

**Democracy in the Middle East:
An Indigenous Assessment**

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ABSTRACT

During the previous century much of the world has taken great strides in adopting and implementing democracy and yet the Middle East has notably faltered. More recently with the rise of religious extremism, the region has fallen farther behind with many states retaining authoritarian forms of governance demonstrating gross humanitarian abuses. Most notably since the turn of the century, the resurgence of Islam as a driving force in regional politics, has proven a daunting challenge for the increasingly secular statesmen and academics of the West. Likewise attempts to understand the situation from an outside perspective and apply remedies concocted in western institutions have met with repeated failure and have in fact only served to bolster the anti-democratic narratives of fundamentalists and terrorists. In order to fully appreciate the roots of the dilemma and help create better communication between East and West, the people living in the Middle East need to be heard and included in the dialogue.

In this study, interviews were done with a broad selection of sixteen students from the Middle East studying at the Eastern Mediterranean University in Gazimağusa, Northern Cyprus. This selection included Arabs, Turks, Iranians and Kurds from all major political and religious backgrounds. Each was asked for their thoughts on the state of democracy in the Middle East. Their answers highlight the fact that although most Middle Easterners welcome increased freedom they don't want the increasingly individualist democracy promoted in the West or the political and economic strings often attached to it. Their responses also underscore the essential role that Islam continues to play in the political psyche of their region, the nature of which

westerners largely misunderstand. This study should prove helpful in highlighting the real concerns of the up and coming generation of Middle Easterners with a view towards fostering better understanding and communication.

Keywords: Democracy, Middle East, Secularism, Human Rights, Islam, West.

ÖZ

Geçtiğimiz yüzyıl boyunca, dünyanın büyük bir kısmı demokrasiyi benimseme ve uygulama yolunda büyük mesafe kat etmesine rağmen, Ortadoğu bölgesi bu konuda alenen tökezledi. Son zamanlarda, yükselen aşırı dinci akımlarla birlikte otokratik yönetimler varlıklarını devam ettirerek büyük insani dramların yaşanmasına sebep oldular ve bu bölgenin ülkeleri Dünya Demokrasi Endeksi'nde daha da alt basamaklara gerilediler. Özellikle 21. yüzyılın başından itibaren, İslam dininin, bölgesel politikaların etkin bir gücü olarak yeniden yükselmesi, batıda gittikçe daha fazla sekülerleşen diplomatlar ve akademisyenler için aşılması güç bir engel haline geldi. Benzer şekilde, dışarıdan olayı anlamaya çalışıp, çözüm önerileri üretmek isteyen batılı kurumlar hep başarısız oldular ve aslında bu sadece köktendincilerin ve teröristlerin anti-demokratik propagandalarını yaymalarına yardımcı oldu. Ortadoğu'daki sorun ve ikilemlerin kökenine inmek ve Batı ile Doğu arasında daha sağlıklı bir iletişim sağlamak için, bölgede yaşayan halkların seslerinin daha güçlü bir şekilde duyulması ve diyaloga dahil edilmeleri gerekmektedir.

Bu çalışmada, Gazimağusa KKTC'de bulunan Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi'nde öğrenim gören Ortadoğu'nun farklı ülkelerinden on altı öğrenciye anket çalışması uygulandı. Çalışmaya farklı dini ve politik gruplardan, Arap, Türk, Fars ve Kürt öğrenciler dahil edildi. Her bir katılımcıya, 'Ortadoğu'daki Demokrasinin Durumu' hakkında sorular yöneltildi ve görüşleri alındı. Cevapları, her ne kadar Ortadoğu'da yaşayan halkların çoğunluğunun bireysel özgürlüklerin gelişmesini desteklediği gibi görünse de, batılı tarzda yükselen demokrasinin beraberinde getirdiği yaşam şeklini ve demokrasiyle ilintili siyasi ve iktisadi modellere pek de sıcak bakmadıkları ortaya

çıktı. Çalışmadan elde edilen bir başka sonuçta da, İslam dininin bölgenin siyasi psikolojisinde önemli bir rol oynayıcı olduğu öne çıktı. Bu durum, din ve devlet işlerinin kesin çizgilerle birbirinden ayrıldığı sistemlerle yönetilen seküler Batılı yönetimlerin, İslam dininin bölge siyasetindeki etkin rolünü anlamakta güçlük çekmelerine ve bölgeyi yanlış okumalarına sebebiyet vermektedir. Bu çalışma, Ortadoğu'da yetişmekte olan yeni nesil gençlerin güncel kaygılarını yansıtmakla birlikte, toplumlar arasında daha sağlıklı bir anlayış ve iletişim sağlamakta faydalı olmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokrasi, Orta Doğu, Laiklik, İnsan Hakları, İslam, Batı.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the many friends I have made in the 15 years I have lived in the Middle East. Many of them long for increased freedom but are frustrated by the realities of the region, which is only exacerbated by a vicious cycle of mutual misunderstanding with the West. I can only hope and pray that this research will give voice to their perspective and help shed light on the truth. Jesus Christ, who lived in the Middle East, once said, “*You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you Free*” (John 8:32).

