

A critical examination of the emergence of an Islamic identity in the late 19th and early 20th Century Ottoman Empire.

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Abstract: This essay critically examines the emergence of a new Islamic identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ottoman Empire. Assumptions about Islamic identity and its relationship to modernity are problematised and broken down. This was a period of rapid and unprecedented change in the Empire, change that had its roots in the expansion of European power. Identity, it is argued, consists in the self-definition of a group against the 'other', that is other groups. Thus contact with the West brought about significant changes in Islamic identity. However, this essay does not claim to have identified a monolithic new identity, indeed it is argued that identities are fractured and open to many interpretations. Rather it identifies significant changes in the way Islam was related to society, land and politics, as well as in the way it was thought about. Three main changes are identified; territorialisation, politicisation, and essentialisation. The first trend involved a new relationship of Islam to land and culture. In the Ottoman Empire refugees from the Balkans contributed to a sense of Ottoman Islamic identity which was cultivated by Sultan Abdulhamid II. In the Arabic regions of the Empire the emergence of printed Arabic and a renewed interest in Islamic forebears gave Arab identity greater salience. Politicisation occurred as Islam became both a resource and a motivation for political struggle. Abdulhamid attempted to use Islam to reinforce his weakening empire, whilst for some of his subjects it was a motivation for revolution or unrest. Essentialisation was the process whereby Islam became a category in the public sphere. It was constructed as a civilisation through the *salafiyya* movement and the influence of Western ideas. Its use as a political resource also resulted in heavy handed attempts to enforce a uniform Islamic identity in some parts of the Empire. The view of Islamic identity that emerges is of a complex and close relationship with nationalism and modernity, one that contradicts traditional views of religion as opposed to modernisation and change.

The period from 1876 to 1922 was a time of deep and rapid change in the Middle East. It was a time when superior European power penetrated the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire as the British occupied Egypt, and the French Tunisia, and as Western economic advisers, military advisers and railway companies appeared throughout Ottoman lands. Besides the presence of European troops, administrators and advisers, the preponderance of a modernising Europe was felt through the presence of Western technology and methods of government. Against this backdrop a new Islamic identity began to emerge. Formal Islam, as set out in the Qur'an and Hadith, was situated in a new environment, and as a result was interpreted, and used, in different ways. Tradition and change, the familiar and the alien, interacted and clashed to create this new sense of Islamic identity.

This essay will critically examine the emergence of this new identity. Critical examination will involve examining the basis of the concept of Islamic identity, and breaking down assumptions about Islam and its relationship with modernity. The main sources of change will be identified and discussed. It is not suggested that the identity in question was universal, nor is it encapsulated in a particular set of writings or any particular movement. Moreover, since 'identity' refers, as we shall see, to perceptions and is intrinsically subjective, the new identity not to be seen as monolithic or clearly definable. The word is in many ways an intellectual tool that enables us to focus on a particular trend, and thus should not be thought to be a mirror image of the real world.

It is the intention of this essay to reveal the complex nature of the interaction between Islam and modernity during the period in question. The emergence of an identifiably new identity will be presented as consisting in three main trends which changed the way Islam was used and seen, and the way Ottoman Muslims related to the world through the medium of Islam. These trends are the politicisation, territorialisation and essentialisation of Islam as an identity. Examination of the history surrounding these trends will reveal the main factors behind the emergence of a new identity.

Islam and Identity

Any discussion or study of identity must negotiate a variety of obstacles before it can reach any meaningful conclusions. A discussion of religious identity, and Islamic identity in particular, is especially hazardous. Let us first address the question 'what is identity?'. Stuart Hall has identified three different ways of looking at identity, 'the enlightenment subject', 'the sociological subject', and the 'postmodern subject' (Barker and Galasinski, 2001, p.40). The enlightenment subject is the traditional conception of the individual as possessing an essential and permanent core (Barker and Glasinski, 2001, p.28 and p.40; Mol, 1978, pp.1-2). Such a conception is implausible, particularly in the modern world where there appear to be multiple and often contradictory identities present in any one individual. Moreover, personal identity cannot be isolated from the influence of society.

This brings us to Hall's 'sociological subject', according to which society and individual are mutually constitutive. The individual still possesses a unified core, this is formed in interaction with society. The 'postmodern subject', in contrast with the previous two conceptions, is composed of several shifting identities which depend on the situation. Thus identity does not consist of a 'real' and essential core (Barker and Galinski, 2001, p.40).

