

The Islamic Crescent: Islam, Culture and Globalization

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ABSTRACT *This paper is an interdisciplinary consideration of Islam in general, and of Islam within the Islamic crescent in particular. Scholarly approaches to the study of Islam are explored, as well as the unity and commonality of attitudes and sentiments that exists right across the Islamic world. This last point is contrasted with differences within Islamic countries in the crescent, particularly in the context of culture. Indeed, this paper stresses the need to understand the relationship between culture and Islam. The paper concludes with an analysis of Islam and globalization, paying particular attention to modernization and Islamic identity.*

Islam and the Islamic crescent

Twentieth century experiments in the establishment of an Islamic state within the Islamic crescent have taken the form of a theocratic (Iran), or authoritarian (Pakistan, Sudan) or fundamentalist (Afghanistan) regime. After Iran, the struggle for power in Algeria has been another reminder to Europeans that they are surrounded by an 'Islamic Crescent'; a crescent that extends from the former Ottoman Empire and the soft underbelly of the former Soviet Union, from the Maghreb in the west to Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines in the east and down south into the heart of Africa. Currently there are 1.27 billion Muslims, or nearly a quarter of the world's population (Ögütçü, 1998). The vitality of Islam, resurgent, confident, 'militant', 'fundamentalist' prevails over the historic experiment of Leninism and socialism in the Third World.

Within the Islamic crescent political Islam has grown as a response to social, economic, and political discontent and dislocation to modernization. For moderate Muslim intellectuals Western institutions function as a rational-legal organization and are useful, in the least, in protecting the human rights of Islamists, as has happened in Turkey.¹ 'Fundamentalist' Muslim intellectuals on the other hand continue to focus on more traditional Islamic conceptions of the world divided into the House of Islam (*Dar al Islam*) and the House of War (*Dar al Harb*): the world of the believer and the world of the infidel, though they allow for a temporary truce with non-Islamic powers (*Dar al Suhl*).

Proceeding synoptically, an examination of the nature of the socio-political developments occurring in the different Islamic populations throughout the Islamic crescent depicts a general picture of Islamists striving to remain true to the demands of their faith, even as the crescent adapts and adjusts to the post-cold war power politics and global economics of the new century and, in the case of countries such as Turkey, Uzbekistan, and in western China (East Turkistan), in the face of continuing state repression.

Entering the modern world at low ebb in its external relations with the West and its internal development, and at the same time menaced by outside attack, the Islamic tradition has undertaken to refashion society. Borrowing technological innovations from the West or selectively introducing from modernity and from their own past the inspiration and determination to succeed, Islamic militants within the Islamic crescent are reasserting their independence in national movements, in organizations such as Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) in Israel or Jamaat-ul-Jihad (Egyptian Islamic Jihad) in Egypt, in Muslim or Sufi brotherhoods. They are vigorously defending their faith in intellectual endeavour as well as conducting atrocities against innocent civilians.

While seeking to reaffirm Islam in theory and in practice, militant Islamists (i.e. active radical Islamists) also face the existential problem of their religious quest: as to how, or whether, the Muslim will or can or should close the gap between his faith and the contemporary world which he has now to construct. Developments in different Islamic countries and populations in the Islamic crescent offer varied patterns and potentialities ranging from attempts to emotionalize Islam into a closed repressive system bordering on medieval revivalism (as in Afghanistan under the Taliban) to working for an open, onward vision.

Despite the apparent variety in direction in which these patterns and potentialities crystallize, ultimately it depends on the direction in which Islam has evolved. State-sponsored Shi'ism in the Islamic Republic of Iran is a prime example here. For ultimately, whatever direction developments take place in any of the Islamic crescent countries or populations, they would have to be shaped by Islam or at least some basis would have to be found for them in Islam. This applies even to the present secularist state in Turkey.

A great deal has happened both within the Islamic countries and populations and the global arrangement of international relations of which they are a part. The emergence of pan-Islamism in a reincarnated version as well as the growing, albeit staggered prosperity of certain West Asian countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, place them in a position of economic and ideological leadership. The rise of ideological and intellectual movements sponsored by the petro-wealth of the Arab countries that periodically seek to penetrate Islamic countries and populations around the world (Saudi Arabia's brand of strict Wahhabism is a case in point), though with varying degrees of success, are some of the recent developments that add fresh dimensions to understanding the nature of contemporary movements in the Islamic world (Ahmed, 1986).