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The modern world is facing a mounting security predicament of unprecedented proportions in the Middle East. Religious inspired extremism¹ is wreaking havoc across the region all the while gaining more proponents and beginning to spill over into the West. This relatively recent wave of violence is threatening to obliterate a century's worth of global democratic initiative spurred on by western governments and liberal scholars. Especially after the end of the Cold War many scholars and statesmen alike elatedly heralded the end of major global armed conflict and predicted the dawn of world peace. Renowned American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, for example, boldly declared the universal triumph of liberal² democracy stating that there were no other significant rivals to it left in the modern world.³ Yet these optimistic forecasts were soon proven shortsighted as the storm clouds of ethnic conflict and global terrorism rolled in.

Towards the end of the twentieth century the overwhelming assumption among political scientists was that with the spread of liberal democracy and modernization⁴,

¹ Throughout this study the term 'extremism' is used to connote violent expressions stemming from extreme interpretations of religious beliefs. In the context of the Middle East this usually refers to radical Islamic based jihadist groups.

² 'Liberal' here and throughout the study refers to the political philosophy or worldview based on ideas of liberty and equality, which largely constitute the foundation of modern democratic ideals.

³ Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Penguin, 1992).

⁴ The term 'modernization' is utilized throughout this study to refer to the notion that less developed societies will with time and effort rise to the standards of more developed societies.

societies the world over would become increasingly secular⁵ in nature and egalitarian in practice.⁶ Soon, it was believed, nations would cease to feel any need for antiquated religious sentiments and their clerical trappings.⁷ Yet today, even as the West in particular continues to advance towards cultural and political agnosticism, the Middle East in particular is regressing into religious extremism and tribal-like feuding. This was recently highlighted by Sir Andrew Green, former UK ambassador to Syria and Saudi Arabia, who summarized his experience in the Middle East quite bluntly when he wrote the following for *The Telegraph* on August 16, 2014,

Democracy is empathically not the solution for extremely complex (Middle Eastern) societies and Western meddling only makes matters immeasurably worse. The fundamental reason for our failure is that democracy, as we understand it, simply doesn't work in Middle Eastern countries where family, tribe, sect and personal friendships trump the apparatus of the state. These are certainly not societies governed by the rule of law.⁸

Such is the seasoned opinion of an international diplomat who doesn't see a future for democracy in a region rife with tribalism and where the rule of law is largely ineffectual. However for those who might prefer to look at statistics a perusal of Freedom House's most recent report will suffice to convince them of the deplorable condition of democracy in the region.⁹ Particularly since 2006, Middle Eastern states have consistently received very low marks in the democratic freedom assessment, with the notable exception of Israel. Even a 'secular' country like Turkey, which has traditionally been held up as a beacon of hope for democracy in the region, is increasingly failing the test. All across the Middle East including North Africa and

⁵ In this study 'secular' refers to the belief that worldly and religious spheres should be held separate so that religion does not interfere with politics and vice versa. In this way 'secularism' has come to connote human governance free from religious inhibitions.

⁶ Hashemi, Nader, *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy*, (Oxford, 2012), Pp. 28-29.

⁷ Bernstein, Richard J., *Is Politics 'Practicable' without Religion*, Social Research Journal, Vol: 80 No: 1, (Spring 2013), P. 33.

⁸ Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/11037173/Why-Western-democracy-can-never-work-in-the-Middle-East.html>

⁹ Available at: <https://www.freedomhouse.org>

on into central Asia, democracy in Muslim majority countries in particular seems to be losing ground.

There were great expectations at the outset of the popular uprisings of average people across the Middle East, which was optimistically dubbed the ‘Arab Spring’, with many hoping that this was indicative of a popular desire and determination for greater democratic values and freer societies.¹⁰ And yet in short order Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen instead of becoming safer and more democratic have actually taken a turn for the worse. Even more worrisome is that the region has become a hotbed for radical extremism in the form of ISIS and others.¹¹ Looking back, even under its autocratic leaders of yesteryear, the region was more stable than it is today. Clearly the ‘freedom’ that some optimists welcomed as harbingers of greater democracy for the region has not resulted in better human rights or more representative governments. In fact instead of using their newfound political leverage to call for more egalitarian and representative governments the majority of Middle Easterners have opted for more repressive forms of governance as exemplified in Egypt. This should not come as a surprise after seeing the result of earlier ‘democratic’ elections held in Afghanistan and Palestine, which only legitimized Islamists political platforms in government. Overall, the dismantling of previous ‘undemocratic’ regimes has only succeeded in sucking the region down into a whirlpool of chaos and anarchy.¹²

