

ian suicide bombers on Israel's streets, and the inevitable human cost in retribution exacted by Israel against the various Palestinian militias..." (p. 36). The source used here is taken from an article written by Uzi Rabi, the director of an Israeli think tank named Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. This think tank is an organization that evaluates events –as can be predicted– from an Israeli perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This may create a skewed perception of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

for a person who lacks previous knowledge about the topic.

Fraternal Enemies: Israel and The Gulf Monarchies can be a useful book for anyone interested in the ties between the Gulf countries, Iran, the U.S., and Israel, especially for academics, students, and politicians, with its rich use of academic resources. Such an in-depth study on the secret agreements between Israel and the Gulf monarchies will greatly contribute to the literature.

The Middle East from Empire to Sealed Identities

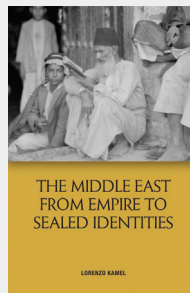
By Lorenzo Kamel

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Reviewed by Fikriye Karaman, Samsun University

Challenging the discourse of the 'medievalisation' of the Middle East Lorenzo Kamel's book *The Middle East from Empire to Sealed Identities* provides an understanding of the historical process through which complex, flexible, and multifaceted identities of the Ottoman Empire transformed into the ones of simplified, politicized, and homogenized. Composed of seven chapters in addition to the introduction and conclusion the book mainly focuses on the 'long 19th century' (1798-1922).

In the first chapter, Kamel contextualizes major concepts including tribe and tribalism, sect and sectarianism, and the Middle East, by deconstructing their simplified and loaded versions. In the following three chapters, he examines the three 'moments,' junctures, of the 19th century that served to the emergence of competing ethno-religious visions. The first mo-



ment consisted of the rising up of nationalism amongst Ottoman Christians of the Balkans and the 'opening process' of the Ottoman markets to European powers. A phase ignited by Muhammed Ali's invasion of Greater Syria and more importantly 'imperialism of free trade.'

The second moment was *Tanzimat* (1839-1871), a period when the Ottoman Empire undertook wide-ranging reforms, the majority of which were legal and administrative. Yet, regarding it as a factor that contributed to the politicization of the ethno-religious differences Kamel focuses on the concept of *wataniyyah* (patriotism) that was introduced for solidifying state and society relations. This period also witnessed the convergence of interests of missionaries and Christian Arabs in Syria and Lebanon creating networks through which Western powers "imposed their politi-

cal, commercial, and cultural influence” (p. 72), which in turn sharpened the ethno-religious identities and gave rise to proto-Arab nationalism.

Another aspect of the second moment is Ottomanism, supranational ideology “providing political freedom and equality in exchange for loyalty to the Empire from all its citizens” (p. 8). Although he does not thoroughly explain how and why it resulted in such side effects, if it did so, Kamel argues that Ottomanism sharpened religious identities and increased ethnic-linguistic awareness among the Ottoman communities. After providing anecdotes about the distant past in which inclusive Ottoman citizenship was rooted particularly in the relations between Jews and Muslims, he makes a quick conclusion and says that “Ottomanism soon became associated with the danger of erasing differences, and for this was highly feared by a wide range of non-Muslim and non-Turk Ottomans” (p. 84).

Rather than making such sweeping statements and reducing the issue into a Muslim and non-Muslim or non-Turk conflict, one needs to have a nuanced approach to examine the implications of Ottomanism and the Ottoman Empire reforms. The late Ottoman history was long associated with Ottomanism as a ‘failed’ ideology for holding multiethnic Ottoman society intact. However, “Ottomanism was inherently immune to constructing ‘internal others’ because its primary focus was the political attachment to the state.”¹ Recent studies demonstrate that there were various interpretations of Ottomanism. Different ethno-religious groups adopted and reformulated it in different ways.² Thus Ottomanism cannot simply be considered a state ideology having a single meaning and motivation. Furthermore, the policy of centralization and standardization of laws and practices across

the empire needs to be taken into account for examining the problems of the state and society relations in the late Ottoman milieu.

