

# Transformation of the Muslim World in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



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Edited by

Muhammed Hüseyin Mercan

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## FOREWORD

The concept of change in the Muslim world has become one of the most studied and debated issues in academia in the last few decades. These studies dealing with the factors of political, economic and social change in Muslim societies are many in number; yet it is still difficult to claim that they are enough. In this framework, this study deals with the important breaking points caused by these developments on a global scale through theoretical and practical examples, through which it aims to contribute to research in this field.

Most of the chapters in the book have been chosen from amongst papers that were presented at the international ILEM summer school organised in 2013. These papers have been improved by their authors and then evaluated by the referee committee to fit into publication form. During the international summer school organised by the Scientific Studies Society (ILEM), the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Presidency for Turks Abroad and the Related Communities and Office of Public Diplomacy, different aspects of change in Muslim societies were profoundly discussed with young PhD candidates attending from over twenty countries. Along with theoretical debates, the main dynamics of—especially—political and social change in Muslim societies were discussed with reference to particular examples from each country. This book is one of the most important academic outcomes of this organisation, and it aims to understand and explain the particular Muslim case that was experienced through big breaking points both on a global scale and specifically to Muslim societies.

In addition to the important breaking points of the last century—such as the abolition of the caliphate, world wars, the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Iranian Revolution and the foundation of a ‘New World Order’, all of which directly affected Muslim societies—the new conjuncture that was formed after the 9/11 attacks brought structural problems and changes to the Muslim world. Political and economic developments in the last ten years in particular have brought many Muslim countries to the edge of crisis. The latest point at which the Arab uprisings and changing regimes have reached shows that structural problems exist and Muslim societies are facing change in the shadow of these aforementioned problems. Alongside political, economic and social issues, the fact that modernisation and secularisation have become quite dominant

in Muslim societies shows that the impact of change and its outcomes are of great importance. In this respect this book, over ten chapters, aims to make a significant contribution to debates on the processes of change and transformation that the Muslim world is currently encountering.

In the first chapter of this book, Kaya & Mercan attempt to question the claim that Islamism has failed. The fundamental weakness to this argument is that it reduces politics to state. The authors suggest making a distinction between politics and political. The concept of political was first used by German political philosopher Carl Schmitt and developed by such post-structural political theorists as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, to go beyond the limited understanding of politics. In this regard, Kaya & Mercan argue that 'political' is a more useful category to understand Islamism and its dynamism throughout the world. The category of political is a very appropriate term to explain the enhancement of Muslim political subjectivity and autonomy in today's globalised world.

In the second chapter, Nasir offers a reading of the concept of secular. This is done by charting out the way the concept of secular discloses the world. His paper thus tries to suggest several axes along which debates on the concept of secular can be deepened and extended. The paper then analyses the political thought of Abul A'la Maulana Maududi and the political behaviour of religious groups in the context of ongoing discussions. The paper ends with a brief reference to classical Islamic sources to place the differences in historical sensibilities into perspective.

In the third chapter, Al Mahmud focuses on positivist Muslim historiography and conventional study of history. His questions on present history show us his endeavour to find an alternative understanding of history and the current global events. In the paper he criticises the dominant character of the Western paradigm over the understanding and interpretation of global developments. Al Mahmud attempts to make a very critical analysis of the current global events through traditional sources of Islam and eschatology.

Navigating popular conversations around Islam and Muslims across Eastern-Western socio-cultural and geopolitical terrains reveals a critical site of inquiry that necessitates unpacking the discursive formations of the Muslim image, particularly in the twenty-first century. For a more focused analysis, in the fourth chapter of this book, Mahdi proposes a case study reading of the discourses shaping popularised images of Muslims in the United States. In order to properly ground this reading in theory, he suggests an examination of two prominent discourses, namely American Orientalism and American Exceptionalism. After this, he explores a conflicting paradox essential to the US global identity that celebrates



America as the symbol of a set of timeless and universal human ideals, yet confined to the reality of the United States as a nation state. It is this seemingly contradictory characterisation of the United States— according to his claim—that misconfigures Americans’ attitudes towards and sustains their perceptions, if not misconceptions, of Islam and Muslims; thereby offering a breathing ground to the sensational narratives of Islamophobia and the clash of civilisations.