¹⁰ Marc Lynch (January 6, 2011) *Obama’s Arab Spring*, Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/06/obamas-arab-spring/>

¹¹ Benny Avni (January 30, 2014) *Arab Spring in tatters*, Newsweek. Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/3741/arab-spring-in-tatters>

¹² David Harsanyi (February 19, 2015) *Obama is wrong. Democracy is the last thing the Middle East needs right now*. Available at: <http://thefederalist.com/2015/02/19/obama-is-wrong-democracy-is-the-last-thing-the-middle-east-needs-right-now/>

1.2 Research Questions

The apparent failure of democracy in the Middle East and its current historic deficit gives rise to some urgent questions: Why has liberal democracy in particular failed in the Middle East when it has proven relatively successful in the West and much of the rest of the world? Similarly, why does religion continue to wield such immense popular appeal and political authority in the Middle East while it has been largely neutralized and marginalized in the West?

1.3 Hypothesis

Western academics have offered a wide range of answers to these critical concerns however they have often failed to tap into the contextual realities that undergird the regional turmoil. The general assumption is that Middle Easterners desire and deserve democratic freedom, which the West has an inherent responsibility to help implement.¹³ However exactly what kind of society Middle Easterners want and what they conceive as democratic is a question that only they can fully and finally answer. The hypothesis of this thesis is that secular and liberal democracy, as envisioned and practiced by the West, is not a viable model for societies in the Middle East because ultimately whatever form governments adopt in the region these can only be successfully determined by their constituent populations.

1.4 Methodology of the Study

In order to apply the proper remedy for the stated problem an indigenous assessment is of critical importance. This study is based largely on primary sources gathered from field work through personal interviews. The surveys conducted were built around the research questions delineated above. The data gathered was then carefully analyzed and correlated in order to find common denominators amongst the answer

¹³ Fawcett, Louise, *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford, 2009), P. 134.

provided. In most cases those interviewed were largely united in their answers making the conclusions quite obvious. Even so the transcripts of the interviews were included to allow full expression to each and every critique. It is believed that the information gained from such direct interaction will indubitably help to shed light on the current dilemma of democracy in the Middle East. Ultimately any prospect for peace in the Middle East needs to take into account the will of its own people. For this the up and coming generation of Middle Easterners needs to be heard. The insights they share offer a unique perspective into the cultural and political psyche of the Middle East, which will in turn prove invaluable in developing workable strategies for lasting peace in this troubled region.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

The troubled relationship between democracy and the Middle East has a long and complex history. The Middle East for its part is known as the ‘Cradle of Civilization’ dating back as it does to the very origins of mankind. Modern civilization on the other hand is firmly rooted in democratic ideals, which are uniquely western in origin. In order to understand the inauspicious dilemma emanating from the Middle East and threatening the stability of the modern world it is essential to probe into this troubled past. This will later be complimented by a literature review of the ongoing crisis between the Islamic Middle East and democracy.

2.2 Defining the Terms

Before delving into the subject of democracy in the Middle East, both the meaning of the term democracy and the demographics of the Middle East need to be specified. Both of these terms are used in various contexts with very diverse meanings.

2.2.1 The Meaning of Democracy

First, the word ‘democracy’ originates from the ancient Greek world. It is a composite word: demos (the people) + kratos (rule), from which came the notion of ‘rule by the people’. From the outset Plato detested the concept believing that the people were unfit to rule themselves. For him democracy was rule by the fickle opinions of the uneducated masses. Aristotle however insisted that the people’s

opinions needed to be given some weight in order for the government to enjoy their support. With time this led to the development of the well-known formula ‘the few ruling with the consent of the many.’¹⁴ Ultimately the fuller meaning of democracy especially in the modern world has been formulated by its tumultuous history.

2.2.1.1 Democracy in Ancient History

The democratic model first came to fruition for a brief period of popular representation in Greek society during the fourth century B.C. However this newfound egalitarian form of government did not always result in greater freedom of expression. In fact it was this same representative council that voted to put Socrates, the greatest philosopher of that age, to death. Later the concept was utilized to a degree in the Roman republic in which citizens were treated equally under the law. But again these ‘democratic rights’ were only extended to citizens, comprising roughly 10-15% of the empire’s population, while the aristocracy often remained immune from any prosecution. Still, this model of democracy, pioneering limited government, later became the chief inspiration for American democracy.¹⁵

2.2.1.2 Democracy in Recent History

During the ensuing ‘Dark Ages’ after the fall of Rome, the concept of democracy was relatively dormant as the emergent Catholic Church had a virtual stranglehold on the political landscape of Europe. There were periodic signs of awakening, like the coerced signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 by the English monarch acquiescing to the demands of the barons to guarantee their rights. However it wasn’t until the Renaissance in the 14th century that democracy was fully resurrected when Europeans rediscovered the ancient Greek philosophers. This paved the way for the Protestant Reformation, which further accelerated the break-up of Catholic

¹⁴ Crick, Bernard, *Democracy, A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford, 2002), P. 11.