The picture of identity adopted in this essay will correspond most closely to the latter of the three conceptions, although no claim is made to follow to the letter a particular school of thought. Rather, it is assumed that identity is fractured, often contradictory and to a great extent formulated in part through an opposition to 'the other' (Yavuz, 2003, p.21). It consists of the ways people define their place in the world. Such a view allows us to formulate a theory of the social and political nature of identity. Since identities are defined against outsiders many identities are social: they define a particular group. Identity is thus a political resource to be struggled over (Yavuz, 2003, p.26), as well as an emotive way of placing ourselves in the world. Definition against the 'other' means that identity changes with the relationship to the 'other' in question.

How does the above discussion relate to Islam? Yavuz identifies three approaches to the study of political Islam, which correspond relatively closely to Hall's three subjects. The essentialist approach, characterised by Bernard Lewis and Bassam Tibi, emphasises the textual sources of Islam and its traditional, as opposed to modern, nature (Tibi, 1990). Islamic identity is seen as essentially political, primordial, monolithic and all encompassing. Islam as an institution is seen to have causal agency. Such a view has many shortcomings, but most significantly it ignores the diversity within Islam and relies on simplistic dichotomies. Yavuz also identifies what he calls 'contextualism', which corresponds to Hall's sociological subject. Islamic identity is seen as an epiphenomenon of social change. Little weight is given to ideas and values (Yavuz, 2003, pp.17-20).

Yavuz favours a third, constructivist view, which assumes that "*any society is a human construction and subject to multiple interpretations and influences*" (Yavuz, 2003, p.20). This more complex view has the advantage of allowing for the power of Islamic ideas without essentialising Islam. Its recognition that society is open to multiple interpretations, thus rejecting the view that there is one social reality that may be discovered through investigation. It allows for fragmented and competing Islamic identities.

A constructivist approach will be used in this essay. Thus the Islamic identity in question is not the only one, nor should it be seen as cohesive and enclosed. It is relational in that it is defined in terms of its opposition to some 'other'. It is to an extent a categorisation to allow the identification of trends and characteristics that bare significant relations to one another. Finally, the rejection of the positivist essentialist approach necessitates the critical examination of assumptions and the origins of concepts.

Forces for change

It is only possible to talk of 'the emergence' of an Islamic identity if factors causing 'emergence' can be identified. The most commonly identified force for change is that of 'modernisation'. In the context of the late Ottoman Empire this involves the introduction of Western technology and methods of government, and the resultant changes in society. However, modernisation is a problematic concept, open to several interpretations. Most troublesome is the tendency to oppose modernisation to tradition, and the identification of secularism with the former and religion with the latter. Moreover the concept is often assumed to be identical to the process of westernisation. Thus, according to these conceptions Islam is opposed to modernisation as traditional and Oriental. The Islamic identity that emerged in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire was not simply a reaction to modernisation. Rather it arose from interaction with Europe on an unprecedented scale. It was part of (not simply a response to) modernisation (rather than westernisation) in the region. It arose from the interaction of traditional Islamic ideas with European pressures (Weismann, 2003, p.2).

The Islamic identity cannot be understood solely these terms. As mentioned, identity is social and political, and these elements must be understood. Social forces caused Muslims to look to different sources and to have different ideas. Politically, these new ideas were manipulated by various leaders, most notably Abdulhamid II. The relationship between politics and identity is reciprocal, so changes in identities drove, as well as arose from, political machinations. It is on the basis of this rather complex framework that we must build an image of those specific forces that were the catalyst for a change in Islamic identity. At the same time the manifestations of this identity must be identified in significant movements, actions of individuals, and schools of thought.

The forces referred to in the discussion will be technological, intellectual, economical, political and sociological. The latter two forces will also appear as manifestations of an identity. The emergence of an Islamic identity will now be examined in terms of its three main characteristics: territorialisation, and politicisation, and essentialisation.