A productive analysis of the interaction between Islam and the state of necessity focuses on the socio-historical and political developments in the Islamic countries and populations within the Islamic crescent, particularly against the backdrop of the recent wave of what is commonly described as Islamic 'fundamentalism' or 'militancy'. Such an analysis needs to locate the direction of the thrust of these developments. That is, whether they have been inclined towards reform, towards reaction or progression and the implications of these developments for Islam and Muslims.

Western academic scholarship on Islam no longer confine their focus of attention to Islam in the Arab world, often seen as the heartland of Islam, as has generally been the case with the tradition of Islamic scholarship in the English-speaking world. Undoubtedly developments taking place in the Arab world are part and parcel of the political struggle which characterizes that region as an aspect of its Islamic heritage.

There are broadly two perspectives or points of view which have dominated the study of Islamic history and developments in the Islamic countries and populations. The first sees Islamic history, and the contemporary developments in the Islamic world, as the unfolding of a common pattern imposed by the unity that Islam as a world religion is

supposed to signify and represent. The second sees Islamic history and developments within Islamic countries and populations as the working out of events under the force of existential conditions (*Ibid.*, p. xxii). In the former view, Islam is credited with an autonomous role in presuming that the developments which take place in the Islamic countries will ultimately flow from the potentialities of their faith, and that such developments must therefore remain limited within the framework defined by the fundamental orientations of Islam. In the latter view, individual Islamic countries and populations and the particular course of developments evinced by them are part and parcel of Islamic history only in the notional sense of relating to a country or people which professes Islam as a religious faith. It is conceded from this point of view that Islamic societies throughout the Islamic crescent, despite the unity imposed upon them by their common adherence to a universal religion, have both the potential and the possibility of pursuing distinctive careers shaped and ordered by their temporal conditions. Even if two or more Islamic societies experience similar developments or socio-economic manifestations—such as Egypt and Syria—distinctive existential conditions can be discerned that have prompted those developments rather than presuming that they have been stimulated by their common adherence to a unified faith. Even though this dichotomy of perspectives on the developments in Islamic countries and populations has been quite evident, its analytic implications have not been adequately appreciated and recognized. On the contrary, despite the difference in precisely how those developments worked themselves out in each individual case, the predominant tendency has been to see Islamic history—that is, the history of the whole Islamic world taken as a unity as well as the history and evolution of individual Islamic countries and populations—as the working out of a common pattern or design imposed by their common faith.

Carré (1986) places a great deal of emphasis on the unity and commonality of attitudes and sentiments that exists right across the Islamic world. In the Preface of his book he writes:

Apart from the great Sufi orders there is above all an international solidarity in what can be called the system of Islam. True, there is no clergy in Islam in the sense of a hierarchy endowed with the sacramental power of a Church founded on the belief in the incarnation of the Godhead. However, a personnel specifically trained in the duties of the doctrine does exist (in Carré and Dumont, eds, p. xxi).

In short, whatever is happening in the Islamic world, whether in its collective manifestations or in individual Islamic countries and populations, is a product of the commonality of attitudes and sentiments which Islam imposes (Ahmed, 1988, p. xxv).

Such a position is undoubtedly maintainable at a certain level of generalization and Carré is perfectly within his rights to lay particular stress on it as an essential background to individual case studies. However, analysis of individual case studies also comes as a sharp reminder to one that this unity and commonality of attitudes and sentiments breaks down beyond a certain general level. Each Islamic country or people has used Islam in a wide variety of mutually differing ways and not infrequently in the same country Islam has acted to serve contrary purposes. For example, Islam has served as an anchor to authoritarian rule as well as democratization; it has served as rationalization or justification for reform and change as well as a basis for return to a supposedly pristine version of the faith which is susceptible to collapse even before it has been adequately grasped. In other words, Islam is like a cloak which can be worn to suit all occasions (*Ibid.*, p. xxv).