¹⁵ Zakaria, Fareed, *The Future of Freedom* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), P. 32.

hegemony allowing states to redefine themselves.¹⁶ At this time the importance of reason began to dominate public debate. People were increasingly emboldened to express themselves freely, make individual choices and even question authority all because the monopoly of the Catholic Church had been broken.

After a period of religious wars climaxing in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, prominent Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau began to deliberate on different juxtapositions of religion and government, which in turn opened the way for debate on how to establish secular states based on an egalitarian code of law.¹⁷ This being said is important to note here that thinkers like Locke were by no means ‘liberal’ in the modern sense, rather they rooted their “democratic” theories on Biblical doctrines of human equality, being themselves religious men. In this way the emerging democratic thesis was by no means developed in antithesis to religion but rather squarely grounded upon it.¹⁸

Years later these deliberations came to fruition in the American and French Revolutions at the end of the 18th century whence democracy was finally enshrined as the modus operandi of secular government. Again it was overwhelmingly religious men who signed the historic Declaration of Independence inaugurating democracy as the founding principle for America. They believed that absolute power corrupts even the best of men, thus it was essential that the ultimate right of sovereignty should rest on the will of the people. Naturally, because of the meaning of the word, from the outset the word democracy was used to refer to people’s

¹⁶ Hashemi, P. 69.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, P. 67.

¹⁸ Stark, Rodney, *The Victory of Reason*, (Random House, 2006) P.

unalienable right to fair representation in government.¹⁹ Consequently western states in particular that adopted democratic ideals went on to establish legal means of civil elections whereby leaders could be chosen by a popular voting process. Democracy thus was at the outset equated primarily with social freedom and equality buttressed by the free and fair process of election, which represented the will of the people in governance.²⁰

Since then however, the concept of democracy has been broadened to include any number of things connected with western society and freedom in general. In other words democracy has gone beyond simply being a unique type of government arrangement to incorporating any number of modern concepts like human rights, civil liberties, political justice, inclusive suffrage and the like.²¹ More recently democracy has come to be popularly equated with modernization, liberalism, individualism, westernization and even capitalism.²² It is also considered a key component of secularization whereby religion is largely excluded from governmental affairs.²³ However in its most elemental form democracy in the words of US President Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg is simply government “by the people for the people.”²⁴

2.2.1.3 Democracy in Modern Times

Democracy today has come to be seen as the great white stallion of the West, arousing both the envy and enmity of much of the world. On the one hand the concept enjoys almost universal approval and often serves as a catchword to

¹⁹ Dunn, John, *Democracy: The Unfinished Journey*, (Oxford, 1992), P. 93.

²⁰ Grugel, Jean, *Democratization, a critical introduction*, (Palgrave, 2001) P. 71.

²¹ Hashemi, P. 7.

²² Chan, Sylvia, *Liberalism, Democracy and Development*, (Cambridge, 2001), Pp. 1-3.

²³ Hashemi, P. 172.

²⁴ Speech given at dedication of Gettysburg cemetery on November, 1863.

legitimize government policies.²⁵ On the other hand, especially in recent decades after western attempts at ‘democratizing’ the rest of the world have met with mixed results, the term has lost some of its luster. Still, many western statesmen and political scientists hold it up as the ultimate human achievement in government and consider it to be the antidote to all mankind’s social woes. For example, on June 1, 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush exemplified this eminently in a graduation speech at the West Point, U.S. Military Academy, saying in reference to democracy, “The twentieth century ended with a single surviving model of human progress, based on non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women and private property and free speech and equal justice and religious tolerance.” He went on to state that all the peoples of the world, especially Islamic nations “want and deserve” these democratic freedoms.²⁶ Whether or not this is actually the case is a matter of growing debate, especially in light of its ongoing setbacks in Iraq and elsewhere after more than a decade of concentrated effort on the part of the world’s only superpower to bequeath them with liberal democracy. In short democracy, the prized-possession of the West, is facing its greatest test in the Middle East.

For the sake of this study the term democracy will be used in the most commonly accepted three-fold designation: civil liberties, social equality and popular sovereignty.²⁷ These three facets more or less summarize all that is usually included in the term. Civil liberties refers to the basic human rights: freedom of speech, expression and association. Social equality refers to the belief that all people should

²⁵ Holden, Barry, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), P. 2.

²⁶ Available at: www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases.