Territorialisation

In the late nineteenth century Islamic identity fused with the Ottoman Empire's two principal linguistic/territorial units. Many discussions of the first stirrings of nationalism in the region ignore the role of Islam. This is no doubt due to the traditional opposition of religion and nationalism (Anderson, 1991). However, Islamic identity came to be linked to nationalism through its increasing association with particular territorial areas. In the central Ottoman Empire the territorialisation of Islam was largely the result of pressures from aggressive European nationalism and Russian imperialism. A major force for a territorialised Islamic identity was the migration of Muslims from Russia and the Balkans (Karpat, 2002). Although migrations began after the Russian

annexation of the Crimea in 1783, the most significant wave came after the Turco-Russian War and the Balkan war of 1912-1913. It is estimated that between 1860 and 1914 five to seven million people migrated into the Ottoman Empire. Moreover behind this migration lay the concept of *hijra*. The emperor's role as caliph and his empire's as a haven for Muslims increased the religious significance of the movement. The violence that in many cases had forced the migrants to flee was well reported, and they were well received by their fellow Muslims. As Karpas points out, such a situation generated a heightened sense of Islamic identity. This identity was reinforced through the policy of Ottomanism, which will be discussed in the next section (Karpas, 2002, pp.697-9). This heightened sense of identity was the result of violent confrontation of the other, and it emerged in what was being presented as the new Islamic homeland.

Another important current pushing for a territorial Muslim identity was the existence of a grassroots Islamist movement that claimed that Ottoman Muslims were a millet, or nation, requiring a land of their own. The political implications of such ideas shall be examined below, suffice to say that a reciprocal relationship existed between such changes in society and the conduct of the Ottoman state (Yavuz, 2003, p.45).

In the Arab territories (including Egypt) the territorialisation of Islam was linked to the Islamic modernism and revivalism of the *salafiyya* movement. This movement, characterised by Muhammad 'Abduh, called for a return to the ways of pious forefathers. In the words of C. Ernest Dawn

"[t]hat the true Islam was the Islam of their ancestors, and the ancestors were Arab, meant the revival of Arabism and Arab culture and the restoration of the Arabs to their position of leadership among the Muslims" (Dawn, 1991, p.9).

It should be noted that the *salafiyya* was by no means an Arab nationalist movement. Its significance in this instance lies in the link it emphasised between Islam and Arab ancestors. The *salafiyya* was, at times, a reaction against an Ottoman leadership, and this contributed to a heightened sense of Arab-Islamic identity. Weismann suggests that reformists sought to protect Islam from the perceived westernising influence of the government by allying with the new middle class. The territorialisation of Islamic identity was furthered with the realisation at the turn of the century that the sultan and Empire could no longer protect Muslims from Western powers. The Reformists were driven away from the central government into an alternative identity (Weismann, 2003, p.5)

The emergence of an Arab-Islamic identity was also driven by the explosion of printed Arabic in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The generally Islamic form of the popular reaction to the British occupation of Egypt, for example, was coupled with the spreading of ideas through Arabic newspapers. Although the vast majority of the population remained illiterate, newspapers could be read aloud in villages throughout the land (Cole, 2002, p.351). The emergence of a public space through technological change thus had the rather contradictory effect of not only increasing the sense of pan-

Islamic identity (to be discussed below), it increased the sense of being a Muslim in a particular, Arab, territory and society (Cole, 2002, p.359). Nationalism was not only triggered by the same forces that were reshaping Islamic identity, the two were intertwined.

Politicisation

Another trend which allows one to speak of the emergence of an identifiably new Islamic identity is the use of Islam as a political resource (Yavuz, 2003, p.26) and the resultant politicisation of Islamic identity. This is a topic to be treated with extreme care, for numerous pitfalls surround the subject of 'political Islam'. Not least of these is the essentialist and now popular view that Islam is an inherently political religion (Salvatore, 1997). Such a view arises from a western perception of the typical characteristics of religion, according to which religion is separate from politics and the state, and therefore Islam stands out as an anomaly, as 'the political religion'. The claim made here is not that Islam was previously apolitical, or that it is essentially political, but simply that prior to the period in question Islamic social identities were not political in the modern sense. That is, they were not used as a political resource. A further risk lies in the temptation to see the politicisation of Islam as a religion as part of the unstoppable march of western, secularising modernity. Such a view is based on a simplistic picture of modernisation, one restricted to western experience.

Thus two points must be emphasised before we proceed. Firstly what is to be discussed is the politicisation of an Islamic identity, not the politicisation of Islam as a religion. No attempt is made to identify essential features of Islam. Indeed such an attempt would be unproductive and futile. Secondly, the politicisation in question should not be seen in the context of secularisation or western-centric ideas of progress. The change identified is examined in the context of Islam's place in Middle Eastern modernity (not westernisation).