To deal with Islam conceived as an abstraction, requires employing a prefix with a national label (e.g. Lebanese Islam, Senegalese Islam, Indonesian Islam, etc.), distinguishing several categories of Islam (e.g. Sufi Islam, Islam of the princes, clientele Islam and popular Islam, etc.), or relating Islam to the historical experience of the country with which it deals. What this really implies is that the particular context of the country, its unique historical experience, and the contemporary socio-economic or political circumstances are of singular significance in the discussion of Islam even as a world religion.

Islam has adapted itself to local cultures and conditions, and its salience in politics derives to a considerable extent from this adaptability rather than its ability to transform local cultures into any unified world image. Even while owing allegiance to the Islamic pillars and sharing a commonality of attitudes and outlook which such allegiance is susceptible of enforcing, the adherents are willing to continue this allegiance only to the extent that it does not threaten their cultural autonomy. Where there is potential of such threat, they have as much reacted against them as they have been unequivocal in proclaiming themselves to be good Muslims. Were it not so, we would not encounter so many currents and movements, each claiming to be Islamic and at the same time questioning the claim of the others to represent Islam. Indeed, the response of the Muslims to the attempts by the state to impose a reified version of Islam either through legal reforms or in the sphere of religious education, rituals and practices in the Malay Archipelago, West Africa, Senegal are good illustrations of this happening.

On the other hand Islam has served in many countries as the principal weapon with which the battle against too rapid secularization (such as attempts at liquidation of Islam in the former Central Asian socialist countries), modernization or even Westernization promoted by the state or outside forces has been fought. In situations where this has happened, resort seems to be taken to Islam conceived as an abstraction, but what has been used is again quite often an abstraction constructed out of the local religious tradition. Senegal, West Africa, Indonesia and the Central Asian former socialist countries illustrate this. Nowhere is the form of Islam actually used as such is found to be the same. Perhaps it is in this context that the theoretical distinction drawn by Grandguillaume (1988) between religion and culture acquires some relevance. Islam is both a religion and a culture. Unfortunately, in popular discussions of Islam this distinction is often not adequately recognized, and the two are seen as being one and the same thing or one making up the other. Even discussions of Islamic fundamentalism seem to have missed this with the rather predictable consequence that, while in each case the people involved have chosen to go back to or invoke the fundamental values of their culture according to which their daily lives are fashioned and lived, it has been presumed that what is being drawn upon is the fundamental value of Islam as a revealed religion. If such were indeed the case, we would not encounter the wide variations that we find in the different countries where Muslims are found to live in some numbers. Nor would we have cases of countries where the waves of fundamentalism have passed silently by without in any way touching or deeply moving the people. (India and Indonesia are good examples.) That this is indeed so suggests that Islamic fundamentalism is in each case an adaptive response to crisis situations and what form it assumes is determined in the ultimate analysis by the specific set of developments in each country as well as what repertoire Islam as a culture renders as fundamental in each particular case. It is Islamic only in name; its content is local and indigenous and draws sustenance from the salience of the threat visualized or perceived to their culture or way of life. Grandguillaume underlines this pointedly when he states:

Any reflection on Islam and politics must thus situate itself between two equally erroneous positions. The first would be to consider it as a corpus of rigid doctrines, from which ordinances flows directly. The second would be to make of it a more direct implement for the authority of a ruling class. These two viewpoints are the source of false questions such as those which consist in

asking whether Islam is progressive or reactionary, socialist or capitalist. Islam may cover all these questions, but in itself it cannot be reduced to any one of them (*Ibid.*, p. 32).

This has direct relevance to any careful exploration of the relationship of Islam to politics which has generally been seen, at least in popular discussions on the subject, as somehow being always oriented towards some kind of fundamentalism by the peculiar worldview of Islam.

We can ask whether the potentialities of Islam in either the conservative (fundamentalist) or the modernist (liberal-Muslim) direction are not ultimately a consequence of its historical relevance and generalizations which attribute to it a particular outlook or worldview or even potential are open to serious question. One point whose significance has often been missed out by those who write on Islam is the rather serious effort on the part of many predominantly Muslim countries to be secular states. Turkey is a prime example here. Nevertheless the state in such countries has had to make substantial concessions to 'fundamentalists' besides using Islam to justify secularism. Even so, the relevance of this for understanding the complexity of the relationship between Islam and politics and the nature of the developments in Muslim countries and populations is considerable. It goes to show that points of view which associate Islam too closely with theocracy or presume that Islam must necessarily and everywhere orient its adherents to a theocratic political framework have obvious limitations. More accurately, the situation in the Islamic countries and populations in the Islamic crescent is highly diverse in respect of the political model that they aspire to create or which they are confronted with in reality (*Ibid.*, p. 34).