In the following chapter, Parray argues that it is unsafe and, in some ways, precarious to make any concrete claims about the future or the results of the ‘Arab Spring’, keeping in view the uncertainty of the region’s political developments. He divides his paper into the following sections: first, he begins with a brief assessment of the Islam-democracy discourse in the twenty-first century, with an emphasis on the last decade before the Arab Spring to Morsi’s ouster in July 2013; second, he examines the Arab Spring and new waves in the Islam-democracy discourse, with a particular emphasis on the views of Rachid al-Ghannouchi; third, he highlights the case study of Tunisia and its democratic experience of the last three years and finally, he offers some concluding remarks.

There are some major paradoxes of the Arab Uprising according to Azmani. His paper in the sixth chapter seeks to explore the paradoxes which occurred during the process of these uprisings. He also finds it very important to begin by examining the Islamic roots of the Islamist movement, by analysing the main factors that led to its identity-politics path, then by looking at the changes and dynamics that have reshaped this path within the new context facilitated by the Arab Spring. Second, the author proposes the ‘post-Islamism condition’ as a conceptual system that helps to capture the dynamics and transformations of ‘Islamism’ within certain times and places. The paper’s examples mostly deal with the Egyptian, Tunisian and Moroccan cases.

Albasoos’s paper is another chapter that deals with the Arab Uprisings in the Middle East which have irreversibly transformed the region. He argues that the Arabs’ call for change and reform in the region has brought a renewed vitality and insistence to calls for democracy in many states across the region. According to the author, the political changes have been diverse in their causes and outcomes, with their impacts on the region varied, contributing valuable lessons to be learnt, both positive and negative. At this point, Albasoos analyses the lessons that need to be highlighted and understood by the new emerging actors of the region in this process.

Troulis's paper focuses on transformation in the Middle East in the post-demonstrations process through religio-political relations. The demonstrators demanded independence from their 'patrons' and for the adoption of democratic principles, while at the same time began pursuing a desire to integrate the Islamic value system and political traditions into this political system. Taking into consideration special identity characteristics and the nature of the subaltern polity-construction processes, it seems that what is demanded is a Western-style rule of law in accordance with Islamic morality, according to the author's view. He states that such a model can be met—especially after 1980 and the adoption of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis—in Turkey. Therefore, Troulis addresses in his paper the issue of Turkey's role as a model for post Arab Spring regimes in typological terms. Currently, the coexistence of secularist and Islamic principles is considered the greatest challenge of the metamorphosis that has been taking place in the Greater Middle East since 2010.

In the ninth chapter of this book, Awan states that over the last decade in Pakistan, there has emerged a dominant political discourse influenced, both from within and without the state, by a predominantly liberal worldview. According to him, the impact of this dominant political discourse that is aligned with democracy and development has been witnessed in a democratic consensus which resulted in the May 2013 elections, in a smooth democratic transition that occurred for the first time in Pakistan's history. The bulk of the political mass is guided by competing political forces united for the sake of democracy and the aspiration for development and is deeply divided from within. This deep division is both ideological and religious in nature. In Awan's view, this diversity in political consensus can become a potential source of conflict with unintended and unanticipated consequences. From this perspective, the first part of Awan's paper deals with the critical analysis of theoretical foundations relating to the emergence of a dominant political discourse on democracy and development that purports to be universally true. The second part maps Pakistan's post-colonial experience with democracy to date and consequential challenges for sociopolitical spheres, while relating to its ideological roots and sociopolitical specificities. The conclusion draws attention to the possibilities of and challenges for future political stability in Pakistan.

Finally, Belal & Marjuk attempt to explain how secularism influences the sociopolitical context of Bangladesh as an ideology. According to them, it remains an offspring of colonial modernity that features secularism as an essential element, and shapes how the country defines the place of religion in society, but traditional religiosity still dominates the

psyche of the majority of people. What matters now therefore is the new context in which the ideology of secularism has attained prominence in politics and thus in the public psyche. In this chapter, they provide an overview of the above-mentioned ideas as an important frame for their discussion, offering a conceptual analysis of the state of secularism in Bangladesh based on their study of the country's dominant political parties' attitudes towards and treatment of religion, particularly Islam.



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# RETHINKING ISLAMISM THROUGH *POLITICAL*

ALI KAYA AND M. HÜSEYİN MERCAN

The abolition of the caliphate on 3 March 1934 led to a radical breakdown of the Islamic world. Although limited in its political efficiency for Muslim communities, its existence and the presence of the caliph in Istanbul had a very important role in both psychological and religious terms. The annulment of this authority, along with the increasing influence of Western powers over the Muslim world, caused a serious political authority vacuum. The trauma caused by long-lasting Westernisation and colonial activities in the Muslim world resulted in political crises encountered by Muslims in the new world order of the nation state. This situation led to the emergence of political structures in the Islamic world that adopted the goal of building secular nation state models, with the aim of integration in the global system, whilst also provoking Islamic opposition movements which then challenged the administration within their own countries, as well as those of Western powers.

