

Religion and Representation

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Islam and Democracy

Edited by

Ingrid Mattson, Paul Nesbitt-Larking
and Nawaz Tahir

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INTRODUCTION

PAUL NESBITT-LARKING

Religion and Representation brings together a diversity of voices and perspectives on a matter of immediate and pressing global concern. The contributions gathered in this volume range from the theological to the secular and scientific, from academic to reflection and opinion pieces, and from the empirical and descriptive to the normative and prescriptive. Many of the chapters and contributions were originally presented as conference papers, but a few have been added from contributors who were unable to attend the original conference.

The origin of most of the contributions to the volume is a three-day conference held in the Faculty of Law at the University of Western Ontario from March 23 to 25, 2012. The conference itself represented the culmination of about three years of planning. A small committee of London, Ontario, community members and academics had come together to respond to a need to examine the status of democracy in Muslim-majority countries. The committee was remarkable in at least two respects: first, it represented a genuine and from-the-ground-up integration of community concerns and academic enquiry; second, it set in place an exciting interdisciplinary opportunity that was to see theologians, sociologists, political scientists, artists, historians, and others come together around a common theme of democracy in the Islamic world. The fruits of the various encounters over those three days, in addition to subsequent correspondence and meetings, have generated the present volume. The chapters represent a broad range of innovative and striking interpretations that bring together theology, history, social science, philosophy, and acute social observation.

While the presenters at the conference came from twelve different countries and the conference attendees had roots in dozens of countries, both the location of the conference and the academic departments from which they came are in the West. Almost inevitably, there is a Western “Muslim minority” as well as a “Muslim majority” perspective throughout

the book. Those contributions that are set in the West, however, are strongly oriented to the overall Muslim-majority focus of the project. A distinctively Canadian orientation to the world can also be seen threaded throughout some of the chapters. Given the setting of the conference, this is again understandable. The merging of Muslim-minority and Muslim-majority perspectives reflects the new reality of global connections at the level of both state and society in which it is becoming decreasingly possible to hold the two worlds apart, even for analytical purposes. What happens in Tahrir Square or Taksim Square is often relayed to hand-held receiving devices in Canada, France, or Australia before it has been fully conveyed to those standing at the edges of the crowds on the ground. In this regard, perhaps, originating places are of decreasing importance.

There is a fissure in Islamic Studies between those writing about Islam from within the Islamic tradition and those contributing from a social scientific approach. The current volume deliberately avoids privileging one set of voices over the other and, in so doing, explores the points of encounter and dialogue between them. From the continuities and discontinuities as well as the tensions and mutualities that emerge from the contributions in this volume, it is possible to draw two broad conclusions: first, from a theological perspective, there is much in Islam that supports and encourages forms of democracy; second, the ideals and practices of Muslims worldwide are no less democratic than those of others.

The focus of Islam and democracy is not only timely, it is also highly political and controversial. There is a great deal in the pages of this volume to arouse controversy, and so we have undertaken a more extended and critical conclusion than might be seen in other volumes of this kind. The conclusion reflects the challenges and opportunities afforded for learning and intellectual growth that arise from bringing a diversity of sincere but disparate voices together in dialogue.

The remainder of this introduction sets the prospectus for the book. In the next section, a series of notes and comments reflect those elements of the conference that guided the dialogue but are not directly represented in this volume. These ideas and perspectives include those of keynote speakers and special presenters. In the final section of the introduction, each chapter is introduced and described in brief. Many of these chapter descriptions are further enriched by the inclusion of certain insights made by the authors in the conference itself.

The Conference

In their commentaries on Islam and democracy, a common theme runs through the summaries in this section: the very question of the compatibility of Islam and democracy is complex and nuanced, and each of the speakers makes a point of countering popular views of Islam as a necessarily anti-democratic theology. Challenging essentialist and binary viewpoints, the speakers seek to open up both interpretations of Islamic scripture and law as well as the practices of Muslim-majority states. Moreover, they raise post-colonial questions of the orientalist stereotyping of Muslim women as well as the Manichaean stereotyping of the West as wholly virtuous. A number of the speakers make reference to Western strategic support for tyrannies and authoritarian regimes in Muslim-majority countries.

