Winds of Change:
The Challenge of Modernity in the Middle East and North Africa

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The Middle East and North Africa have suffered great destabilisation in modern times, especially following 9/11 and the Arab Spring. *Winds of Change: The Challenge of Modernity in the Middle East and North Africa* assesses the challenges to the region by addressing a variety of social, economic, political, cultural and religious issues in the face of democracy, modernity and globalization. One main theme of the first three chapters (by Behrooz Sabet, Cyrus Rohani and Abul Hamid al-Ansari) is the opposition between traditionalists and modernists, "the conflict between fundamentalists and those who want to bring Islam into the modern age". This is one of many oppositions created by a changing world of faith vs. reason, democracy vs. theocracy and technology vs. culture. Facing this new world, "the Burhan Institute intends to address these binary oppositions as dialectical tensions that inevitably lead to the emergence of a more unifying framework for social transformation" (p. 3), in the belief that this situation can only tend to an awakening and a transformation of the region.

To address these challenges the book explores possible approaches, beginning with the need for social change. The Middle East must be able to temper a spiritual vision in a modern and pragmatic world and needs to rediscover traditional values without "a perpetual and obsessive return to the past".

The 19th century saw the beginnings of change with roots in an anti-western reaction to colonialism, imperialism and unbridled capitalism. But no alternative solution to evolve was proposed, and Islam was "hijacked by radical interpretations resulting in widespread influence of militantly exclusive and sectarian ideology". The region still needs to develop tools to adapt to scientific, technological, educational and democratic changes.

As this region is not in a vacuum, the solution to global problems is also global, and a global society is no longer a utopian dream. The world needs new institutions to govern a society where the oneness of humanity is a focal point of the value system. To build such a new world, Islam through its history of peaceful cohabitation between religions and cultures can be very helpful. However, the solution should be in a new pattern of governance, because every current system is dysfunctional, even democracy, which has become a perpetual opposition between different groups. The authors propose that the only solution is to create a common global governance structure and work together to create peace and to face other global challenges, such as climate change.

Saad Salooum reflects on the outcomes of a grassroots youth dialogue initiative based on citizenship and religious diversity in post-Isis Iraq, recommending a three-fold approach for violence prevention whereby structures of social dialogue should be sustained; processes of social reconciliation strengthened, and political reforms launched. Over-quoting and citation of UN documents left limited space for an insight into the youth dialogue project that the author supervised. Salloum, however, offers advice for peace promotion practitioners; that inter-faith dialogues should not be limited to religious leaders and Track II actors but also invest in grassroots youth. They should be sustained over time, including in times of peace, in order to build resilience in times of crisis and conflict. Finally, his discussion around the UN documents cited gives the impression that the author makes a correlation between religion and violence, which is in our view rather a matter of governance in the region, as the author concedes at the end of the chapter calling for the urgency of "implementing political reforms"

Ramin Jahanbeglo laments "the absence of critical intellectualism in the Middle East region". Jahanbeglo thinks non-violence to effect change in the MENA region "has a future" but the region's civic actors have to decide whether they remain " specialised elites in the service of the status-quo" or live up to their ethical duty and earn their badges of critical intellectuals (p. 85). Some of the bold assertions the author makes, however, seem to not pay tribute to the tremendous sacrifices significant numbers of intellectuals have made to contribute to the democratisation in the region. Sacrifices that have heralded the advent of the peaceful protests over the last decade from the Iranian 2009 movement to the second "wave" of Arab uprisings in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon in 2019.

In "Religion of Peace", Christopher Buck dives into early Islamic texts to extract some "Islamic Principles of Good Governance". For him, in their "search for viable paradigms of good governance", Muslims may use some of the knowledge produced in the West but they must frame it within "the protective ethics of Islam", and "the quest for freedom from oppressive regimes should remain an Islamic [...] endeavour". Otherwise, they risk to "threaten the very fabric of Muslim society". As examples of Islamic texts, Buck mentions the "Constitution of Medina" but focuses on "Caliph Ali's Letter to Malik al-Ashtar", governor of Egypt. He discusses the sources of the letter and the debate around its authorship by several Muslim scholars before analysing the text. He then summarises the "Letter to Malik" in a set of principles of good governance, formulated in a modern language and covering various areas and principles. The author recognizes the limitations of

the "Letter to Malik" for being a consensual document since its authorship is disputed, particularly by Sunni scholars who would not be "predisposed to recognise the authority" of this letter which nonetheless is a "paradigmatic and all-important Islamic document" intimately associated with Caliph Ali and "revered by Sunnis as well as by Shi'is" (pp. 112-124).