The ideology and practices of the new state established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal in Turkey, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, had an active role in both the formation of secular political management and the development of Islamic thinking and movements in the Islamic world. This ideology of the new state - called 'Kemalism'- affected the entire Islamic world, particularly the Middle East. According to Salman Sayyid, Kemalism can be analysed through four strategies as a manner of redefining Islam: secularism, nationalism, modernism and Westernism (Sayyid, 2000, p. 94). This conceptualism provides great convenience in understanding the policies implemented by a number of regimes that emerged after colonialism in the Middle East. Inspired by Kemalism were Reza Shah in Iran, Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt and Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, each of whom acted with similar efforts in attempts to create countries and societies that sought to isolate Islam from public life.

The perception of secularism in the mind of Mustafa Kemal was not merely the separation of the state from religious institutions, but the total effacement of Islamic concepts and practices from the minds of

individuals in society (Shaw, 1977, p.384). The practices that emerged as a result of this perception can be construed as attempts to create a new identity by first destroying the traditional, via intense intervention of the state at the level of the social perception of religion. From this framework the *adhan*, or call to prayer (sung in Arabic across the world), was required to be called in the Turkish language after the founding of the Republic. In Tunisia, Bourguiba imposed a ban on public employees from observing the obligation of fasting during the month of Ramadan, with a justification that it reduced their efficiency and which he coupled with intentional exhibits of eating before the public during this month.

The suggestion made by John Esposito (1992) that, specifically in the case of Turkey, the process of Kemalist modernism could only be triggered once Islam was ousted from public institutions and public life as a whole, is indeed eye-opening towards understanding the entirety of modern and secular states in the Islamic world. Muslim communities, which were placed under ideological pressure to a further extent and were stuck between the conflicting hegemonic discourses of the USA and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) after World War II, became confronted with the reality of Islam being pushed away from society and daily life by their own administrators.

The fact that Islam could not find a place in the practical arena of formal politics led to the expression of an Islamic political thought/discourse led by social movements. Certain prominent personalities, such as Hasan al-Banna and Abul A'la Maududi, expressed their reactions to the moral collapse and political crisis caused by Westernism and secular administration by establishing systematic and modern organisational structures, so as to defend and promote religious values (El-Affendi, 2010, p. 31). The Society of the Muslim Brothers (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) founded by al-Banna in Egypt, or Jamaat-i-Islami founded under the leadership of Maududi in Pakistan, were the first modern Islamic organisations to challenge Western values on a political platform without a caliph, in terms of their discourse and area of influence. The establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood introduced the first organised Islamist structure in the modern era. The city of Ismailiye, in which the Brotherhood was founded, was at the time considered one of the most Europeanised cities in 1920s Egypt (and was administered by the British army) (Helbawy, 2010, p. 63) and thus provides important evidence that Islamism was built on a foundation of opposition to Westernism and colonialism.

The expansion of the area in which Islamism/Islamic movements were active went beyond the organisational form that struggled against the secular administration in any one country. The phenomenon therefore of



an Islamic movement began to emerge and gain strength in consideration of changes in global politics. Iran's Islamic Revolution; the Afghan jihad against the U.S.S.R.; the Palestinian Struggle (Intifada) and similar developments gave rise to a period, starting from the early 1980s, in which Islamism was conceptualised as a threat and addressed with a categorically exclusionist political style (Davutoğlu, 1997, p. 5). The fact that Islamism was accepted as a threat, particularly in Western politics and academia, caused the production of a vast number of works and discussions on this topic.

In this paper we attempt to question the conceptual language of the literature which announces the 'failure' and 'end' of Islamism. While addressing Islamism, politics is frequently assumed to be constituted solely of the state. This perception and assumption stand before us as important obstacles to understanding the dynamism and variety of Islamism, both today and in the past. One of the methods—perhaps the only way to overcome this obstacle—is to change the conceptual language set. We assert therefore that making the distinction between politics and political in this study is vital in order to understand Islamism. In the forthcoming sections, the literature which addresses Islamism from the angle of state-centred politics is evaluated from a critical point of view, and then the implications of the concept of 'political' are discussed. Lastly, the possibility of construing Islamism through the concept of 'political' considered.