The politicisation occurred as a result of two pairs of factors. The first pair is the centralisation of the Ottoman state during the nineteenth century, coupled with the emergence of a public sphere. The picture is only completed with the addition of another pair of factors: the use of Islam as a political resource, and its role as an object and motivation for political struggle. Let us examine the backdrop first. The centralisation of the Ottoman Empire was essentially a response to the threat from a more advanced and powerful Europe. The process had begun in 1826 when Mahmud II crushed the Janissaries in what came to be known as 'the Auspicious Event' (Yapp, 1987, p.104). It gathered momentum during the Tanzimat when Europeanisation was furthered through local government military and legal reform. A policy of Ottomanism was pursued, whereby equal legal rights were granted to all groups in an effort to cultivate a sense of Ottoman citizenship (Yavuz, 2003, p.41). The policies of the Tanzimat were continued under Abdulhamid II, but with a different spin. The most significant difference was the employment of an Islamic ideology, but what concerns us at present is the strengthening of the state and

bureaucracy. The army remained the central instrument of control, but the centralising efforts of the regime fell most heavily in the legal and educational spheres (Yapp, 1987). Technological developments such as the building of railways and a telegraph system extended the control of the state over its territories.

However whilst the coercive potential of technology is well recognised, it can also provide society with the means of counter attack. Thus whilst the Ottoman state was able to reach into further into the provinces in its attempt to tighten its grip in their inhabitants, technological development had the paradoxical effect of providing them with more space. As troops travelled along railways, and reports flowed along telegraph wires to Istanbul, the resentment of sections of the population could spread through the channels provide by a rapidly expanding print culture (Cole, 2002).

The framework necessary for the conduct of a new and more intense politics was not on its own sufficient for the emergence of a more political Islamic identity. This occurred as resentment grew over the perceived moral corruption of the state, and the presence of colonial powers. At the same time Islam was recognised as a useful resource in its drive to maintain its grip on the empire, not least in the face of an increasingly resentful Muslim population (Deringil, 1993, p.11). The latter trend was most apparent in the pan-Islamic ideology employed by Abdulhamid who recognised the need to “*create a feeling of hope among his Moslem subjects*” (William Ramsay Mitchell, quoted in Deringil, 1993, p.11). This approach was pursued through a variety of channels, including the building of schools, a new emphasis on Arabic and the Arabs, contact with Sufi leaders and the direction of resources to ‘Islamic’ projects such as the Hijaz Railway and reconstruction in Mecca and Medina (Oschenwald, 1980; Yavuz, 2003, p.44). The true nature of Abdulhamid’s policy is hard to discern. The extent to which it was a manifestation of a sense of Islamic identity or simply the use of that identity as a resource with which to enhance state power is unclear. The evidence for the latter is ultimately more convincing.

Hamidian pan-Islamism should not simply be dismissed for the purposes of the argument however. It was a response to a genuine increase in the intensity of Islamic sentiment as a result of the pressures exerted by the European powers. Moreover it was at least partially responsible for triggering a response to those pressures based on resentful Islamic sentiment. The former trend has already been touched upon in the discussion of territorialisation above. We can now elaborate on the depth of the Islamic identity generated by the hijra from Russia and the Balkans in terms of its political manifestations. Perhaps the most dramatic of these is described by Karpat. In 1878 Ali Suavi, a publisher associated with popular preachers, landed on the pier of the palace of Sultan Murat V with about a hundred followers, most of who were refugees from the Balkans. It seems that he wanted Murat to replace Abdulhamid due to the latter’s failure to back Muslim guerrillas fighting the Russians and Bulgarians and his granting of Muslim lands to Christians. Intriguing as this story is, its significance is, as Karpat points out, that it was the first time that a group of civilians attempted to

overthrow the sultan (Karpas, 2002, p.703). This is the politicisation of Islamic identity at its most striking: Muslims violently expelled from their homelands taking unprecedented, religiously inspired, *political* action against a leader on the grounds that he had failed to perform his duties as sultan.