²⁷ This is the three-tiered system adopted by Freedom House.

be treated as equal regardless of age, race or sex. Finally popular sovereignty refers to the notion that governments and laws should be established in accordance with the free will of the people and ultimately accountable to them.

2.2.2 The Middle East

With regards to the term ‘Middle East’, this is also a loose nomenclature that needs some defining. It is generally used to refer to the geographical region in Southwest Asia and the corner of Northeast Africa. In the past this region was referred to as the ‘Near East’. In its more restricted definition it includes the 18 modern countries clustered around the historic Fertile Crescent with Turkey and Egypt on the western front, Yemen on the south and Iran on the east.²⁸ Some scholars use a much broader definition that includes Muslim majority countries of North Africa and expand it to the Far East to incorporate other Muslim states. This has been termed the ‘Greater Middle East’ or simply ‘the Muslim World’. However for the sake of this study and because of natural limitations, the term Middle East will be used in reference to the first and narrower definition.

2.3 Historical Background

The origins of the current Middle East crisis find their roots more immediately in the last century when western democracy began to dominate global affairs. Understanding the historical developments leading up to this unique juxtaposition is critical.

2.3.1 The Triumph of Democracy

Since the forging of modern democracy in the American and French revolutions at the end of the 18th century, it has undergone a rigorous amalgamation process in both western continents. Even as democratic ideals continued to evolve in a relatively

²⁸ Bourke, Stephen, *The Middle East: The Cradle of Civilization Revealed*, (Thames & Hudson, 2008), Pp. 12-13.

short period of time the core democratic principles of freedom, equality and popular sovereignty were adopted by most other states in the western hemisphere. However from the outset in each respective continent different democratic ideals were stressed so that with time each accrued a unique flavor. While the American version stressed protection of religious rights, the European (particularly French) version sought to incubate the state from religious influence.²⁹ What is important to note however is that the whole process and development of democracy is inextricably linked to its religious roots in the West. Middle East expert Dr. Hashemi highlights this important point when he writes, “this process of negotiation and bargaining over the normative relationship between religion and state was organic to Europe and North America.”³⁰

Democracy then faced its first global crisis with the advent of militant nationalism in Europe and the resulting World Wars. After each of the two great wars the allied powers immediately sought to establish international legal bodies in order to safeguard global peace and security. In this regard one of the implicit goals of the League of Nations and the subsequent United Nations was to further spread liberal democratic ideals in hopes of preempting any future global meltdown. Although the term democracy does not feature in the UN charter its stated purpose to prevent the ‘scourge of war’ and promote human rights, equality, rule of law and freedom in general clearly outline its democratic objectives.³¹ Thus began a concentrated effort to ‘democratize’ the remaining nations in the world in order to ensure basic civil rights and the rule of law on a global scale.³² Democratization has taken many shapes and forms. In most cases countries that witnessed the economic and political

²⁹ Hashemi, Pp. 111-112.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, P.137.

³¹ See UN Charter preamble at: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/preamble.shtml>

³² Kengley, C, Raymond G, *The Global Future: A Brief Introduction to World Politics 2nd ed.* (Wadsworth Press, United States, 2007), Pp. 33-34.

benefits of liberal ideals sought to emulate the West and be included in international treaties and organizations. In other cases varying levels of economic and diplomatic coercion have been utilized, often by means of the UN or IMF to try and establish democratic structures in otherwise ‘undemocratic’ places like Namibia, Cambodia and Kosovo.³³

The precipitous rise of technology and science that were, initially at least, overwhelmingly at the disposal of western industrial powers, has further exacerbated their appeal and authority over the rest of the world. More recently the spread of globalization with all its information and communication technology has brought the peoples of the world into even more immediate contact.³⁴ The net result is that in the 21st century a large majority of the world has come to ascribe, at least in name, to liberal democratic ideals promoted by western markets and media. In fact even traditional ideological enemies of the West, like the USSR and China, have in some ways adopted democratic principles politically and economically.³⁵ And yet even as liberal democracy has seemed to flourish and triumph the world over it has continuously met with strong resistance in the Middle East.

2.3.2 The Challenge to Democracy

Up until the early 20th century the majority of the Middle East was under the dominion of the Islamic Ottoman Empire ailing as it was. With the termination of WWI came the final demise and dismemberment of this the last great Middle Eastern empire. In its place a patchwork of states were established by the victorious western

³³ Newman, Edward and Rich, Roland, *The UN role in Promoting Democracy* (United Nations University Press, 2004).

³⁴ Chan, P. 79.