## **The 'End of Islamism' Narrative**

The categorical approach of the Western world towards Islamism, despite making momentary explanations, has not allowed an opportunity for the development of a comprehensive and deep analysis framework. Indeed, Davutoğlu (1997, p. 6) rightly criticises the shallowness of this categorical approach and conceptualism by Western thinkers, arguing that

'Although classifications devised in this framework such as fundamentalist, radical and political Islam prove pragmatically useful for their users in momentary political uses [they] fell short in giving a meaning to the long-term transformation as these developed concepts failed to create a clear and objective description area or a consistent set of criteria.'

Although the level of interpreting Islamism evaluated through (or reduced) to Iranian, Afghan and Algerian experiences gave rise to an Islamism phenomenon/perception which was exhausted through the global politics interpretations of authors such as Fukuyama (1989) and

Huntington (1993), the 2000s were a precursor to a new period. Right at the beginning of the new century, the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in the USA on 11 September 2001 gave rise to a discussion of Islamism again, but this time, in a new dimension. The invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and then Iraq (2003) in the scope of the so-called ‘Global War on Terror’, which was initiated right after the September 11 attacks, revealed a new method adopted by the West in its combat against the ‘threat of political Islam’. What occurred during the period after the 9/11 attacks showed that the ‘fight against terror’ became the new grammar of international order, despite all the costs involved (Sayyid, 2011, p. 151).

In addition to this wave that started in 2001, a new order emerged as a result of civil unrest in the Arab world in early 2011. Therefore it often seems that Islamic movements/political Islam have become the sole subject on which the entire world is focused; while one of the most important subjects is in fact the awakening of the Islamic civilisation against the West. Simplistic discussions of this, however, have reduced this awakening to temporary factors emerging in the Western world due to mainly pragmatic reasons (Davutoğlu, 1997, p. 6). Even though the shallow level of analysis in these studies attempts to explain the developments in the Islamic world in a manipulative manner, or based on the rhetoric of ‘failure’, it should be emphasised that Islam, Islamism or Islamic movements cannot be addressed using a uniform and reductionist approach.

One of the most important representatives of this restricted and one-dimensional interpretation of Islamism from the perspective of its weakening or exhaustion is Oliver Roy. In his famous work *The Failure of Political Islam (1994)*, he defends his thesis on the basis of various experiences in which he sees Islamism as having failed. The consideration here is that testing the success or failure of conceptualising Islamism or political Islam is not possible through individual examples. Evaluating and testing Muslim communities extended over a wide geographical area and with different political, social, economic and administrative cultures, through a conceptualisation of these based on a single concept, is highly problematic.

First, the misunderstanding that stems from the claims of Roy on the ‘ending of Islamism’ should be corrected. While stating that Islamism has gone bankrupt, Roy does not develop an argument regarding the extensiveness of Islamism. This is because he believes that Islam, while extending from Pakistan to Algeria, also drifts away from its authentic promise and loses its spirit. This situation means that Islamism no longer

promises a new society, a new political form or a different future from that which is already present. As a result of this, the ruling experiences of Islamists are 'superficial', whilst 'Islamic norms' in the area of law have been finalised with an 'Islam economics model' that legitimises Third World state socialism and a liberalism rhetoric that legitimates speculation rather than production (Roy, 1994, p. ix).

Roy builds on the claim that the failure of Islamism is an intellectual one in the first place. Islamists thought, at a very simple level, that the virtuousness of all Muslims (with administrators being first in this regard), would suffice to construct a good society. However, issues over public areas, public authority and political bodies are far beyond the virtuousness of individuals. Islamic discourse reckoned that the moralisation of these areas would lead to direct solutions of structural issues that stemmed from the system itself. The criticism at this point suggests that Islamism failed to develop an adequate discourse on plurality of the public sphere (1994, pp. ix-x).