In the early years of the next century the resentment of Egyptians against the British and Ottomans took on a religious character. The Urabi revolt that prompted the British invasion of Egypt has been presented as a proto-nationalist movement. Such an assessment probably misinterprets the motivations for the uprising. As well as being a result of the personal and group specific resentment of Arab army officers, it was powered by no small amount of religious fervour. The revolt thus provides an interesting insight into the emergence of a political Islamic identity. Urabi and his followers were motivated in part by anger at the growing influence of the West and the apparent readiness of the Khedive to bow to Western pressure. Islam emerged as the prime motivating force for rebels outside the inner circle. Islam was thus a useful resource and provided part of the motivation for anti-Western and anti-Khedive sentiment.

Rudolph Peters describes an incident that illustrates this new role for Islam. Shortly before his defeat by the British, Urabi asked the grand mufti Muhammad al-'Abasi al-Mahdi to issue a fatwa supporting the destruction of some statues in Cairo. The demolition was both a religious and a political act. It was religious in that classical Islamic law prohibits images on the grounds that they imitate God's creation, and thereby imitate unbelievers. It is the political side that is most interesting however. This is provided by the fact that Urabi was making, and wanted to be *seen* to be making, a stand against European influence and the ruling house (Peters, 1996, pp.217-19). Islam was thus both resource and motivation.

Essentialisation

A further factor in the development of an Islamic identity was intellectual effects of confrontation with Europe through the sense of spiritual crisis it created. With the British invasion of Egypt the impotence of the world's only significant Islamic power was undeniable. The superiority of Western technology was striking; telegraphs, railways, steamboats, rifles, newspapers multiplied across the Empire. The question now confronting Muslim intellectuals was how could this happen to followers of the one true religion? As Salvatore points out, the politicisation of Islamic identity, discussed above, required that *islam* become a "*keyword*" or "*pivotal category within public communication*". The process of essentialisation involved the moulding of Islam into such a category through attempts to identify its essential characteristics. The first stage in this essentialisation occurred in the last decades of the nineteenth century (Salvatore, 1997, 47-48). If we accept that all identities require the presence of some 'other', and indeed contain that 'other' within themselves, then it is not surprising that the catalyst for the essentialisation of Islam was more intense contact with Europe than had previously been experienced (Yavuz, 2003, p.22).

The intellectual and social process of essentialisation cannot be entirely separated from the process of politicisation discussed above. Indeed many intellectuals were active politically and their idea had a reciprocal relationship with politics. It is therefore not surprising that the factors behind the essentialisation of Islam as an identity are similar to those behind its politicisation. The same resentment of the state or colonial powers provided the motivation for revivalist movements. And in the same way that the emergence of a public sphere facilitated politicisation, it allowed the rapid growth of new ideas. The growth of print was central to the intellectual movement.

Before turning to intellectual movements it is worth examining a more deliberate and tangible attempt to create a unified Islamic identity. It should be clear that the pan-Islamic policy of Abdulhamid II discussed above was part of the process of territorialisation and politicisation, but it also involved heavy handed attempts at the essentialisation of Islam. Selim Deringil describes what he calls “*a desperate attempt at social engineering*” through which Sunni Hanafi *mezheb* was promoted as the semi-official religion (Deringil, 1993, p.14). Deringil describes mass conversions of Christians and Shi’ites that took place in Syria and Iraq in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Deringil, 1993). Whilst these accounts make fascinating reading their significance lies in the fact that they constituted physical attempts to homogenise Islam. Moreover they were in response to perceived threats from the ‘other’, whether that was Christian missionaries or Persian Shi’ism. They are also clear illustrations of the interconnectedness of territorialisation, politicisation and essentialisation.

More significant moves towards essentialisation occurred in the form of the *salafiyya* movement. The goal of this movement was a return to the ‘pure’ Islam of their ancestors (*al-salaf al-salih*) and they vociferously condemned the decadence of leaders and the weakness of the *ulema* (Schulze, 2000, pp.18-19). Thinkers such as Sayyid Jamal al-Din ‘al-Afghani’ and Muhammad Abduh invoked the tradition of *islah* (reform) alongside the promotion of *ijtihad* (‘free reasoning’) over *ijma* (consensus). Although Schulze’s claim that *salafiyya* was “*a variant of late 19th-century classicism*” (Schulze,2000, p.18) is an overstatement, it did arise to a great extent from the interaction of Islam with the West. The emphasis on Islamic tradition was coupled with a Western influenced presentation of Islam as a civilisation or “*tangible historical entity*” (Salavatore, 1997, p.85). Moreover, the promotion of *ijtihad* was influenced by the Enlightenment call to rationality.