Prefiguring a contrast developed by Armajani, al-Sayyed, and others in the volume, Muhammed al-Atawneh, from the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, presented a paper on theological interpretations of the extent to which Islam and democracy are compatible. He outlined two broad perspectives. The first, supported by Wahhabis and the Salafists, is that sovereignty is entirely in the hands of God and therefore that men should not participate or innovate in democracy beyond obedience to divine legislation as revealed to Muhammad. In this way, the sole purpose of government in Islamic states is to promote shari'a. Democracy beyond these criteria is a Western imposition. The second and contrary interpretation is to argue that the Qur'an is, in the end, a matter of pen and ink and so is always necessarily open to human interpretation. For this reason, jurists cannot agree on the relationship between the divine and the mundane. Going even further, some scholars argue that God does not seek to control each aspect of human life and so humankind is free in these areas as long as dignity and integrity is maintained. Theological principles of Islam in fact support and encourage democracy, notably the emphasis on human equality. The superiority of one person offends submission to God. Emerging models of Islamic democracy are neither fully theocratic nor democratic in the Western sense. They are nomocracies, grounded in a certain set of principles and laws, which necessarily react to existing Western models of democracy as they adapt and shape new democratic regimes.

Hakimul Ikhwan, a sociologist from the University of Essex, UK, presented a paper on the transition to democracy in Indonesia, specifying

developments since the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998. Over the course of the subsequent six years, a multi-party system was established that enhanced women's political participation and saw a withdrawal of the military from political life. Ikhwan also noted that according to its freedom index, Freedom House classifies Indonesia as the only completely free country among the ASEAN states. Against this backdrop, he raised the challenges of inter- and intra-religious conflicts, evidenced in the rise of Islamism, religious conflicts in the Moluccas, shari'a protests, and the planting of over twenty bombs, including the Bali bombs, since 1999. In the context of this complex evolving Islamic democracy, Ikhwan identified three core problems in existing research literature on Islam and democracy: first, complex realities are often presented in an essentialist and binary manner; second, the Muslim world is oversimplified; and, third, the interpretation of Islamic texts is diverse and has resulted, in certain places, with Islamism encouraging and promoting forms of democracy. In order to study these matters further, Ikhwan interviewed sixty Indonesian Muslims for an average of an hour and a half per interview. He discovered that the early democratic movements were centred on achieving local power in order to promote Islamic morality and to bring shari'a principles into local legislation. These struggles took place at the level of the regime and the legal system, systems of actor networks, and at the level of individual agency. His principal conclusion was that political Islam in Indonesia has been both contesting and concurring with democratic developments. Contestation has centred around opposition to a history of abusive and repressive democracy and the current domination of Indonesian democracy by large-scale capitalists. Concurrence with democracy has taken shape in the context of political Islam weakening previously hegemonic structures while allowing for the orderly development of democratic practices. Political Islam has opened up space for previously excluded groups.

Also eschewing a binary and essentialist approach, Christie Roberts, from the University of Kent in Brussels, presented a paper on the possibilities for women's freedom and development in the context of the Arab Spring. Making reference to an increase in virginity tests, physical assaults, and other anti-women actions in post-Mubarak Egypt, Roberts nonetheless reasoned that Islamist political movements and parties are not necessarily antithetical to women's interests. While questioning its very terminology, Roberts argued that Islamic feminism is attempting to read feminism in the context of Islamic and Qur'anic virtue. This entails some questioning of the notion of "women's rights" as a Western export and

imposition into Arab societies. The Arab Spring opens up opportunities for a reappraisal of the fundamentals of democracy and citizenship in Arab states and societies and therefore questions the terms of citizenship and the format of an emerging democratic practice.

Keynote speaker Nader Hashemi is the Director for the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver. Hashemi began his presentation on democratic potential among Muslim-majority states by stating that stereotypical interpretations of the rise in Islamist political parties and the concept of shari‘a have undermined the capacity for there to be a serious engagement with the potential for forms of democracy in Muslim-majority states. An almost uniform impression of Muslim and Arab peoples as backward and benighted goes hand in hand with a collective amnesia regarding the history of various theocracies, tyrannies, and despotisms in the West. Arguing that no particular religion is more or less prone to democracy or liberalism, Hashemi pointed out that all religious traditions are highly complex bodies of doctrine that can be read in a variety of ways. Hashemi made specific mention of the history of Catholicism as an anti-liberal and anti-democratic force up to the recent past. Consequently, Islam is not alone in its struggles with democracy. In order to assess the potential for democracy in Muslim-majority countries, it is useful to draw a distinction between paths to the present in the West and Muslim-majority parts of the world. Hashemi pointed out that there have been no wars of religion within the Muslim world and few instances of religious conflict. Muslim societies have historically been far more tolerant of religious diversity than Western countries. Classical Islamist constitutions have characteristically included elements of counterbalance to absolutist leadership and, in particular, muftis have deposed sultans when Islamic principles were compromised. Hashemi contends that Islam constitutes a coherent basis for ethical guidance and social stability and order. It represents an alternative to post-colonial authoritarianism, notably in the shape of secular Arab nationalism in Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. Islam serves as a resource for political inspiration and hope and, according to Hashemi, there is no reason why democracy should be based upon Western-style secularism. He points out that Western regimes have supported long-standing dictators in the Arab world, including those presiding over fundamentalist Islamist regimes that have been prepared to enter into bargains with the West. Political opposition in the Middle East has often been mediated through Islam because the mosque has been a refuge from secular tyranny, backed by the West. In terms of the prospects