Armin Eschraghi addresses in his "Traditionalist and Reformist Discourses Pertaining to Islamic Revival" the everlasting debate between traditionalists and modernists in the Muslim world over the interpretation of Islamic foundational texts and dealing with the body of jurisprudence developed in the early centuries of Islam. The author cites the Quranic verses used by both sides to support their views. He presents an ideological landscape dominated by extreme traditionalists and extreme modernists without giving room to a third category: the reformists, conflated by the author with modernists, even those who try to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. Eschraghi also attempts to deconstruct what he sees as the myth of the Islamic Golden Age. He concludes by affirming that "it will eventually be decided by the majority of Muslims which of the different approaches will, in the long run, secure their wellbeing and correspond to their actual wants and needs."

This is followed by an advocacy by Christopher Buck for "Defining Islamic Social Principles" through a process of consensus building. The author calls for rooting Sharia in the Qur'an-based moral framework capable of guaranteeing a large consensus among the various Islamic schools of thought. For extracting the higher ethical and moral principles from the Qur'an, Buck rejects the "pick and choose" process and recommends a robust method that "would be self-validating". These principles would have a "normative force" and be used to check if an action undertaken by an individual or a group is Islamic or un-Islamic. "In this way, Muslims may articulate a principled basis for their own actions, and may challenge others to present, reciprocally, a principled basis for their actions." This thesis echoes a promising endeavour of the DIWA organisation in Nigeria, where a course called Sharia Intelligence has been devised in order to offer a systematic framework for rules and principles of Islamic jurisprudence.

Nazila Ghanea tackles the thorny issue of the advancement of the status of women in the MENA region. Ghanea explains the discrepancy between the international standards and treaties that MENA governments adhere to and national laws; secondly the inconsistency between the national laws and their implementation; and thirdly, the "cultural gap" between the implemented laws and the status of women in society. She calls for a "cultural proj-

ect" to "shift and replace practices in the non-legal sphere" (p. 138). Ghanea argues that forty years on since CEDAW we should concede that top-down, elite-driven attempts to advance the status of women in the MENA region have shown their limits. She offers an alternative bottom-up approach to building "a counter-culture" that is inclusive, consultative, and locally-owned (p. 141). Ghanea's three-pronged strategy advocates firstly excavating deeply into the cultural sources of the region in order to revive and promote resources that support the compatibility of human rights for women with local culture; secondly, identifying and widely networking local voices who understand the community realities and power dynamics, and resistances to women rights advancement; and thirdly, broadening this circle of local champions for women rights locally in order to promote the resulting cultural change of mindsets. Ghanea's plea is refreshing and innovative. She insists that her model is not a call for MENA exceptionalism but a push for a reconsideration of the name and shame approach in favour of a long-term investment that would render human rights for women "authentic and alive" in the region.

Ian Kluge's essay, "Reason in Islam: Taking Back Their Own" (chapter 10) discusses two ways offered to the Muslim Ummah to recover from its long civilisational decline: revivalism, "to purify the civilisation of foreign influences and all sorts of deviances that have accrued over time", and modernisation, "to identify what is the best and strongest in a culture, along with what is weakest, and remedy or even in some cases abandon the latter". The author favours the modernist approach, initiated in the late 19th century by Jamal-al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. Kluge insists that this process must be endogenous since "the intellectual resources for modernisation are within Islam itself." However, he attempts "to locate those places where the ideals of the European Enlightenment overlap with the Qur'an and thoughts of Muslim modernists" and focuses on Kantian ideas. The author concludes that "the Islamic world has its own philosophical resources on which to build an Islamic Enlightenment", that "there is considerable common ground between the Kantian understanding of 'enlightenment' and what [is] primarily in the Qur'an", and that "this common ground offers a basis for a mutual rapprochement and enrichment of Western and Muslim philosophies and worldviews for the benefit of both"(pp. 144-167).