Roy believes that Islamic movements go back and forth between two methods: that the Islamisation of society is only possible via the state first, and second, that the state will automatically assume an Islamic identity in the event that society, defended by a reformist wing, becomes Islamised. While a top-down movement is being referred to in the first instance, the second adopts a movement going upwards; namely, a society to state mechanism. The point that should not be ignored here is the *a priori* acceptance of an Islamic state as a requirement in both scenarios. The main matter of discussion within this method is how to reach this state. Roy names Islamisation from the top to the base as Islamism, and Islamisation from society to the top as neo-fundamentalism. According to Roy (1994), Islamism is to capture the state first and to transform the society later. The Iranian Revolution is an example of this. Saudi Arabia gives support to the improvement of neo-fundamentalism, and provides material support to the improvement of Islamic movements so as to reduce the effects of the Iranian Revolution. Islamic movements financed by Saudi Arabia are puritan, populist-conservative movements. However, neo-fundamentalist movements could not develop an alternative to the existing political and economic order despite these characteristics (1994, pp. 24-25).

Even though the distinction between Islamism and neo-fundamentalism explains Islamic movements and Islamist discourses, Roy's political understanding fails to develop this distinction. This is because the political understanding of Roy has quite a state-centred framework. This situation causes him to construe Islamism with the assumption that social change is

only possible through capturing the state. As a natural result of this, Roy fails to realise the ontological character of political and addresses politics within a certain institutional entity alone.

One of the arguments within the literature that claims the end of Islamism is that politics is, in essence, the shared platform of material and non-material resources (Easton, 1965), and that Islamists took their place in this sharing when they came to power, and, consequently, lost their oppositional and critical characteristics (Türköne, 2012a; 2012b; 2012c). This claim also restricts the ending of Islamism to the capture of the state and reduces it to politics with the allocation of resources. It is obvious that the allocation of resources would bring along a struggle of power. The politicisation of Islam, which is pure in essence, inflicts damage on Islam itself in the first place. Islam is used as a tool of legitimacy for the demands of power from Islamists. The final consequence of this approach could be that no collective identity, including that of the Islamists, could have unique political demands besides demanding a monopoly over power and resources.

One of the circumstances that facilitated a discussion about the supposed 'end' of Islamism is the fact that secular-liberal political and economic forms announced their own victory with the ending of the Cold War. In this period an environment of reducing politics to liberalism came into existence (Fukuyama, 1989). Liberal hegemony fortified the aforementioned understanding that perceived politics as a sharing and allocation of resources. In fact, condemning politics to the language of economics and liberal democracy is, in a way, an attempt to kill it. This is because politics is the name for thinking what is beyond established order. It was inevitable that the global expansion of Islamism and its efforts to devise political subjectivity for a better world would disrupt the comfort of the order of liberal politics. Therefore, the Islamist political struggle was immediately grouped under headings such as archaism, terror and violence.

Another argument suggested by this story of an Islamist ending, which was produced by the language that reduced politics to economism, also attributes the rise of Islamic movements to their promises of helping the poor and those coming from the periphery (Bayat, 2008; Tuğal, 2007). The implication of this discourse is that this hope ends when power is gained; in other words, when the periphery is carried in to the centre. From first impressions, we would suggest that this approach tries to speak of Islamism in a sociological language using a non-essentialist approach. However, the following question is meaningful here: how come Islam and not socialism, social democracy or another political discourse or

movement became a ‘hope’ for these people? One of the things that cannot be comprehended by economic reductionism is the identification of subjects with political discourses, which is their strong link with metaphors and signifiers that made them political in the first place.

### **Thinking of *Political***

While the distinction between politics and political started with Carl Schmitt (2009) in German political thought, it was brought to the agenda with the article titled “Political Paradox” by Paul Ricoeur in France. Prominent French thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, P.Lacoue-Labar, Claude Lefort and Alain Badiou joined this distinction to their theoretical projects. The meaning of political was not common to all of these. Some used political as a specific rationality, whilst others used it as an event that changed the existing order. However, the common aspect of all of these was that there were not any particular essential (e.g. economics, religion, etc.) foundations that established society entirely, and possible contingencies were accepted. These post-foundationalist thinkers agreed on the point that society can never be definitely determined by any essence or foundation. They stand somewhere between a total essentialism and the postmodern approach of ‘anything goes’. Political in this respect means the partial completion of society. No political discourse can determine society in its entirety (Marchart, 2007, p. 4).

Post-foundationalists agree on two points in respect of political. Despite the idea that suggests society cannot be definitely determined, it may be possible to establish society in part and on a temporary basis through political (Marchart, 2007, p. 8). As this establishment is only possible through practices and institutions, which are politics, we cannot speak of a final closure. On the other hand, this establishment can be dislocated anytime as it is partial.