for democracy in Muslim majority countries, Hashemi urges us to ask not whether Islam and democracy are compatible, but rather how and under what practical conditions can the two be made compatible. Rather than imposing a Western model of democracy, one grounded in a history that is unique to the West, Hashemi says it is better to ask how the current struggles in Muslim-majority countries will generate new practices and norms that eventually come to be sedimented in forms of democracy. None of us can know in advance what these might be.

Keynote speaker Haroon Siddiqui is a veteran Canadian journalist and editor emeritus of the *Toronto Star* newspaper. In his reflections on the first anniversary of the Arab revolutions, Siddiqui presented an overview of the achievements and the setbacks of the events. Like Hashemi, Siddiqui made the point that most of the tyrannies against which the Arab uprisings fought had been backed by the West. The West has not been on the side of democracy in the Middle East and, in fact, has sided with autocrats and despots and corrupt dynastic rulers. Moreover, the West has supplied weapons to beat back pro-democracy protestors. Taking issue with Western stereotypes, Siddiqui pointed out that protests and uprisings were not anti-Western or anti-Israeli but predominantly and indigenously pro-democracy. Siddiqui further pointed out that pro-democracy struggles have, for the most part, been long-standing and peaceful, even though the violence has attracted greater notice. Among the unwarranted claims of Western observers are: (i) that Arabs and Muslims are incapable of democracy; (ii) that Arabs and Muslims are incompatible with modernity; (iii) that Arab and Muslim women are subservient and accept such an inferior status; (iv) that only uncovered women are activist and progressive; (v) that young Arab men, predominantly the unemployed, are all potential terrorists; (vi) that the only good Muslims are moderate Muslims, that is those who support Western foreign policy and, ideally, attack the core premises of Islam and other Muslims; (vii) that it is impossible to be a devout Muslim and pro-democracy; (viii) that all Islamists demand a caliphate rather than a democracy; and (ix) that all Islamists are extremists who demonize and wish to exclude their opponents. In the end, Siddiqui argues along with Hashemi that the political potential of Arab states is not much different from that in the West. As the revolutions unfold, argues Siddiqui, Western observers should avoid stereotyping or cliché and instead stand with the democratic forces and then be vigilant and watch how events unfold. Siddiqui's evaluation of the West is that leaders have been reluctant to break with their previous support for military regimes and dictatorships.

Keynote speaker Hadani Ditmars is an author, journalist, and photographer with extensive experience in Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, and Iraq. Ditmars presented a photo essay on Baghdad in which she contrasted the cultural and intellectual promise of pre-invasion Iraq with the brutality of the American-led invasion, the most recent of a series of invasions of “foreign hordes with no cultural understanding.” Focusing on cultural activists, such as the director of the Iraqi national orchestra, Ditmars demonstrated how the promise of democracy in Iraq had been caught between the demands of fundamentalists, on the one hand, and those of foreign invaders, on the other. With specific reference to the importance of cultural workers in animating democracy, Ditmars gave evidence of the closing down of dialogue and of the exile and murder of the cultural class, including the killing of over 400 academics in Iraq.

The conference also incorporated an art exhibition of the work of Pakistani-born Canadian artist Amin Rehman entitled *A is for . . .* Blending Perso-Arabic calligraphy and English language text, the work called into question both the association of terrorism with the Arabic language and also the binary opposition between English and Perso-Arabic. Both in form and design, the exhibits prompted critical reflection on global capitalism, neo-colonialism, and orientalism. The artistic use of words and texts made both direct and oblique reference to the distortions of language associated with both American foreign policy and the internal governance struggles of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Chapters

The volume begins with a personal reflection on the conference from conference organizer Nawaz Tahir. He awakens us to the critical and timely importance of understanding affairs in Muslim-majority countries, notably among those of us living in the West. He points out that recent events, such as September 11, along with associated subsequent developments, have resulted in the perception that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Nawaz explains how the impulse to understand events in Muslim-majority countries conditioned the rise of a community and academic committee in London, Ontario, to bring together experts from around the world to discuss Islam and democracy. He notes that while the conference was planned well before the Arab Spring, the events of those uprisings enlivened and sharpened the purpose and the experience of the conference itself.