The author’s account of the late Ottoman history has other problematic aspects too. Abdülhamid II is represented as the sultan who “blocked the reformist process” (p. 67). Although it differed from *Tanzimat* in some respects, the Hamidian regime “continued many of the same reforms.”³ With no convincing explanation Kamel asserts that the Ottoman reformist era, “proved, to a large extent, to be a failure” (p. 69). Although *Tanzimat* reforms were partially carried out, the Ottoman Empire accomplished astonishing improvement in terms of the central and provincial administration, state centralization, standardization of bureaucracy, judiciary, military, citizenship and property rights, monetization of the economy, transportation and communication against the backdrop of chronic economic crisis, multiple external threats, and internal turmoil.⁴ It is true that the reforms, particularly the ones introduced in 1856, yielded unintended consequences, and despite all the efforts to achieve the balance they could not satisfy everyone. However, the extreme complexity and diversity of the Ottoman population require a much more analytical and complex way of dealing with it than the one used in this book. Furthermore, Kamel refers to “discriminatory policies implemented by the Young Turks with the aim of promoting full assimilation...these included the removal of a number of Arab public figures from prominent positions” (p. 98). On the contrary, Arabs were aggressively recruited to official posts and proportionally represented in the parliament under the Young Turks.⁵

After covering the Ottoman background Kamel proceeds to discuss the wartime and post-WWI settlement. Chapter 5 provides details,

a little too much, about the process of framing the Balfour Declaration, which created a Jewish national home in Palestine. Because of its perception of the land 'in racial and/or ethno-sectarian terms,' Kamel takes the Balfour as a pattern for explaining the identity configuration in the region. The Balfour indeed had a great impact on the creation of the modern Middle East yet it cannot serve as the only formula to sort out identity problems in the region.

Having almost no discussion on the transformation of identities Chapter 6 recounts the victors' partitioning of the Ottoman territories in the aftermath of WWI and their use of the League of Nations for legitimacy. As part of this process, mandate regimes were established in the Arabian Peninsula. In accordance to the post-WWI Treaty of Lausanne, significant numbers of Orthodox Christians from Türkiye and Muslims from Greece were exchanged. Oddly enough, this is the only place, other than a brief comment on Kurds (p. 29), where the book refers to the people of Türkiye who suffered no less than their Arab counterparts when it comes to the issue of identity. Indeed, no research on the issue of identity in the Middle East would be complete without due consideration of the Turkish national identity.

Providing valuable anecdotes about the heterogeneity of identities, peaceful coexistence of diverse groups under the Ottoman rule, and the involvement of European powers in the process of sealing the identities during the 19th century, Lorenzo Kamel's book challenges the essentialized and ahistorical notions of identity in the Middle East. This is a feat in itself. However, concentrating on Palestine, to a lesser extent Greater Syria and touching briefly on Iraq, the book does not cover much of the Middle East thus falling short of readers' expectation for a fuller picture of the region.

An equally problematic aspect of the book is its mere focus on the 19th century to explore the roots of the present conflicts in the region, which seems to attribute much, if not all, of the responsibility to the Ottoman context. By doing so, it reconstructs the Ottoman past through the national present to narrate a linear history of the nationalization of Middle Eastern identities while trying to deconstruct essentialist identity narratives of the Middle East. Instead of jumping from the immediate aftermath of WWI to the present, the author should have also engaged with the parameters of the 20th century, which have been substantially contributing to the homogenization of diversities, the construction of problematic national identities, and causing chronic crises in the region.

Endnotes

1. Serhun Al, "Young Turks, Old State: The Ontological (In)security of the State and the Continuity of Ottomanism," in *War and Collapse*, p. 156.
2. Kerem Tınaz, "An Imperial Ideology and Its Legacy: Ottomanism in a Comparative Perspective, 1894-1928," (PhD. diss., University of Oxford, 2018); Stefano Taglia, "Ottomanism, Then & Now," *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 56, No. 3-4 (2016); Masayuki Ueno, "For the Fatherland and the State: Armenians Negotiate the Tanzimat Reform," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2013), pp. 93-109; Julia Phillips Cohen, "Between Civic and Islamic Ottomanism: Jewish Imperial Citizenship in The Hamidian Era," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2012); Sia Anagnostopoulou, "The 'Nation' of the Rum Sings of the Sultan: The Many Faces of Ottomanism," in Lorans Tanatar Baruh and Vangelis Kechriotis (eds.), *Economy and Society on Both Shores of the Aegean, Historical Archives*, (Athènes: Alpha Bank, 2010), pp. 79-105; Ussama Makdisi, "After 1860: Debating Religion, Reform, and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2002), pp. 601-617.
3. Carter Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789-2007*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 150.
4. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 208.
5. Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).