Political is realised through deciding on the extension of undecidability instead of rational choices.<sup>1</sup> The distance between undecidability and decision is always closed with an act of politics. This thought objects to the claim that decision is the result of rational contemplation. Decision always contains power as it prevails over other options. There is no initial or prerequisite that determines a decision in a dislocated structure. If there is something that predetermines the decision, this is not a real act of decision (Norval, 2004, pp. 142-143). Undecidability contributes to the reason of political as follows: conditions never necessarily lead to an expected action. The reason for undecidability brings clarity to two points. The first is that there is no societal reason that determines and structures

all possible political decisions in the event of a crisis, and the second shows that societal order - the contingency of which is revealed through the action of dislocating - is not *a priori* shaped by an ethical demand. Both of these consolidate the priority and privilege of political (Norval, 2004, p. 142).

While politics is about the wide range of practices of the ontic area, political is about the ontological dimension, which is how society is established. Political is not specific to a political moment, status or society. It is inherent to all societies and determines our existential status (Mouffe, 2013, p. 16). While political sciences deal with politics as an empirical area, politics philosophers deal with the moment of the foundation of society and the drawing of boundaries thereof. Political tries to show us the contingent dynamics and conditions of the moments that establish society. Accordingly, there are certain political discourses that manage societal relationships. These determine what can be demanded or dreamt by subjects. In this sense, concepts such as democracy, justice and freedom are empty signifiers. They do not have an absolute content and instead gain meaning and definition through discourse pairings on a continuous basis. For instance, when democracy is joined with a socialist discourse, the discourses of social justice and equality become prominent, whilst the grammar of self-fulfillment and freedom expand with a liberal discourse, and so on. When environmental pollution and harm are addressed, different discourses about the reasons for the deterioration of the environment will inevitably bring about differing explanations. While environmentalism joined with feminism may determine that the environment deteriorated due to a male-dominated political and economic order, it is possible for a conservative to state that it was damaged due to our own bad and sinful actions.

An important characteristic of political discourses is that they are contingent and non actor-centred. This gives us the possibility to refrain from giving privileges to the state, class or group while producing the discourse. Effectiveness of discourse depends entirely on historical conditions and context. In this sense, there is no essence which predetermines the success of a discourse. For instance, the feminist movement did not capture the state in any place. However, it created an important area of awareness in respect of the subjective status of women. Or, let us take the example of Prophet Muhammad. He did not make his call based on capturing the state by any means. He invited people to embrace reality and as a result of this, he produced brand new subjectivities that would shake the relations in society to their core.

The political field is a field of conflict and struggle. When parties and boundaries begin to occur in any subject, we can say that politics starts there. If any conflict in religion, morality or ethnicity is strong enough to separate people into friends and foes, it becomes a political conflict (Schmitt, 2009, p. 55). That political is the field of struggle is marginalised by the liberal discourse. There is a common belief in the liberal discourse that conflict is bad, accidental and temporary. On the contrary, the existence of conflict and struggle revitalises and enlivens society. Anywhere with an absolute consensus is condemned to an eventual totalitarianism. If a society lacks differentiation and antagonism, this may eventually lead to the ending of that society or, as it is famously called, ‘the end of history’. Being political requires decision-making of seemingly irreconcilable differences. A political problem is not an issue that can be resolved by a technical expert; it can only be resolved as a result of thinking and behaving politically. The conflicting nature of political is not visible enough due to the hegemony of liberal understanding.

Political does not reflect existing practices and situations. Political teaches us to remove the existing practices and situations from the category of obligation and to think within the category of contingency. It therefore teaches that any societal status is not fate or above history. It invites us to new forms of life and new societal relationships. In this sense, political does not only reflect given interests and positions, but also questions and attempts to overreach these. If there is the absence of differences within the existing order, there is also the absence of political.

### **To Conclude: Islamism and *Political***

We have already argued in the introduction that claiming Islamism is over is a short-sighted approach in light of the recent state experiences of Islamists, as it risks reducing politics to the state. We shall assume for a moment that Roy’s claim that the focus of Islamist politics on capturing the state is true. However, we see that Roy has compiled the examples which support his claims from the Iranian Revolution and the following experiences that emerged from this event. We could say that the state experiences of Islamist movements are fairly new in this sense, and therefore it is not possible to extend these claims of Roy to the long history of Islamist movements. In this context, the political category that we have discussed above has the potential to offer an alternative perspective in terms of understanding Islamism as a whole.