The first three substantive chapters of the volume—by Maryam al-Sayyed, Jon Armajani, and Humayun Kabir—examine evolving theological interpretations of Islam and the manner in which they contribute toward understandings of democracy.

Al-Sayyed examines a range of schools of Islamic thought on the issue of democracy and the democratic state. She begins by pointing out that there is no singular and clear Qur'anic version of democracy, the state, or government, and that each successive jurist and school in Islam has had to interpret this question. Al-Sayyed identifies the Shi'a, Sunni, and Kharijite schools as the dominant traditional interpretations of the state in Islam. While Sunni interpretation incorporates human reason and the possibility of revelation, Shi'a interpretation is grounded in prophecy under the authoritative interpretation of the imam. For their part, Kharijites adopt an openness toward matters of state formation and, on the basis of their interpretation of shari'a, argue that the decision to appoint a ruler is purely pragmatic. There are two dominant modern schools of interpretation of the state in Islam. First, there are those who regard Islam as incorporating a pre-given and complete legal code and therefore a state. This gives rise to calls for God's sovereignty and not the people's sovereignty. Secondly, there are those who reason that there is nothing in Islam to designate a specific state formation. The first tendency is evident in the reasoning of the Arab-Islamic *shūrā* traditional approach that argues democracy is a Western imposition and that it is not in conformity with God's revealed law. Emerging from the second tendency is the European-based Renaissance authoritative approach which reasons that Islam and democracy are seamless and that certain principles of the Islamic state can be discerned in the Qur'an. Al-Sayyed's general conclusion is that the events of the Arab Spring have given a boost to the Renaissance authoritative interpretations of Islam and democracy.

Jon Armajani's chapter contrasts the views on democracy of two prominent Pakistani public intellectuals of the twentieth century, Fazlur Rahman and Sayyid Mawdudi. Rahman's basic perspective is that the Qur'an, hadith, and sunna point to an inherently democratic Islamic polity, notably because of the central importance of the key representative, consultative, and consensual practices of the *shūrā* and the *ijmā'*. For Rahman, the early *umma* was a model for contemporary democracies. Mawdudi's premise is that Allah is the only sovereign and that our earthly duty is to submit. The duty of an Islamic government under such an interpretation is to implement God's law consistent with his message. For

Mawdudi, but not for Rahman, Muhammad and his message are hierarchical and not egalitarian. Consequently, Mawdudi discourages elections but favours the public acclamation of an amir, who interprets the shari‘a. The role of the amir is to impose Islamic law through his authority in order to avoid *fitna* or chaos. Armajani identifies limitations in both Mawdudi and Rahman. Rahman fails to indicate the limits of freedom, while Mawdudi misuses the concept of democracy and is vague on the matter of leader selection. Armajani points out that despite their apparently large differences, both approaches make use of modernist technologies, ideas, and ideals, including that of democracy, and reflect Western influences even when ostensibly opposing them. Followers of both Rahman (liberal Muslims) and Mawdudi (Islamists) are selective and partial in their appropriations of historical Islam, criticizing certain aspects and raising to prominence certain others.

Humayun Kabir’s chapter, “Beyond Jamaat-e-Islami,” studies the religious and political history of Jamaat-e-Islami, the Deobandis, and Islamic mystical Sufi traditions in Bangladesh and other parts of South Asia. After the failure of early political resistance against colonial power, the ‘ulama’ began to promote Islamic education as a means of regaining Muslim culture, pride, and power. Emerging as oppositional movements in the era of anti-colonial struggle, Sufi-based movements were part of an explicitly political struggle, while the Deobandis—named after Darul Uloom Deoband and founded in 1867—represented a more explicitly religious manifestation of resistance. Kabir describes how various Islamic religious-political factions grew up to claim a range of nationalist, ethnic, and anti-colonial positions. These movements were more or less religious or secular. In general, Kabir points out that modernity has made Islam more worldly and less ethereal. The principal focus of Kabir’s chapter is the creation of Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941 and the role of its leader Mawdudi. As in Armajani’s chapter, Kabir identifies the technological modernism of Mawdudi’s Islamism, based upon print culture and modern communications. Unlike Armajani, however, Kabir regards the Western philosophical training of Mawdudi as indicative of his openness to the use of reason in the formation of political organizations and ideals. Kabir argues that Jamaat-e-Islami rejected not just mysticism but also religious traditionalism in building a religious-political movement that provided social services and gradually adopted electoral democracy. While remaining a religious organization in Bangladesh, it has accommodated secular organization and promoted certain populist causes. Kabir explains how each of the religious movements—Jamaat-e-Islami, the Deobandis, and the mystics—has

gradually oriented themselves to the framework of the Bangladeshi state, without any one of them becoming hegemonic. We learn that the struggle is complex, not just between secular and Islamic forces, but also between mystical/traditionalist religious tendencies and those who, like Mawdudi, have reinvented Islam through modernist values. In the process in Bangladesh, both state secular and Deobandi/mystical forces have made compromises, but the contradictions between their perspectives continue to fragment political Islam.

