

Book Review:

**The Idea of The Muslim World, A Global Intellectual History
(Cemil Aydin)**

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The notion of "The Muslim World" as a binary point of opposition to "The West" has become a global narrative, accepted by many Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In fact, Muslims reside in different parts of the world, speak different languages, live in different traditions and cultures, and have different nationalities and political interests. Besides, the those who believe in notions of the Muslim world have rarely discussed or imagined the Christian world, the Buddhist world, and so on in similar terms. Thus, how did this narrative about the 'Muslim World' come into being and become a mainstream belief in the modern world? This issue constitutes the main point of discussion in Cemil Aydin's book, as the title suggests, "The Idea of The Muslim World." Questions such as who, when, how, and why this notion arose and persists in the modern era are discussed.

Differing from the mainstream belief regarding a unified entity, Aydin argues that the notion of the so-called "The Muslim World" is just an illusion. He outright rejects the understanding of most modern Muslims regarding "The Muslim World," which is equated with the concept of the *Ummah* (Muslim community), and also the belief that the Islamic world was always unified before nationalism and European colonialism tore it apart. In his view, the notion of the "Muslim World" has been fabricated by political actors, both from the Muslim side through the idea of Pan-Islamism in the 1870s or from Western imperial racism through "Islamophobia," to pursue their political objectives. Prior to this, Muslims never imagined a global united Muslim community until the nineteenth century, when European hegemony peaked, and Muslims suffered setbacks in various fields due to colonization. To refute this illusory notion, Aydin sequentially outlines Islamic historical events from the seventh century, the birth era of Islam, to the second half of the twentieth century. In the first chapter, he briefly discusses the divisions and wars among

Islamic dynasties from the Umayyad to the Ottoman Empire as solid evidence of his argument. The second chapter discusses historical events in the first half of the 19th century (from 1814-1878), including how the British Christian empire supported Ottoman Muslim rule over Christians in Turkey, to highlight the absence of a monolithic Islam versus the West. The third chapter discusses the emergence of political racism, which was not just limited to skin color but also included religion and political interests, beginning three decades after the defeat of the Ottomans at the hands of Russia in 1878. During this era, the idea of Pan-Islamism – promoted by Sultan Abdul Hamid II and resulting in Islamophobia in the West – emerged and gained support from Muslims in various parts of the world.

The fourth chapter describes how Pan-Islamism, which presupposes a unified global Muslim community, was strengthened by two fatwas issued by Ottoman Muslim clerics, encouraging Muslims around the world to revolt and fight against invaders, especially Russia, France, the British empire and their supporters who fought against the Ottomans. The fifth chapter outlines Muslim politics after the fall of the Ottoman empire (1924-1945) and the worldwide interwar period. It reveals how the narrative of “The Muslim World” survived during this time and also describes the role of several prominent Pan-Islamists, such as Abdurreşid Ibrahim, Shakib Arslan, and Amin al-Husseini, in promoting their ideas in other parts of the world.

The final chapter describes the resurrection of Muslim internationalism after its decline. Between 1945 and 1988, many bloody incidents took place in the Muslim community, including an arson attack in the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969. Responding to this, King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz bin Saud of Saudi Arabia called for a summit of leaders of Muslim-majority countries. Faisal cast himself as a new, twentieth-century version of Sultan Abdul Hamid II in reviving global Muslim solidarity. In the concluding chapter, Aydin states that the grand narrative of the clash of civilizations between Islam and the West needs to be disproven. Instead, the driving factors have been the competing geopolitical interests of imperialist racism and Muslim reformers with Pan-Islamic views.

The strength of this book lies in its thorough reading of world historical events through a geopolitical lens. Aydin not only successfully refutes the false narratives around "The Muslim World" and its eternal conflict with "The West" but also opens the reader's eyes to understand that the struggle for power and influence in the

world always colors our perceptions about ideas. His ability to elaborate on the hidden objectives of political actors is a strong element of this book.

In the present day, where Islamist groups are growing and gaining more public attention in many parts of the world, this book constitutes an important reference source for academics and those in non-academic circles. The concept of Islam versus the West has made it difficult for the eastern and western worlds to unite and instead engendered ongoing suspicion. Understanding that such ideas are just illusions crafted by political actors will enlighten the reader and dispel suspicions between eastern and western societies. The conflict between these two blocks is politics covered in the shroud of theology.

Implicitly, this book rejects civilizational theorists' views on the existence of clash of civilizations, such as Samuel Huntington (Huntington 2007), Gilles Kepel (Kepel 2004), and Bernard Lewis (Lewis 2002) (Lewis 2003), who viewed Islam as a threat. At the same time, the main argument of this book aligns with the arguments of accommodationists, such as John L. Esposito (Esposito 1999), who view the narrative of Islam as a global threat as being a Western myth. The rise of Islam should not be seen as a threat but as an authentic expression of Muslims contributing to global civilization (Rauf 2009). They do not desire a relationship of domination and subordination, as the West has practiced up until now. What they dream of is merely equality with the West in every aspect of life.

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