The essentialisation of Islam was triggered through the interaction of modernity and tradition. The clearest illustration of this interaction is in the effect of the introduction of print to the region, discussed by Juan Cole. Cole argues that “*the preexisting ecumene of knowledge in the southern Mediterranean was not so much displaced as put to new uses*”(Cole, 2002, p.346). Cole identifies two effects of print culture. Firstly it created a reading public with a new independence from the ulama and easier access to the Qur’an than ever before. As a result a more scripturalist Islam emerged.

Control over interpretation of the Qur'an was slipping from the hands of the ulema, as those who could read gained access to the text itself and classical commentaries. The second significant effect of print culture was that potential authors now had access to books. Moreover, they could afford to become professional writers as journalism emerged as a career option. Indeed, Cole describes Afghani as "*a fish in the water of print culture, who would earlier had no medium in which to swim*" (Cole, 2002, p.356). The existence of a reading public and professional writers enlarged the public sphere, creating an environment where ideas could spread more rapidly and to a wider audience. In such an environment a new sense of Islamic identity could thrive.

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to present a particular interpretation of Islamic identity in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Ottoman Empire. Critical examination of the emergence an Islamic identity in involved questioning many assumptions. The nature of Islam's relation to modernity and nationalism was questioned in a way that broke down assumptions about the opposition of religion to modernisation, and the equation of modernisation with westernisation. The conditions under which a new Islamic identity emerged were discussed to reveal how it was constructed in opposition to and interaction with a dominant western 'other' and its influence.

Two main factors have been present in explanations of changes in identity throughout the essay. The first is more intense contact with the 'other' in the form of European power. The second is the response of elites within the Empire to the pressure that had its roots in that contact. Underlying these two factors is the wider trend of the expansion of the West into its periphery during what has been presented as the first wave of globalisation. The new Islamic identity should be viewed in the context of that trend, and the modernisation that it triggered.

Before identifying the main characteristics of the new identity it is worth re-emphasising the limitations of this discussion of identity. No claim is made to have identified a change in Islamic identity as a whole. Nor is any claim made to have identified a change in the identities of all Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. Such a task would be difficult, if not impossible, for evidence regarding the attitudes of those living outside major urban areas is hard to come by. Moreover, such a claim would be preposterous; the vast majority of Muslims were illiterate during the time in question and many would have lived in remote areas far from the political arenas. The suggestion that a uniform change occurred amongst all Muslims would ignore these inequalities. Perhaps most importantly such a claim would assume a unity in Islam that did not exist.

What this essay does claim to have achieved is an identification of new ways in which Islam determined some Muslims interpretation of their

relationship to the world. This new interpretation has been identified as emerging through the effects of developments in technology, ideas, and politics. The influence of the powerful has also been identified as a significant factor, whether they were the European powers or the Ottoman government. The new identity consisted of an increased sense interconnectedness between the Islam and specific place or cultures, most importantly Turkish and Arabic. The next significant change was in the relationship of Islam to politics. The nature of politics in the Ottoman Empire had changed significantly by the end of the nineteenth century. Islam came to be seen as a useful resource in political struggles and Muslim identity became a factor that motivated political action. The third significant development identified was the process of essentialisation of Islam. This process involved both clumsy and more subtle attempts to identify the essential characteristics of Islam. This essentialising process crystallised the view of Islam as a civilisation, the opposite of which was the West, furthered the feeling that Muslims were part of such a civilisation.

What is the significance of the identification of a change in identity? Firstly a critical examination of Islamic identity in the period in question is of interest as a reinterpretation of the role of identity at that time. It allowed the overturning of assumptions about the declining influence of Islam as nationalism began to emerge. The identification of the new identity illustrates how Islamic identity was at once part of a broader reaction to the expansion of the West, and at the same time how it was crystallising into a distinct basis for action. The findings have also revealed the problematic nature of the categories that are often used to discuss the history of the Ottoman Empire on the eve of the creation of the modern Middle East. Islamic, Arab, Turkish, orthodox, reformist, traditional, and modern are revealed to be inter-linked rather than distinct. The simple opposition of these categories to one another is unsatisfactory.

Finally, discussion of the emergence of an Islamic identity allows us trace its development up to the present in a new light, as a political ideology and a source of identity lying behind those of region and nation. The problematic nature of traditional views of the role of Islam in the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century suggests that greater care should be taken in examining assumptions that are made about the modern Middle East.

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