Ultimately, whether the aspirations materialize and what particular model evolves in any one country or what potentialities it offers for future developments remains contingent upon its unique historical background, the interplay of social forces to which it has been exposed because of its immediate historical past, and whether or not some basis can be found for it in Islam. The picture in different Islamic countries and populations is highly clustered, and the forms that developments have assumed represent a wide spectrum. Some Islamic countries and populations are characterized by the rise of a strong Muslim nationalism, while in others zeal to defend Islam and a drive towards reviving Islamic glory and reinstating once again on earth the proud society of divine Islamic prescriptions is discernible. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a good example here. Again, in still others one encounters a deep frustration, a bitter disillusionment with secularism and modernization, resulting in a series of movements of fanatical outburst which their own Muslim governments have had to suppress: Egypt and Syria are good examples here. Each country's evolution is the result of global and local forces at work, highlighting that Islam in each case is at the same time one specific instance of Islam.

At the same time, Islam remains central to an understanding of their evolution. Indeed, an understanding of their evolution hinges very largely upon an appreciation of their Islamic quality. Were this not the case, it would be well impossible to discern something of a common pattern—enough at least to justify their characterization as Islamic—amidst the numerous diversities in the modern Muslim world. Therefore, the really significant question for assessing contemporary developments in the Islamic countries and populations turns ultimately on to what it is about Islam that gives those developments a distinctively Islamic complexion. Is it some kind of unity which Islam imposes as a unified worldview? Or, is it its ability to offer a repertoire for legitimization of political actions? In stressing the importance of ideas and moral values for the development of Islamic society the ideological question is fundamental for Pakistan, for

instance, but not because it is Muslim. Because it is Muslim, its ideals are Islamic. For other nations, ideals take other forms, for example in Senegal, Sudan, Iran or Turkey.

Islam and culture

While Islam, for millions of believers in the crescent, represents a religion, a faith, it is also a culture, a remodelling of a material and moral environment that provides markers for a specific identity. Foremost to be considered in Islam is its normative quality. Islam offers individuals the code they must submit to in their material and spiritual life, which allows them to adjust to the human environment they live in. In this sense a culture is a *law* imposed on the individual. Submission to this law, according to Grandguillaume:

takes place during the socialisation process by which Muslims renounce their individual nature in favour of Muslim conditioning which is the price of their integration. This is why individuals find advantage in this acceptance: namely to be recognised by the group whose laws they accept, to receive an identity from them (Ibid., p. 32).

A law is not an independent entity: in real life, every law is the law of a group, of a community or of an individual embodying it. Islam, the law of Allah, means 'submission' to his authority. However, from a historical viewpoint, the law of Islam has always referred back to a representative (Caliph) or to a community. The absence of a supreme authority of a papal kind has had as a result the multiplication of the places that actually embody the law. Islam likes to refer to the community of believers which are the guarantors of its orthodoxy (*Ijma*): in practical application, it refers to the many real communities and their representatives.

Islam embodies a law, but this law is not structurally acting alone, but expresses in concrete historical forms the law of a social group holding power. If Islam is not an empty framework, if it is the repository of fundamental principles, it is capable of transcribing the law of quite different authoritating powers, ranging from the most traditional to the most progressive regimes. Islam is thus capable of legitimizing a political authority.

Whether in the eyes of the masses or of the elite groups, Islam appears in great swathes of the Islamic crescent as the root-source of all legitimization. Although not always explicitly stated, this corresponds to the conviction that, at the very least, no government should be granted recognition in the event of it repudiating or opposing some essential truth such as the affirmation of oneness of Allah or the authenticity of the mission of his Prophet Muhammad. This is a fundamental principle in that it precedes any organizational or legal structure which might put it into practical application. There exists, moreover, between the two levels of principle and application, a series of 'cultural mechanisms' which are universally used by Islam in relationship to power.

