

- Muhammed Hüseyin Mercan (ed.), *Transformation of the Muslim World in the 21st Century*, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, xi+174 p.

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The post-9/11 Muslim world witnessed diverse but significant transitions and transformations, among them such eye-catching episodes as the unfolding of the so-called war on terror used to justify the invasion and subsequent occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, followed by what is popularly known as the Arab Spring and other sorts of socio-economic and religio-political changes. Moreover, not only have these events and episodes engendered some vital structural changes, but they have also brought many Muslim nation-states to the edge of a political, economic, and security crisis. At the same time, a great deal of literature has been produced on socio-political change and continuity in this vast region.

Keeping this in view, Muhammed Hüseyin Mercan's edited *Transformation of the Muslim World in the 21st Century* is a fresh and updated work that offers a theoretico-historical and, in many chapters, a case study analysis of the various dimensions of change seen within these societies. The book is actually a collection of high-quality research works and papers written and presented by some of the budding scholars and intellectuals during an international ILEM (Scientific Studies Society, İlmi Etudler Merkezi) summer school program. Its main objective is to examine, explain, and understand the massive changes that the Muslim world has experienced in both regional and global terms. Therefore, it comprehensively discusses "the processes of change and transformation that the Muslim world is currently encountering" (p. viii). The book comprises of ten chapters preceded by, among others, a Foreword and Acknowledgements, and followed by a Note on Contributors and Index.

Kaya and Mercan's joint opening chapter 'Rethinking Islamism Through Political', highlights, while discussing the phenomenon of what they call "Islamism," the significance of defining and explaining its ideological orientation in the context of 'political' instead of 'politics'. The chapter starts with a concise description how a 'Western oriented local leadership', say Mustafa Kemal, Reza Shah, Habib Bourguiba, and others transformed the Muslim world during the 20th century. They argue that these leaders' secularization and modernization efforts, which were designed to destroy the traditional sphere, actually led to the emergence of a vibrant Islamic political thought/discourse (p. 2). The chapter's main focus is on how to understand Islamism's narrative and dynamism in a better way so that a vital alternative can be provided.

Secular and secularization are important variables when it comes to explaining and exploring socio-political developments in the Muslim world. Chapter 2, titled 'On the Concept of the Secular: Some Reflections' which is broadly divided into three sections, reflects deeply upon the meaning and concept of Secular. While conceptualizing and critically analyzing the region's political dimensions, Muhammad Ali Nasir endeavors to re-cast the thought,

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ideology, and discourse of Maulana Maududi, a dynamic 20th-century figure. As its chief objective is to define, explain, and contextualize the concept of the secular, the author deals with some of the significant tangible features related to this concept. According to him, 'secular' is not simply a description of politics, rather a thorough reading of the world wherein the arguments of the influential theorists regarding it can be analyzed in the context of the transcendental and the immanent (pp. 17-18).

Another fine chapter on the Islam-democracy discourse is provided by Tauseef Ahmad Parray, who examines several of its axes while emphasizing on the post-9/11 period and the Arab Spring. This uprising, which was ignited by events in Tunisia, brought regime change and, to a certain extent, a 'democratic storm' that swept across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The author, however, correctly maintains that it would be naïve to claim that these popular mobilizations have truly brought democracy, given what happened in Egypt during 2013. On the one hand, he mainly limits his discussion to Tunisia, and, on the other hand, analyzes Rachid Al-Ghannouchi's views about Islamic democracy. Both tangibles are important to any study of these new waves, because only Tunisia managed to remove its long-ruling dictator and establish a democratic government. Besides, Al-Ghannouchi is the most famous living political thinker who is also such an active participant in this ongoing discourse.

The Arab Spring, which surprised one and all, represents a mixture of failure and success. The many complexities produced by this historical event range from authoritarian breakdown and authoritarian continuity to the varying degree of post-Arab Spring religio-political transformations in the MENA region and beyond. These varying complexities are comprehensively addressed by the chapters of Azzedine Azzimani, Hani Albasoos, and Markos Troulis.

Azzimani's welcome contribution discusses the major paradoxes of the Arab Spring, especially the varying dimensions of Islamism, post-Islamism, and power politics. For example, he attempts to answer such questions as why did Islamist movements assume power during this transitional period, what can we deduce from this, and are Islamists an objective outcome of the Arab Spring? The author also analyzes the emergence of Islamism's new ideological orientation, referred to as "post-Islamism," which, he opines, refers to the mutation within Islamism that emphasizes religiosity and rights (p. 93). Albasoos chapter, on the other hand, deals with different political transitions and transformations in the Middle East. Amid navigating some of the region's unprecedented and astonishing events, he mainly concentrates upon the background, as well as the casual causes and consequences, of the Arab Spring through the regional perspective.

The MENA region, which continues to be on the edge, is experiencing tremendous developments, especially in the post-Arab Spring period. The emergence of Islamic groups, as the dominant political entities through the democratic process reflects the fact that the protestors were not only demanding freedom and dignity, but also calling for a greater role of the Islamic value system. Troulis makes this facet conspicuous in chapter 8, where he discusses at length the possibility of a religion-politics synthesis in the Middle East by opining that "In all but one of the sovereign states with a clear Muslim majority, Islam is the state religion ... [which] means that as far as democracy is linked to the people's expression

of free will, the basic Islamic constituent of Middle Eastern societies is [also] expressed" (pp. 117-118). In this regard, Troulis has analyzed Turkey's model because in the contemporary geo-political scenario, the country is very often seen as a model for the MENA region given that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey has successfully welded together the currents of modernity, secularism, and Islam.

One of the fine chapters in this book relates the experience of 'democracy' and 'development' in Pakistan, the world's second largest Muslim country (Indonesia is the first). In its first section, Muhammad Faisal Awan critically maps out the dominant discourse of the post-World War II period. He maintains that the reputed and renowned academics and social scientists have developed theoretical models wherein they have attempted unabatedly "to make democracy and development *the* ultimate ideals" in the world (p. 132). The following sections focus on Pakistan as a case study and the impact of Western liberal views on its internal discourse by highlighting its encounter with democracy and development, as well as the multifarious challenges in this regard, from the post-colonial period up to and including the present day.

Other excellent chapters discuss and address many important facets of the Muslim world. In sum, *Transformation of the Muslim World in the 21st Century* is both quantitatively and qualitatively an insightful and valuable work that offers a comprehensive picture of the diverse and significant transformations of the Muslim world's socio-political and religious setting. The book is, therefore, a valuable treasure for all those interested in comprehending the dynamism of Middle Eastern politics and beyond.