The next three chapters—from Nevin Reda, Marco Demichelis and Ingrid Mattson—examine the intersections of Islam, jurisprudence, and governance, particularly with respect to the application of Islamic laws in historical and contemporary settings.

Nevin Reda's chapter discusses how the theological principles of shari'a inform the development, limitations, and possibilities for democracy. Defining shari'a as grounded in Islamic jurisprudence, or *fiqh*, Reda identifies disconnections between shari'a and Qur'anic scripture. Linking her core contention to a contemporary case study, Reda argues that the attempt to introduce classical shari'a into Ontario faith-based arbitration practices in 2005 would have compromised the core Qur'anic principles of monotheism, non-coercion in religion, and *shūrā* (consultation). Reda outlines the theological bases of the three principles. As an egalitarian theology, monotheism requires the abandonment of a religious elite—those empowered to define God—both in society and the state. On the basis of her interpretations, monotheism supports the separation of religious authority from governmental authority. Moreover, since Islam teaches non-coercion in religion, and the state executive is grounded in the use of compulsion, the state and religion must be kept separate on grounds of non-coercion. Reda employs the concept of *shūrā* to ground an Islamic theology of democratic engagement. While the original concept is restricted to the community of believers, there is evidence to support the view that from the Queen of Sheba's role in the Qur'an as a consultative leader, certain principles of democratic governance may be derived, notably through the practices of popular sovereignty, assembly, consultation, referenda, and diplomacy. Reda concludes that monotheism and non-coercion lead to the separation of religious from state authority, and that the principle of *shūrā* prefigures the deliberative component of democratic systems. In this respect, the Islamic legal tradition of shari'a can be said to condition democracy as a natural development.

In his investigation into the possibilities of democracy in non-Western settings, Marco Demichelis examines the political thought and social institutions of the Kharijite Islamic Ibadite sect and the Qarmatian government of Bahrain. Through these early political societies of Islam, Demichelis traces the evolution of *shūrā* and *bay‘a*, Islamic principles of consultation. Each of these is linked historically to clan systems and practices of elite accommodation that incorporated a range of views. While the caliphate imperial system of Islam was grounded in hierarchy, the Kharijite and Qarmatian systems were more egalitarian and open. Grounded in a bedouin way of life, the Kharijite polity in Basra stood for solidarity, equality, brotherhood, and limited equality for women. The Ibadite sect of North Africa practiced consensus and tolerance toward others. While divided through inner conflict, it nonetheless manifested levels of democracy and equality that were in advance of other contemporaneous European and Middle Eastern kingdoms and emirates.

In her chapter, “Could Civil marriage Help ‘Preserve Religion’ in Muslim-Majority Countries,” Ingrid Mattson examines family law as it pertains to the marriage of non-Muslims in Muslim-majority countries. The general trend among Muslim-majority countries has been for regimes to devolve certain matters of family law to religious minority leaders and to prohibit civil law arrangements for matters of family and marriage affairs. Mattson’s core argument is that owing to the absence of civil marriage options in most Muslim-majority countries, certain non-Muslims have opted for conversions of convenience into Islam in order either to gain certain legal rights that come with membership in the dominant religion or to avoid the alternative, which is control by the leadership of a minority religious community. Mattson identifies a range of problems associated both with conversions for the sake of legal expediency and subsequent acts of reversion to a previous religion. Her proposed solution is to extend the rights of civil marriage, thereby reducing the social and individual damage caused by religiously unfounded conversions and reactions against them. Skilfully integrating the history of Islamic jurisprudence with case studies of conversions undertaken for familial purposes, Mattson explains how a system of civil marriages could reduce both personal hardship and tensions within and between religious communities.

The remaining six substantive chapters report on empirical analyses of the political sociology of Islam throughout the world, but with an emphasis on Muslim-majority states.