These cultural mechanisms are represented by two structures, one of which expresses the superiority of knowledge over ignorance. This is the opposition *'ilm-juhl*; the other expresses the superiority gained by the struggle for the Islamic faith or *jihad*.

In its fundamental sense, the notion of 'science' or 'learning' (*ilm*) is an essential part of knowledge of true religion, of the single path revealed by Allah to his Prophet Muhammad. It is in this sense that it is often quoted in the Qur'an and it has been consecrated as such. The antithesis is the notion of *juhl* which stands for ignorance, particularly ignorance of the true faith, and this is how it appears in the term *jahiliya* which is applied to the period preceding Islam.

The term *jihad* refers to a struggle for the faith, a holy struggle. This may be understood in a general sense as a protective measure which consists in shunning all contact with non-Muslims. But it signifies above all a positive, holy struggle, and it is this conception to which Islamic history testifies.

The struggle for independence in the three countries of North-west Africa, the Maghreb, for instance, was made into *jihad*. The exile of the Sultan of Morocco Mohammed V and his return in 1955 were understood in this sense. The official title of the Tunisian President is 'Supreme Combatant', *al-mujahid al-akbar*, and the Algerian resistance fighters were called *mujahidin*. The use of these terms is significant. It reveals the superiority granted to anyone defending Islam, and it is liable to mobilize the masses and to legitimize the holder of power by this title.

These two notions of *ilm* and *jihad* represent the two channels through which Islam continues to concern the authorities in North-west Africa (Ibid., p. 36), especially in Algeria.

In recent times, Islamic culture has come into conflict with two cultures: one is the popular culture of the area, the other is the Western culture introduced by colonization. The first is particularly connected to the mechanism of '*ilm*', the second to that of *jihad*. Local traditional cultures (re)present a pre-Islamic substratum. 'Ignorance', moreover, correlates with a language that is at the oral stage. Islamic culture, rooted in the written language, the holder of 'learning', has the advantage of recognized superiority which can easily be transformed into power. This power, faced with the popular culture, can draw on Islam as a rational element, in contrast to the practices and intermediary beliefs, which are so frowned upon by the Islamic religious establishment—e.g. Shamanistic practices in Central Asia and African religious practices in North-west African culture.

On the other hand, Western culture was introduced into large areas of the Islamic crescent, including North-west Africa and South-east Asia, by colonization and is maintained there by development models adopted by the independent states. In the Malay Archipelago, for instance, it is present in the institutions, the media, and the economy, but also in the internalization of values differing from those of Islam. Faced with this foreign culture, Islam can adopt one of two situations: adaptation or rejection. The first is that of the modernizing tendency which would integrate certain Western values into Islam. This trend stresses the importance of rationalism and science, sometimes going so far as to adopt 'Islamic nationalism', or 'Islamic socialism' as a section of the membership of the Iranian socialist Trud did. This position receives support from the different governments, which obliged as they are to seek the help of the West for the continuance of their development programmes, try to integrate Western values, amalgamating Islamic and Western rationalism in a common revaluation of science. Use is made of Islam to legitimize the national government.

The second position makes Islam the pole of difference. This is the position adopted by the leaders in their struggle for independence—the mechanism of *jihad*. Its logical aim is to build a society different from Western society, as the Taliban movement in Afghanistan is trying. However, as this has not proven possible in the Malay Archipelago and indeed the Maghreb, this position is adopted by those who have been marginalized in the development process and who, realizing their exclusion, find in Islam the watchword of difference and of rejection of a foreign system. This reaction often materializes in fundamentalist movements such as the Muslim Brothers, which are found everywhere in North-west Africa, Al-Gama'a in southern Egypt, Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda group, and in Pakistan and Kashmir the Harakat ul-Mujaheddin (HUM) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria, and Hizbollah (Islamic Jihad) in the Lebanon.

Thus Islam can add weight to the process of legitimization of power, but may equally serve as the rallying-cry for those who reject this power.

It is as a culture that Islam is concerned with identity and power. The socialization process that fits every individual into a particular society consists in accepting the law of a group, its culture, and in being recognized by this group as one of its members, in receiving from them an identity. Culture is thus the exchange of submission for the recognition of identity: it is in this sense that it can be said that every culture is a law.