³⁵ Hurrell, Andrew, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), P. 214.

powers largely based on their own arbitrary demarcation and the new-fangled notion of self-determination. Consequently in short order a number of modern states like Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Iran appeared on the map.³⁶ The Anatolian heartland for its part was salvaged from the smoldering Ottoman ruins by a very secular-minded general named Mustafa Kemal who succeeded in expelling the foreign forces and forming the modern Republic of Turkey. In 1923 Mustafa Kemal also known as ‘Ataturk’ (Father of the Turks) founded the first secular democracy of the Middle East.³⁷ While some like the Shah of Iran at least made a show of wanting to emulate his democratic initiative, the majority of Muslims across the region viewed his liberal agenda with deep suspicion and even outright disdain.³⁸

At this time the oil boom also attracted global powers to the region all seeking to maximize their economic and ideological leverage by courting regional leaders. Western powers in their efforts to counter Communist influence and establish their own hegemonic power in the region, often ended up supporting autocratic governments. Naturally in the Middle East this engendered a political culture rife with suspicion and mistrust toward the West.³⁹ After the end of the Cold War and the onset of unchallenged American supremacy it seemed that the way was clear for the “new world order” and democratic progress in the Middle East.⁴⁰ This time however westerners were met with religious fundamentalists like Al-Qaida who outright rejected any foreign interference in the region. Western powers responded with military force but even as they dismantled the repressive regime of Saddam Hussein, instead of peace and security the region spiraled into uncontrolled religious sectarian

³⁶ Fawcett, Pp. 26-27.

³⁷ Mansfield, Peter, *A History of the Middle East*, (Penguin Books, 2013), P. 194.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, P. 240.

³⁹ Fawcett, Pp. 50-51.

⁴⁰ Mansfield, P. 382.

violence. Western powers had naively assumed that Middle Easterners would gladly accept the gift of democracy and work to implement it in their societies. And yet the opposite has happened with further regional unrest resulting in a political and military quagmire for the West.⁴¹

Throughout the 20th century even as democratization has made great strides in much of the rest of the world, its success in the Middle East has always been marginal. This has led to some noting that the Middle East appears to be “exceptional” in its rejection of liberal democracy.⁴² Throughout the last century many of the leaders in the Middle East at least paid lip service to western ideals and tried to implement limited social and political initiatives in line with liberal democracy and yet they remained autocratic at the core.⁴³ This became the primary focus of the Arab Spring, a popular uprising whereby the Middle Eastern masses resorted to violence in order to uproot long-standing autocrats. However even when some succeeded in securing ‘democratic’ elections in their countries the results showed that instead of yearning for western styled egalitarian governments the Muslim populace actually wanted a return of notoriously un-democratic religious based groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. This has put the West in a quandary; on the one hand they want democratic freedom to thrive in the Middle East, on the other hand this newfound democracy instead of producing the expected secular governments is in fact engendering fundamentalist regimes at odds with the West and all the while legitimized by the ‘democratic’ election process. In short in the Middle East

⁴¹ Steve Dobransky, Middle East Quarterly (Winter, 2014) *Why the US failed in Iraq*, Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/3680/iraq-us-failure>

⁴² Potter, David, et al. *Democratization*, (Polity Press, 1997), P. 323.

⁴³ Brown, L. Carl, *Religion and State*, (Columbia University Press, 2000), P. 132.

increased freedom has largely instigated a return to religious fundamentalism rather than liberal freedom.⁴⁴

Interestingly across the region both relatively moderate local imams and leaders of extreme groups like Al Qaida and the Islamic State regularly imprecate western secularism and liberal democracy as chief culprits in the current evils besetting the Middle East.⁴⁵ Although they may differ in their tactics together they are calling for a return to fundamental Islam as the solution for the regional woes claiming that only when Muslims reinstate Sharia as the law of the land, as in the times of the prophet Mohammed, will they enjoy the blessings of Allah.⁴⁶ According to them democracy was never meant to be in the Middle East. This is not a new notion either. Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi, writing after the first Gulf War, speaks of the fear of ‘dimuqratiyya’ that has permeated the Middle East since WWII.⁴⁷ She notes that although most Middle Eastern States initially were zealous to join the United Nations and eagerly signed on to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights they soon realized that the broad freedoms and comprehensive equality guaranteed therein was not compatible with their religious culture. This forced many of them to create qualifying legislation to counter the radical liberties enshrined in these international treaties.⁴⁸ Clearly Middle Eastern leaders at least have known from the beginning that western democratic ideals were not harmonious with their traditional religious values.

⁴⁴ Harsanyi, David, *The People have Spoken (and they are Wrong)*. (Regnery, 2014), P. 168.

⁴⁵ See the Islamic State’s online magazine Dabiq, Second Issue. Available at: <http://media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isis-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-2-the-flood.pdf>

⁴⁶ Mansfield, P. 425.

⁴⁷ Mernissi, Fatima, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, (Addison-Wesley, 1992), P. 52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Pp. 66-67.

