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ABSTRACT

“Global Identity of the Muslim World: The Legacies of the
Late 19th Century Intellectual History”

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In the current global debate on *Islam and the West*, it is rarely recognized that, even though the Islamic faith tradition has played an important role in the lives of Muslims throughout history, the idea of *the Muslim world* and the notion of an Islamic civilization are modern constructs whose origins can only be traced back to the crisis of an imperial world order in the second half of the 19th century. What are the roots, content and evolution of the idea of *the Muslim world*, and how did it gain its contemporary global recognition, paradoxically in a world order composed of nation states?” This paper argues that the discourses on *the Muslim world* are neither just the legacy of basic belief requirement, nor an invention of Cold War era Islamism. The modern idea of *the Muslim world* emerged in the second half of the 19th century, in a context of an imperial legitimacy crisis and rapid economic globalization. The fact that a transnational identity of *Muslim* emerged by the turn of the 20th century was no exception in world history, because other global identities, such as “white,” “Western,” “Asian,” “black” or “Christian” developed around the same time due to what I call the *geopolitization of globalization*. This paper outlines the origins of the transnational Muslim identity and its imperial context in the last quarter of the 19th century, and emphasizes its parallels with Pan-Asian, Pan-African, Pan-Slavic, Jewish, and white/colored race identities. For background, the paper delves into the conceptions of world cultures, history and universalism in medieval Muslim intellectual traditions, especially among the educated elites of Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal Empires. The writings of two cosmopolitan travelers, Ibn Batuta (14th century) and Evliya Çelebi (17th century), will be used to illustrate how pre-19th century conceptions of Muslim space, history and diversity were still far from the modern notions of Islamic civilization and geopolitics. While showing the development of a 19th century global consciousness about Muslim identity, and the importance of Ottoman imperial visions in this process, this paper also examines the impact of the 18th century tradition of religious renewal and Salafism or the general Islamic tradition of theology, law and mysticism, on anti-colonial Muslim thinkers.