This law which is contained in Islam, as in any other culture, is an element which any government is well advised to attach to itself. This is what has happened in the states of North-west Africa: in Morocco with brilliant success, in Tunisia more discreetly, in Algeria with extreme difficulty and in Malaysia with relative ease.

This Islamic identity, on which these states play, is a notion which is profoundly felt but, while it may have wide coverage, its meaning is weak; it may accommodate itself to the most diverse contents, from heightened religiosity to professions of atheism. It refers back to the great Islamic community (*umma*), but above all to its concrete manifestations which are the ethnic group, the region, the town. The various political authorities have tried to make it coincide with the nation. This will certainly be the final outcome but, in the meantime, this new reference sometimes sparks off conflicts linked to the perception of different identities. This is so, for instance, for the ‘Berber problem’ in Algeria or the ‘Alevi problem’ in Turkey. Whether we are dealing with legitimization of authority or with perception of identity, finally, Islam is a culture which concerns the political authorities throughout the crescent.

Islam and globalization

A pivotal question at this junction is whether the associated religious and cultural implications of globalization are officially accepted in the Islamic crescent along with its material accompaniments. Although this question cannot yet be answered with any conviction, the early indications are that by and large globalization is neither accepted nor rejected wholesale in the Islamic crescent, but is instead received differently in its various spheres. The technological components of globalization tend to be accepted almost uncritically while its underlying economic institutional features are more partially and conditionally embraced, as shown by the complicated progress of privatization—Uzbekistan is a good example here. The political and cultural aspects of globalization are more hotly contested. While it is true that the neo-liberal ideology embedded within globalization brings with it new identities, values, and norms that potentially challenge prevailing institutions and sources of power, the tendency to adapt positively to such challenges is at least as pronounced as the tendency to retrench (Blum, 2000). Most of the Muslim states in the Islamic crescent undoubtedly accept the material benefits which they believe closer relations with the EU will bring—Morocco is a good example here, as is Turkey with its Customs Union agreement with the EU. But globalization can skew the overall relationship between the EU and the Islamic crescent.

According to Blum, globalization has three major components: (1) Conditions: openness (political-institutional and infrastructural); (2) Process: flows (of capital, people, goods, information, and ideas); (3) Outcomes: convergence, in terms of technical harmonization, social organization, popular culture, and norms (and to some extent, local particularism as well).

However, and in addition to its major components or categories, the *character* of globalization is also important. The cluster of norms and functional institutions embedded within it include private property, free trade and movement, government

enforcement but limited government interference, and basic individual rights. In short, globalization involves the spread of essentially neo-liberal institutions and behaviours. Globalization on the other hand may simply mean ‘Americanization’ or the intensification of capitalist-driven worldwide social relations.

Currents of global integration are already working their way through the Islamic crescent. The process is enormously uneven, and to the extent that it is taking place this tends to be concentrated in certain areas within Turkey, Morocco, Kazakstan, and Azerbaijan. A number of intriguing developments are underway.

More nebulously, it is possible to observe shifts in attitudes and aesthetics consistent with further globalization. The West in general, and America in particular, are generally considered the avatars of modernity in terms of urban development, hard power, standard of living, and sense of style. Therefore Western—or globalized—modes of physical infrastructure and spatial organization are increasingly imitated within the Islamic crescent, such as building styles, parking lots, and advertising techniques.

Nevertheless, for all the ideological conflict inherent in globalization, for the most part Samuel Huntington’s vision of struggle between monolithic ‘civilizations’ is less in evidence than the struggle among multiple, competing constructions of the relationship between meaning and material life. To a significant extent this is simply a novel form of a deeply traditional political struggle over wealth and status, marked by sharply competing normative claims over state-building, state–society relations, and the ongoing quest for legitimacy. As always, this is a struggle which takes place as much within as between nations or ‘civilizations’.

According to Blum what is distinctly new, though, is the growing inability to sequester domestic politics or shield them from unwanted external influences. Naturally this does not keep the state from trying to do so. In Iran and Turkmenistan, such efforts take the form of pervasive, anachronistic and, ultimately, self-defeating bids to filter information and starkly restrict access to the outside world. In contrast, in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Morocco and Kazakstan the state has essentially bowed to the dictates of globalization. There, government officials increasingly attempt to associate traditional symbols of cultural identity with their own, often highly non-traditional political and development programmes.