Using a Gramscian analysis, Gillian Kennedy explores the changing character of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists in Egypt. Adapting Gramsci's class-based concept of hegemony to the religious sphere in Egypt, Kennedy explores how three religious factions—the literalists, the conservatives, and the reformers—has each attempted to build counter-hegemonic projects to incorporate a broad coalition of the popular classes. As with the deterministic Marxists, who Gramsci criticized, the literalists are only able to offer majoritarianism and ultimately oppression of minority voices, notably those of Coptics and women. In contrast, the conservatives, notably the Muslim Brotherhood, have made some concessions and movements toward a more inclusive and coalitional politics. It is unclear to Kennedy how far such moves have been taken. In order to parallel the popular front of Gramscian counter-hegemony, reformist movements in Islam are the most inclusive and pluralistic. Ultimately, Kennedy believes that the Muslim Brotherhood have been unsuccessful in developing new counter-hegemonic ideologies that might underwrite broad-based coalitions of support.

Kathy Bullock's chapter is a study of a Western-based Muslim organization, the Muslim Association of Canada (MAC), and its perspective on Islam and democracy. Bullock selects MAC because it has been associated in popular discourse with extremist and radical ideas. Her contention, which is put to the empirical test, is that MAC's democratic values are close to those of the Canadian (including Muslim Canadian) mainstream. Bullock analyses the MAC website through the application of collective action frame analysis. She demonstrates that MAC consistently and unambiguously supports and seeks to promote democracy. Among the principal ideals expounded are support for the Arab Spring, the role of Islam as a guiding force in one's life, the compatibility of Muslim and Canadian identities, and the celebration of Canada as a land of freedom, education, and opportunities. The MAC website urges members to contribute to Canadian society and its institutions and to support multiculturalism. These goals and ideals are stated to be in conformity with Islamic principles. MAC also promotes full and thorough education for girls as well as civic education, charitable involvement, and political engagement. These three spheres are regarded as interwoven and mutually beneficial.

Sabrina de Regt's chapter, "Islam and Democracy: The Political Culture of Muslims in Europe," explores levels of support for democracy among European-based Muslims using data from the 2008–2010 European

Values Study of eighteen European democracies with substantial Muslim minorities. Her sample consists of over 25,000 respondents, including almost 1,000 Muslims. Using measures of interpersonal and institutional trust, political interest, and political activism, de Regt outlines the political cultural values of Muslims and others in Europe. She also looks at tolerance of diversity. Controlling for level of education and other indicators of modernization, as well as measures of ethnicity, religiosity, and denomination, de Regt's study offers a highly specified model of Muslim democratic beliefs. She is able to separate the effects of being Muslim from a range of socio-economic and cultural variables that might otherwise explain individual differences. De Regt's findings are mixed. Muslims in northern and western Europe exhibit lower levels of interpersonal trust but higher levels of institutional trust. In general, Muslim respondents have lower levels of political interest and are lower in political participation. Importantly, however, most differences cease to be statistically significant once educational differences, income, and cultural variables are taken into account. De Regt's conclusion is that once income, education, religiosity, nationality, and denomination are taken into account, it is inaccurate to regard European Muslims as less democratic than non-Muslims.

Guided by a commissioned report for the Church of England, Davide Tacchini and Amédée Turner's chapter offers some personal reflections on the possibilities for democracy among Muslim-majority countries. The authors present the case for favouring parliamentary over presidential systems of government in emerging Muslim-majority countries. The authors also set out in detail, and with exemplification, certain challenges associated with introducing stable democracies into regimes that have depended for so long on coercion and tyranny. Across a series of focus groups held mostly in the United States and the United Kingdom, the authors discover that most Muslims regard Islam as a set of beliefs and ideals, but regard democracy as a technology. Consequently, the respondents regard Islam and democracy to be orthogonal rather than compatible or incompatible. Many of those taking part in focus groups following the Arab Spring report a greater degree of enthusiasm for democracy than those whose focus groups took place earlier.

Susan Khazaeli and Daniel Stockemer examine the causes of democratic politics among forty-six Muslim-majority states using data gathered from 1995 to 2009. Employing quantitative data analyses of large aggregate global data sets, Khazaeli and Stockemer detect significant

correlations between the geographical location of the Muslim-majority country (Arab vs. non-Arab) as well as the degree to which their economies depend on the export of largely unprocessed raw materials, and the degree to which they are integrated into the international community. Non-Arab, low raw material export, and more highly integrated countries exhibit higher levels of democracy. Despite this, most of the many variables they test do not achieve significance and so their principal finding is that in terms of the anticipated correlates of democratic development according to the political scientific literature, there appears to be little to differentiate one Muslim country from another. Khzaeli and Stockemer's aggregate analysis subsumes a broad degree of local and situated reality under a common system of classification. Such a wide-lens perspective is valuable in delineating the correlates of democratic growth among Muslim-majority countries.