Nonetheless, despite deep misgivings regarding ongoing western imperialism, Middle Easterners have no qualms about using western appliances, technology and weapons. Most of the younger generation, in particular, openly flaunt western paraphernalia and fantasizes about living in the United States. Thus the Middle East is caught between a deep longing for change and an equally deep-seated belief that they could never fully be democratic. This is only reinforced by the vicious cycle of violence and corruption that consumes their lives and future. Extremists for their part capitalize on this impasse claiming that the failure of secular governments in the Middle East, although exacerbated by geopolitical and economic problems, is proof that liberal democracy is fundamentally incompatible with the region's core religious tenets.⁴⁹ In short the future of democracy in the Middle East seems as bleak as ever. Despite all western efforts to instill democratic reforms in the region, it has proven a notorious failure.⁵⁰ Understanding the reasons for this is a matter of urgent concern.

2.4 Islam and Democracy in the Middle East

To date, a century long effort to democratize the Middle East has proven fruitless, but why? Diverse answers have been provided for this quandary. They range from blaming Western imperialism to deprecating Islam. However what is clear from this debate is that Islam is a critical factor, which needs to be addressed in order to break the impasse. U.S. President Obama in response to the waves of religious radicalism that continue to ransack the Middle East was adamant in rejecting both extremes posited above. In a speech at the Summit on Countering Extremism at the State Department in Washington D.C. on February 19, 2015,⁵¹ he insisted that the narrative that seeks to blame western powers for every ill in the Middle East is

⁴⁹ Gabriel, Mark, *Journey inside the mind of an Islamic Terrorist*, (Frontline, 2007), P. 91.

⁵⁰ Cox, Caroline and John Marks, *The West, Islam and Islamism*, (Civitas, 2006), P. 47.

⁵¹ The speech is available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2015/02/19/president-obama-speaks-summit-countering-violent-extremism>

unfounded and in fact only helps to validate the propaganda of terrorists. President Obama further rejected the infamous ‘clash of civilizations’ narrative posited by Samuel Huntington whereby the West is pitted against the Muslim World calling it an ‘ugly lie’. Instead he laid the blame for the current rise of extremism on poverty, lack of education and local political grievances which terrorists capitalize on. He reiterated that for peace and stability to take root in the Middle East democracy is essential, and yet today this is the hardest thing to find in the troubled region. Understanding the reason(s) for the conspicuous democracy deficit in the Middle East has fueled much debate and continues to bewilder scholars but this has not kept them from offering any number of suggestions and solutions.

2.4.1 The Roots of the Matter

Firstly, it is important to distinguish root causes from later consequences. In his speech Obama noted that this dilemma has deep roots reaching back into a history of troubled relationship across continents. Thus is important to first understand the historical and political development of the region, especially as it relates to the West. Renown Middle East scholar and historian Bernard Lewis in his book *Islam and the West*⁵² stresses the historical and theological background of the Middle East and its troubled relationship with the West as chiefly responsible for the abject failure of democracy in the region. He notes that Islam had up until relatively recently enjoyed supreme political status in the Middle East. This is because from its very inception Islam was a religious state, which for over a millennia intermittently conquered and ruled many of its neighboring civilizations. Mark Gabriel, former Professor of Islamic History in the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo, testifies to how

⁵² Lewis, Bernard, *Islam and the West*, (Oxford University Press, 1993).

Mohammed “completely fused together religion and politics” in his day.⁵³ This set the tone for the ensuing Islamic Empire, later Ottoman Empire, that governed the Middle East, North Africa and much of Eastern Europe throughout the Middle Ages and up until the beginning of the 20th century.

Bernard Lewis notes that it was not until the Muslim armies were rebuffed at the gates of Vienna in 1683 and were later forced to sign peace treaty of Carlowitz in 1699 on the terms of the ‘infidel’ enemy that their conquest was curtailed.⁵⁴ Up until that point the fact that Islam postulates itself to be the final revelation from God superseding all previous religions made it only natural for its adherents to presume a divinely ordained mandate to spread its dogmas throughout the world.⁵⁵ This in fact was the general trajectory of Islamic history until it was truncated by the Western Christian powers. The result was a reversal of fates with Europe growing ever stronger while Islam grew weaker. The ramifications of this historic turnaround are still being felt today.

It is often forgotten that up until one hundred years ago world politics were still regularly perceived in religious terms. Until the end of the Ottoman Empire a historic struggle between Islam and Christendom lasting well over one thousand years was the staple of international affairs. Although many things changed in the West with the advent of the industrial revolution and with Europe largely deserting organized Christianity, the more recent resurgence of fundamentalist Islam seems to underscore the fact that the age-old religious feud is still latent, at least in the minds of many

⁵³ Gabriel, P. 132.

⁵⁴ Lewis, P. 19.