While it is not within the EU’s power to orchestrate and ensure convivial domestic politics in these countries, it is within the EU’s power to ‘help foster the macroeconomic and infrastructural framework within which such developments may occur on their own’ (Blum, 2000). The effect on the countries of the crescent will undoubtedly vary. But with the decline of the power of nation-state to forge identity in the face of globalization, notions of Islamic identity may now have to be (re)negotiated.

Now nation-states are no longer as important as global cities, such as London, New York or Tokyo, which have become centres of corporate organizations and ‘the strategic nodes in corporate networks’ (Robins, 1997). National identity within the crescent may well weaken in the face of third wave internationalism.

But globalization does not simply represent a ‘freeing’ of particular phenomena from the narrow confines of identity and/or nationality. On the contrary, it has to negotiate, and come to terms with particular local contexts and constraints. The understanding of what the concept of ‘Europeanness’ or ‘Islamicism’ represents may be viewed quite differently. The relationship between Europe and the Islamic crescent’s vision of national culture is of central importance here.

The homogenizing process of globalization simultaneously reinforces diversity. However much the Muslim citizens in the Islamic crescent postulate one view of ‘Europeanness’, there exists a multiplicity of viewpoints as to what this concept actually

represents. This may be perceived as a (re)assertion of cultural difference and distinction in the face of globalizing tendencies. It is important to take account of the complex relationship between the global and the local, which allows for the construction or preservation of new transnational, national and sub-national cultural identities. Notwithstanding, Muslim perceptions of Europe confer on a major point: that it represents a modern, efficient set of political and economic institutions. Europe with North America, moreover, represents the West—the civilization that Mustafa Kemal wanted Turkey to ‘aspire’ to. On the other hand, the thorny, exploitative core–periphery relationship between the West and the Islamic crescent is continually focused upon.

In the Islamic crescent in recent years it has become necessary for political elites to resist potential threats to the project of modernity (excluding Afghanistan). But globalization encourages multiple popular identities, and modernity and nationalism are threatened from globalizing trends and high technologies of the market. One of these popular identities is a new form of Islamic modernism combining industrial and cultural expansion with a regulation of social life that would ultimately guarantee the constitution of a ‘virtuous society’ (Atasoy, 1996; Magnarella, 1998). To counteract these possible dangers nationalist Muslim intellectuals in, for example, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have forged a new consensus that makes communication across socio-political divides possible while upholding the universal principles of truth and justice encapsulated in a nationalist discourse.

At this point, it might be asked: exactly whose ‘universal principles of truth and justice’ are being described here? The answer is fairly straightforward; such principles were located, according to Raw (1998), ‘in the cultural products of European modernity’. In recent years, however, universalism has been equated with modernism, promoting respect for and loyalty to the nation-state. Whereas contemporary European identity may encourage respect for local and regional cultures at the expense of the specifically national, many academics in the Islamic crescent prefer to approach such developments through the ‘universal principles of truth and justice’, embodied in the nationalist project. They may appear to be resisting, rather than accepting Western values.

The word ‘seems’ is important here. To analyse these Muslim academics on this basis is to assume, once again, that Western modernity (or, in this case, postmodernity) occupies the centre of the world system. Selected arts of the modernist project are still alive and well in the Islamic crescent (excepting once again Afghanistan) which should remind us that the ‘liberation’ associated with Western values can also be experienced as a threat and a force of disintegration.

Several factors have contributed to the fragmentation of Muslim society—the rise of radical Islam, the presence of nationalism, and globalization. It is the cultural policy makers’ responsibility to restore confidence in the nationalist project by eliminating such ‘threats’. On the one hand, they have re-emphasized universal human values, particularly the value of tolerance and consensus; on the other hand, they have stressed the importance of the nation. Both approaches may be considered parochial by European standards; from the Muslim-state perspective, they represent a continuing commitment to modernism.

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Notes

1. The Turkish leader of the Virtue Party said, 'the headscarf ban was not a matter for religious belief but rather a human rights issue', *Turkish Daily News*, 11 September 1998, *AIL*. See also Narli (1999).