Nazli Bilgili addresses the widespread contention that it is the religiosity of Islam that stands in the way of democracy. Bilgili's chapter cites data that demonstrates that there is in fact widespread support for democracy, although not necessarily secular democracy, in Muslim-majority countries. Bilgili argues that Islam is neither inherently democratic nor anti-democratic. Consequently, she argues, the most straightforward way to assess support for democracy among Muslims is to ask them. Using World Values Survey data for 2005–2006, Bilgili examines forty-one countries. Her comparative frame consists of Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Muslim respondents. Data analyses demonstrate that being Muslim increases the likelihood of supporting democracy and, while Muslims are less supportive of democracy than Protestants, they are more supportive than either Catholics or Orthodox adherents. However, the higher levels of support for democracy lose their significance once controlled for demographics and cultural attitudes. The greater the degree of religiosity of a Muslim respondent, the greater the likelihood that he or she is supportive of democracy, as measured by their propensity to claim that being governed democratically is important. Equally, the greater the degree of importance attached to religion for Muslims, the greater the support for democracy. Irrespective of religion, Bilgili's analyses demonstrate that education, tolerance, and trust enhance and deepen support for democracy.

The final substantive chapter of the book is a short personal reflection from conference committee members Mahdi Tourage and Jonathan Geen. Summarizing their experiences of the conference, they offer a critique

centred on their perception that the conference papers were short on criticism of existing politics and regimes in Muslim-majority countries and that, in their judgment, the challenges and limits of democracy in these countries were understated.

The final chapter of the book is a critical review co-written by co-editors Ingrid Mattson and Nawaz Tahir.

REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

NAWAZ TAHIR

It has become a bit clichéd to remark how September 11 changed the world we live in. And while many people have documented and commented on the direct impact that it had on us, there is an indirect consequence to what happened on that infamous day. It was on that day that foreign policy firmly placed itself at the dinner table of many of us in North America. All of a sudden, what was happening in countries on the other side of the world had increased relevance to our day-to-day lives.

On a personal level, one line of thinking from the post-September 11 commentaries stuck with me for some time. It was a comment by then US President George W. Bush about how “they” were attacking “our” way of life. This comment triggered an intellectual exploration for me. Who were the “they” he was talking about? What did he mean by “our” way of life (as I highly doubted that President Bush’s life resembled mine)? During the course of the next several months, this intellectual journey led me to form the impression that more than just fringe elements in the Western world had reached a certain, skewed conclusion about the Islamic world, its functionality, and particularly its mechanics of government. From the pronouncements of this group of skewed commentators, a perception was projected that Islam and democracy were incompatible.

What puzzled me the most was that the crystallization of this perception went beyond the fringe elements. In my own mind, I had formed the impression that the holy Qur’an was quite clear that governance decisions were to be made based upon the principle of *shūrā* or consultation. Yet, I heard the commentary, and looked around the Islamic world at the countries that were being named, and realized that, in fact, there were some countries that did not appear to have a real system of *shūrā*. Some countries said they had a system of consultation, but that was a façade, while other countries were clear about their lack of *shūrā*.

It was at this point that I decided that what was needed was an open discussion on Islam and democracy. I was inspired to bring together people from around the world to come and discuss the topic, and that such a gathering of scholars might inspire the growth and development of what democracy in an Islamic country might look like. So began a three-year journey that culminated on March 23, 2012.

I knew that this topic would have academic interest, but that was just one aspect of what I hoped this gathering would achieve. Rather than it being simply an academic exercise, I wanted the gathering to have a long-term practical impact. Therefore, it was important for the gathering to appeal not just to academics but also to people from all walks of life. Accordingly, I went on with the task of reaching out to people who might have shared an interest in the topic. This included professors from the University of Western Ontario (UWO), the London, Ontario legal community, and beyond.

I vividly recall the first meeting I had in my office with London lawyers Faisal Joseph, Mihad Fahmy, and UWO professor Michael Lynk. From the first instant, I knew that they really liked the idea and its possibilities, and I knew that I could not have picked three finer individuals to begin the process. Their guidance and connections allowed us to reach out and bring in a number of exciting and successful individuals, and through the three years, the committee grew from that initial group of four to a fully operational committee of multiple talented and diverse individuals.

Our monthly meetings were fascinating. We were blessed to have a committee that was able to rotate hosting the meetings and provide us with some amazing meals to keep our minds nourished for the task at hand. With such a wealth of knowledge and excitement around the table, it was an honour for me to chair meetings. A number of friendships developed on the committee that will last for years.

And so, we got down to the tasks at hand: selecting a date, reaching out to keynote speakers and panellists, establishing a budget, fundraising, program development, and so much more. There were the usual ups and downs, particularly since we were putting together the infrastructure for a conference, the likes of which had never been put together in our part of the country.