The most important historical moment that gives us an opportunity to think of Islamism through the ‘political’ category defined above is the

abolition of the caliphate. Muslims faced a rueful question with its end: in what kind of a society and administration would Islamic life continue to be maintained? Even though many discussions and reform requests arose from amongst the populace during the time of the caliphate, it was clear to Muslims the type of society in which these changes would be made; a Muslim society ruled by the caliph (Sayyid, 2000, pp. 78-84). With the ending of the caliphate we can say that Islamists had an enlarged political thinking space. In order to explain what occurred to Muslims in the modern period, political language became increasingly popular instead of being based on metaphysical and theological vocabulary. This means that there is a world order and that this order emerged through the contingent joining of historical conditions. So, this world order is not mandatory or ahistorical. This order can be disrupted and changed through political decisions. Political thinking is obviously limited. Assuming, therefore, that all Muslims think politically, is an exaggerated claim. Political is a process of creating the subject; it is not a simple representation mechanism on which given societal positions and demands are reflected. This creation process takes place by means of certain discourses. It is clear that there are Muslims who have interiorised the discourse on the unchangeability of the existing world order. Those who believe that the new world order will not change are those who have not become sufficiently political. It is clear that there is an increased capacity of Muslims to question the existing order; in other words, their becoming political has given rise to certain reactions and fears. The continuous rise of Islamophobia in Europe is caused by the increased political subjectivity of Muslims that reminds others that they are members of a worldwide political entity, along with their self-identification continuing to be grounded primarily in Islam and being a Muslim, as opposed to ethnicity. This situation shakes the strictly nation state based political order of Europe.

Another benefit of studying Islamism through the lense of 'political' is that we can still talk about it despite the presence of several different understandings and strategies within Islamism. Islamism does not have a doctrine or an orthodox model. It is a discourse and, as a result, it is only natural for it to be open to local and global articulations. However, despite the differences contained within, this discourse has a limit which is drawn through social antagonism (Sayyid, 2007, p. 305). This limit is formed through continuously questioning secular political forms. Different structures within Islamism offer varying vocabulary sets for this act of questioning.

Finally, it is the Muslims themselves who will decide whether Islamism will or will not end. It will not end as long as there are people



who believe in it as being the best way of life. Those who have run out of this hope possibly face cynicism. Cynicism is the seeking of the best by those who do not have hope for a better life for themselves, for their family or for their closed community. The next step of cynicism is to believe in the metaphysicality of the existing, and to opt for compliance with it. This depoliticises the existing and strips it of history, transforming it into fate.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Laclau introduced Derrida’s undecidability to political theory. Laclau explained the principle of undecidability through tolerance-intolerance, which is among the most important topics of discussion in the recent period. Accordingly, intolerance should be absolutely negated so as to draw the boundaries of tolerance. However such a conceptualisation of tolerance has an abstract content and does not offer concrete distinctions as to what should be tolerated or otherwise. Drawing the boundaries of tolerance by excluding intolerance weakens the ground of the existence of tolerance. This weakening occurs in two manners. The first one is the ambiguousness and changeability of boundaries to which extent tolerance can be shown. Excessive tolerance shown to intolerant individuals poses a threat to the existence of tolerance itself. Another threat to the existence of tolerance are the common moral values in society. The majority of society reaches a consensus as to certain behaviours that should not be tolerated. This agreement consequently defines the boundaries of tolerance. There is a transmission from a rambling and ambiguous tolerance discourse of those that should be tolerated and intolerated to a discourse that is formed based on certain norms. The question that comes to mind here is whether it is possible for such a norm to draw a boundary between what is actually tolerable or not. If we determine the boundary based on moral compliance criteria, the question that arises is as follows: if what I tolerate and morally approve of are the same thing, what is tolerance? When we reduce tolerance to morality, tolerance has no meaning. Tolerance begins when I accept something although I do not morally approve of it. In such a case, we encounter two aporias. The first suggests that if we try to base tolerance on itself without a reference to its contents, it is inevitable that it turns into its opposite; intolerance. On the other hand, if we attempt to define tolerance with a different normative mechanism such as morality, it is not possible for tolerance to remain as a meaningful category. The solution here could be reversing both assumptions. In terms of content, tolerance becomes meaningful if only I tolerate what I do not morally approve. In such a

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case, moral questioning should be suspended for tolerance to continue its existence. We encounter a new problem even when we accept this. This problem is what the ground of tolerance will be. The main principle of this ground can be suggested as the requirement of society to operate based on its internal differentiation, because imposing a strict understanding of good without permitting this differentiation leads society to totalitarianism and civil war. In order to refrain from such strictness, the state should not prefer one understanding of good over others. On the other hand, unlimited respect for differentiation would harm societal patterns as much as ethical integration. Therefore, the result implied here is that the resource of tolerance is being intolerant towards certain things. Intolerance is both the possibility and impossibility of the condition of tolerance. It cannot be decided where the line between tolerance and intolerance should be drawn from the dilemma of tolerance/intolerance. This line will always be the scene of hegemonic struggle. The existence of this struggle will keep societal patterns alive, and if the process that absolutises a view of good starts otherwise, intolerance becomes inevitable (Laclau, 1998, pp. 52-53).