"'Be Just': Qur'anic Ethics as Benchmarks for Islamic Law" by Christopher Buck is a continuation of his previous contribution, emphasising, once again, the concept that Islamic principles must set the framework for Islamic law and be derived from the Qur'an, believed by all Muslims to be "the revealed word of God, transmitted through

the Prophet Muhammad". Because "Qur'anic ethics are individual as well as collective", Buck proposes to "tur[n] Islamic virtues (based on the Qur'an) into Islamic social ethics, social principles and public policy". He focuses on the higher Qur'anic principle of justice and uses as a test case the Islamic law of apostasy. The author points to "a clear contradiction between the sharia law of apostasy and Islamic claims to 'freedom of religion' [... and the] Qur'anic verse: 'Let there be no compulsion in religion'", and observes an evolution in dealing with this issue in the Muslim world, particularly at al-Azhar, which adheres to "the idea that Islamic law, and the traditions upon which it is based, ultimately must be brought into relation with clear Islamic principles."

Behrooz Sabet contributes a wide-ranging critique of "Education in the Middle East", with some interesting digressions into psychology and philosophy. He highlights the dichotomy facing the region between religious authorities enforcing a dogmatic approach and the development of a truly scientific and fact-based system. He also makes good observations about the prevalence of social science education and the correlation among women between higher levels of education and unemployment, but his contribution suffers from over-reliance on examples from Iran, rather than the broader region, and under-explained charts which could further strengthen his arguments.

In "Globalisation and the Middle East", Shahrzad Sabet writes about the region's lack of involvement in globalisation processes and strongly argues for more openness to other cultures. She reminds the reader of the contrast of this situation with that of the former glorious periods of Islamic civilisation and posits that this could be due to reactions to colonial rule and rejection of the crude materialism that ensued. She makes strong arguments for the need for spiritual renewal and the enhancement of values, and a balancing of the universal and particular, so that connectivity and diversity can go hand in hand.

Arthur Lyon Dahl tackles "Environment and Sustainability in the Middle East", highlighting the absence of models for addressing human wellbeing over simple economic prosperity, and focusing on the poor treatment of the environment. As he points out, over-reliance on fossil fuels as a main source of income in many countries has been disastrous for a region that already suffers from poor water management, a burgeoning population and poor use and maintenance of the land. Dahl includes a useful reminder of Islamic precepts on the environment, based on Qur'an texts, and encourages the religious notion of "stewardship", together with justice and better education to better manage these challenges.

Finally, in "Connecting Electronically to the Public Forum during the Arab Spring", Deborah Clark Vance contributes an interesting chapter on the use of media during the Iranian and Arab protest movements from the early 2000s onwards, with a focus on different countries of the Arab Spring. She writes well and succinctly about the use of both internet-based and traditional media (when online access was shut down) to effect change under extraordinarily oppressive regimes. The book might have had been already in print when the 2019 peaceful protests erupted in Sudan, Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon, but a similar examination of the role of Facebook Live, YouTube Live, Instagram, WhatsApp and Telegram messaging would have been amply useful.

The book promotes aspects of "global common governance" in a fairly idealistic manner, postulating such an approach in the light of new technologies and a supposedly shrunken world. The weakness of this argument is that the new technologies have created a world where people are closer in technological means but lack closeness culturally and in interests. The new means of communication have exacerbated individualism and potentially put people in a position of confrontation to realise their own dreams and world views. Also, the authors' arguments do not address the current polarisation in society between people who want a new world to face climate change and inequities, and those who see the solution as electing far-right populist candidates.

In addition, several of the arguments are trapped in the mainstream binary division of the Islamic landscape: radical vs. moderate Islam. They do not provide sufficient space between the extremes and are unable to see the continuum of views and opinions. They also confuse radicals and extremists and associate radicalism with violence, a common methodological inaccuracy encountered in much of the current literature.

However, this book is a worthwhile and welcome contribution to current debates over the future of the MENA region, and the breadth of its contents give ample food for thought and discussion over the way forward in this troubled but dynamic part of the world.