Then a game-changing event occurred. Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, set himself on fire on December 17, 2010, protesting the confiscation of his wares and the harassment and humiliation he experienced from a municipal official and her aides. His self-immolation triggered protests in Tunisia, which generally led to protests across the Arab world in what we now call the Arab Spring.

As noted by keynote speaker Nader Hashemi, an interesting element of the Arab Spring is the rise of Islamic parties—that people thought Islam could help bring about positive change. The Arab Spring also showed both domestic rulers and the international community that everyday Muslims yearned for some of the same things that “we” do—freedom, democracy, and an opportunity to realize their dreams and aspirations.

One of the more memorable moments in the lead up to the conference came when we had to review the abstracts for the papers. Over 100 abstracts came in from every corner of the world. Not only was the geography of the authors exhilarating but equally so was the content. It was, at times, a very difficult task to select the abstracts that would eventually become the presentations at the conference.

Accordingly, the material that came out of the conference met and exceeded my expectations. I was particularly impressed by our Young Scholars session, which provided us with information from around the world. The idea to start the conference with a Young Scholars session was excellent, and it gave us a glimpse into some very bright futures.

You will see some of the papers in this book and draw your own conclusions, but some of the more intriguing things I heard are as follows. First, we heard that, in Europe, studies showed that there is no significant difference between Muslims and non-Muslims in democratic ideals and the approval of the performance of government. From another presentation, I was astounded to learn that out of 1,100 elections in Muslim-majority states, voter turnout was lower than in non-Muslim-majority states. I wondered if this had something to do with the fact that many of those elections occurred in states that were “new” to democracy and had come from situations where freedom of speech and opinion were brutally repressed—perhaps there was some hesitancy or anxiety engaging in political participation.

One of the more intriguing comments made was that several Muslim-majority countries have done something that the United States and Canada have never done—elect a female head of state: Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Tansu Ciller of Turkey, Atifete Jahjaga of Kosovo, Mame Madior Boye of Senegal, Roza Otunbayeva of Kyrgyzstan, Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia, and Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh. We heard one speaker present a further irony that when one considers the secular democracy known as the United States of America, it is difficult to imagine a presidential candidate who could be successful without the evangelical vote or who renounced or distanced him or herself from Christianity. Would the United States ever elect an atheist, for example?

The conference was not as large as we had initially hoped. There were definitely some learning moments and some “next-times.” Yet, we still brought scholars from around the world to present on a topic that has become a headliner. And while the quantity of participants was not where we had originally hoped, the quality was second to none.

Questions still linger: What makes a successful democracy? What makes a successful democracy in a non-secular context? Will social media play as big a roll in the development of these democracies as it did in the revolutions? And, having witnessed the Arab Spring, is it better to delay elections after a revolution while the surrounding society stabilizes and political parties have time to organize themselves and provide true policy initiatives?

Despite these questions, one thing is now firmly ingrained in my mind after this conference: Islam and democracy are, in fact, compatible and have been for some time. Yes, there are challenges, but as Winston Churchill once noted, democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to those individuals on the steering committee that accompanied me on this journey. Their selfless gifts of time, energy, and other resources allowed us to build an international conference from scratch. I hope we can do it again soon.

CHAPTER ONE

DEMOCRACY AND ISLAM: THE INCOMPATIBLE PUZZLE

MARYAM A. AL-SAYYED

Despite the exclusive focus on the conflict between religion and politics in most traditional liberal theories, the Arab Spring's ongoing effects and its participants' determination proves that social and religious dimensions are significant elements in understanding the development of the democratization process.

Islam's relationship with democracy has undoubtedly been the most important question in modern discourses of Islamic thought. This issue has been highly controversial and has been explained differently based on the various understandings of the relationship between Islam and politics. Moreover, the nexus between democracy and Islam has been shaped by the question of whether Islam is a religion or a state. Numerous schools of Islamic thought have engaged in this dialogue, with countless theories on the place of the state in Islam having proliferated.

The Arab Spring challenges the dominant understanding of Islam and its political rule and brings political Islam to the forefront of the ongoing debates on the transition of the region. The uprisings and spread of Islamists' ideological influence, with their activism shifting toward establishing a civic state, has brought the Islamic political issue into sharp focus, particularly the relationship between Islamic regulations and the priority of democratic change. Henceforth, the conflict between the propagators of democratic rule and those advocating for the establishment and implementation of Islamic law and regulations has been the subject of heated debates between Muslim scholars and Islamic political parties. The central issue of this debate has been whether or not political secularism has a defensible place within Islam.