# ON THE CONCEPT OF THE SECULAR: SOME REFLECTIONS

MUHAMMAD ALI NASIR

The present paper attempts to provide some notes on reading the concept of the secular. This is useful if one is to understand the sociopolitical dynamics within the Muslim world and to contextualise the debates on the (re)working of the political field. The concept of secular is however difficult to define. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the concept is used so widely that it may not be viewed, defined or analysed similarly within academic literature. However, the task of gleaning some tangible features of the concept of the secular is hopefully possible. Inevitably, this will require some selection from varied sources, and then a selective reading of those sources. It is therefore essential to provide a working definition of the secular and to countenance the all too readily accepted notions regarding it, and a large part of our discussion will address this specific point (Section I). Having done this, the paper then tries to conceptualise and critically evaluate the dynamics of politics in the Muslim world. This is done by focusing on the thought of Maulana Maududi (1903-1979), who is an important figure both because of the reception of his thought and the important role of his theoretical contributions to ‘religious politics’ at the present moment. This analysis is guided by an assumption that politics in the Muslim world—especially those which invoke religion—can be usefully understood by reading the varying interpretations on the concept of the secular (Section II). Finally, the paper concludes with a brief reference to classical sources of Muslim thought in order to serve as a contrast with the concept of the secular, and to put in perspective the difference in historical sensibilities (Section III).

## **Section I: Some Notes towards a Definition of ‘Secular’**

The secularisation thesis within social sciences and historical studies views the process of secularisation as one of ‘functional differentiation’ (Durkheim, 1973 [1893]; Luhmann, 1977). This means a certain

‘compartmentalisation’ of different value domains, spheres of life and division of separate realms, where every sphere operates through its own rules of games.<sup>1</sup> Thus ‘religion’ as a sphere operates in a functionally differentiated manner from other spheres (economic, political, and public). Although largely correct, this is only half of the story. Such an understanding ignores the way in which the functional differences—if they are as such—are disclosed in the first place. And thus through this, one ignores the specificity of the phenomenon at hand. I argue that the basic problematic within secularisation is not the separation of the religious and political spheres, the sacred and the secular, the specific balance between the two or the priority of one over the other; but the *way* and the *reason* these spheres are differentiated in the first place. It is only after the disconnect and separation of such spheres are *posited* and *given* that these secondary questions come to the forefront. In fact, as Talal Asad has identified, what is distinctive about the concept of the secular is ‘that it presupposes new concepts of “religion”, “ethics” and “politics”’ (Asad, 2003, p. 2).<sup>2</sup>

Through such a perspective, the political impact of the process of secularisation can be viewed as an effect of secularism-as-an-ideology and the secular-as-a-concept.<sup>3</sup> Such an attempt at reading does not seek to abandon the political, but seeks to expand the extent of workings of the secular to explain more concretely the workings of the political within it. Then the question becomes primarily epistemological and ontological, rather than political (to inverse Rawls’ claim: metaphysical, not political). Epistemologically: what knowledge claims led to the way through which the concept of the secular is posited? Or, in other words, what passes as a claim to knowledge and what does not, and how? Ontologically: what leads to such an existential differentiation given that existence is rather lived as a whole? Or, in other words, what passes as a meaningful and authentic lived life (individually and collectively), and what notions are to be imposed on the social body with the use and regulation of the ‘legitimate’ coercive power (and how)? Both aspects of these questions are normative and transformative. That is, not only describing what the order of things ought to be, but constructing them in a given way.

The difficulties one faces whilst positing a concept of the secular are twofold. First, as far as the leading exponents are concerned, there has been a wide variety of theoretical justifications pointing in different directions. This is obvious when this connects to the second reason, that largely from the eighteenth century onwards, the concept of the secular has impacted the social and political planes as well. Therefore, the process of secularisation has transformed practice in such a way that theory may not