabiting a vast subcontinent, who abandoned old lands in which they feared persecution to settle in a new homeland. Just as Israel is the world's sole Jewish state, Pakistan is the only country to be established in the name of Islam.

Revealing how Pakistan's troubled present continues to be shaped by its past, *Muslim Zion* is a penetrating critique of what comes of founding a country on an unresolved desire both to join and reject the world of modern nation-states.

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Editorial Review

Review

Muslim Zion exposes the reader to ideals and realities that competed in the formation of Pakistan. It is a cerebral insight into how there was never a clear notion of 'what Pakistan should be' and, therefore, it is not surprising 'what it has become.'

(Gayatri Chandrasekaran *Mint* 2013-08-22)

Faisal Devji's *Muslim Zion*...is a refreshing addition to the study of politics of Muslim League and Jinnah's personality as it traces the creation of Pakistan...*Muslim Zion* brings forth the collaborative and competitive politics of Ambedkar and Jinnah, a much ignored aspect. The book thus effectively traces the creation of Pakistan by mapping Islam, Muslim, and minorityism packed with some fresh and original perspectives on Sir Syed Ahmed, Allama Iqbal, and Syed Ameer Ali among others. *Muslim Zion* will also be of interest to those seeking to have some understanding of the Shia sub-sects. Devji suggests that the interest of prominent Shias in the politics of Muslim League had got to do with the fact that they wanted to protect themselves from both the Hindu as well as the Sunni majority... Even as the book explores on the idea of Pakistan, the amazing parallels between a Muslim homeland and Jewish settlement seamlessly runs through the narrative making it eminently readable. *Muslim Zion* is a provocative and fascinating piece of scholarship with some very complex and tight observations and arguments. (Danish Khan *Two Circles* 2013-09-12)

A trenchant analysis...the book presents a wholly different and more nuanced view of Islamic politics than most recent titles. (*Publishers Weekly* 2013-07-01)

No one but **Faisal Devji** could have given us *Muslim Zion*, which offers a brilliant, counterintuitive meditation on the analogy between ideologies of Zionism and Pakistani/Muslim nationalism, and at the same time a nuanced historical exploration of the idea of Pakistan. Intellectual history as a page-turner. (Noah Feldman, author of *Cool War: The Future of Global Competition*)

Despite their vast differences, Pakistan and Israel share this strange coincidence of birth: they were both created to resolve the problematic status of minorities defined partly by religion. Scholars in a number of fields have begun to explore facets of this strange parallelism. **Faisal Devji** has brought the historian's traditional skills to the task, focusing on the Muslim League's demand from the 1930s for a separate homeland for the Muslims of India. *Muslim Zion* tells a gripping story and will make an important contribution to this ongoing scholarly discussion. (Aamir R. Mufti, author of *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*)

Devji is arguably the most brilliant scholar of his generation writing today on South Asian history and global Islam. His explorations of the tensions inherent in the idea of Pakistan as a Muslim homeland, and the fascinating parallels he draws with Zionist and settler-colonial pasts, provide a new point of departure for the study of both Muslim and Dalit politics in British India. His reflections on the failure of the category 'minority' in decolonizing times will help us rethink the very idea of the political in the twentieth century. A thoughtful and courageous book. (Dipesh Chakrabarty, University of Chicago)

A fascinating, thoughtful, and provocative work, *Muslim Zion* explores the paradoxical dimensions of Pakistan by focusing on the period when this country was imagined, but yet unrealized. (Christophe Jaffrelot, CERI-Sciences Po/CNRS)

Faisal Devji's brilliantly written, deeply felt book is an important contribution to the study of the tortured

relationship between different ideas of Pakistan and of Islam. (Anatol Lieven, author of *Pakistan: A Hard Country*)

A remarkable book...**Devji** has persuasively interpreted Jinnah's view of Pakistan as an anti-territorial, universalistic conception of the nation. Summoning Pakistan into existence was an act of pure will that required the rejection of history, soil, and culture--all the usual grounds on which to claim nationhood, and which for Jinnah subverted the unity he claimed for India's Muslims. (Sunil Khilnani *New Republic* 2013-11-09)

Devji provides a unique insight into the underpinnings of the idea of Pakistan. [He] sees a parallel between the Zionist movement for Israel and the Muslim nationalist movement for Pakistan...Devji provides an excellent narrative of the course of Muslim politics, its interactions with other Indian movements, and the commitment to a separate political entity--Pakistan. This is familiar territory, but it is presented with an entirely new perspective--the author refers to contemporary literature, poetry, and political speeches and writings...Devji's erudite, balanced and lucid work, embellished with pithy insights and interesting sources, is a stern warning about the hazards of basing nationhood on religious identity. (Talmiz Ahmad *Business Standard* 2013-11-12)

Devji offers a detailed analysis of the various political and ideological forces that were at play in the buildup to Pakistan's creation. Devji's larger project seems to be to mitigate the tendency to look at historical phenomena from the 20th and 21st centuries isolated from their global context...He notes that Jinnah 'seems to have possessed more books on the problems of European Jewry than on any Muslim people or country.' Devji also believes that the formation of Pakistan set a precedent that made Israel possible. (Hannah Harris Green *Los Angeles Review of Books* 2013-12-02)

About the Author

Faisal Devji is Reader in Indian History and Fellow of St Antony's College at the University of Oxford.

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