⁵⁵ David Bukay, (2013) *Islam’s Hatred of Non-Muslim*, Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/3545/islam-hatred-non-muslim>

Middle Easterners. Even as the West has for the most part abandoned their religious moorings, people of the Middle East in particular still retain a close affinity to their religious heritage and traditions. Consequently even though Westerners see global affairs in purely secular terms, Middle Easterners continue to read into them religious nuances.⁵⁶ An example of this is how the Middle East perceived American military involvement in Iraq as a renewed religious crusade. Secular westerners however were largely ignorant of these alarming religious connotations.⁵⁷ Sadly it is this mutual misconception that exacerbates the miscommunication and mistrust between East and West ultimately becoming fodder for mistrust, resentment and even terrorism.

2.4.2 Are Social Injustice and Poverty the Problem?

Typically the modern day spread of terrorism has been blamed on social and economic inequalities disseminated by globalization in general and western states in particular. Many, like President Obama, often make the case that ‘extremists’ take advantage of the disenfranchised poor and uneducated around the globe. According to this commonly held notion globalization, with its many forms including, democratization, secularization, modernization, consumerism and capitalism, have come to represent a Western imperialistic agenda in which social disparities are maximized to the detriment of the less fortunate but this time on a transnational level.⁵⁸

Indeed poverty can breed resentment, which in time can produce all-out rebellion toward the global status quo. Failed states in particular can become fertile ground for

⁵⁶ Gabriel, Pp. 175-176.

⁵⁷ Mernissi, P. 102.

⁵⁸ Cronin, Audrey Kurth, *Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism*, International Security, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter, 2002-2003), P. 45.

such disenfranchised groups reacting to the global establishment. That being said, this explanation fails to account for the high level of education and relative affluence shown by most who choose the path of jihad. Put simply, poor and dispossessed individuals do not generally staff modern terrorist networks.⁵⁹ Indeed the fact that otherwise well-educated and wealthy individuals leave their comfortable western homes to join terrorists cell groups weighs against the notion that they do this for personal interest or monetary gain. ISIS in particular is a case in point, with most of its recruits foregoing all they have amassed in the modern West to go and join the otherwise backward and uncivilized 'Islamic state'.⁶⁰ Social injustices while contributing to global disenchantment with Western ideals cannot primarily be held accountable for the rise of extremism. Poverty and discrimination exist the world over but why is it that the Islamic Middle East in particular is always rife with violence? This leads to some even more probing questions.

2.4.3 Is Islam Compatible with Democracy?

The failure of western democratic principles and secular ideals to take root in the Middle East has led some to question whether the historic tenets of Islam are in fact compatible with modern western paradigms at all.⁶¹ The Baroness Caroline Cox in her book *The West, Islam and Islamism*, offers ample evidence from the Islamic Sharia law and leading Muslim scholars that its historic tenets are diametrically opposed to secular and democratic ideals. She writes,

The comprehensive control by religion of virtually every aspect of human life, individual and collective, enshrines the essence of totalitarianism and

⁵⁹ Zakaria, P. 136.

⁶⁰ Haque, Omar Sultan and Choi, Jihye, *Why Are Young Westerners Drawn to Terrorist Organizations Like ISIS?* September 10, 2015, Psychiatric Times. Available at: <http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/trauma-and-violence/why-are-young-westerners-drawn-terrorist-organizations-isis>

⁶¹ Whitehead, Laurence, *Democratization: Theory and Experience*, (Oxford 2002), P. 190.

totalitarian control which is inherently incompatible with the concept of individual freedom which lies at the heart of liberal democracy.⁶²

On the other hand western supporters of Islam like political scientist John Esposito, stress that Islam and the Middle East are fully capable of reforming and reinterpreting themselves in order to fall in line with modernizing trends. Esposito acknowledges that the current condition of the Middle East is lacking in democracy and that the purist exercise of Islam marginalizes women and certain minorities however he is optimistic that just as Christianity adapted to modern times during the Reformation, Islam can also succeed in reinterpreting itself to conform to the democratic world.⁶³

Since 9/11 politicians and political scientists alike have made a mantra out of the phrase “Islam is a religion of peace”. And yet those who have experienced Islam first-hand often disagree. Former Muslim and prominent social activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali takes issue with this notion recalling her own experience growing up in Somalia. She suggests that while most Muslims are not radical, they are often pulled into it by Jihadists who adhere to a strict observance of their religion.⁶⁴ Ironically, for all the effort expended by Westerners to defend Islam and depict it in egalitarian terms, it is often Islamic scholars that challenge the notion that Islam is compatible with western values. Sheikh Ramadan Al-Buti of Syria, who was one of the most widely respected traditionalist Sunni scholars before he was killed in 2013 by a suicide bomber, decries this claim as a ‘falsehood’ imposed upon Muslims by westerners to render

⁶² Cox and Marks, P. 34.

⁶³ Esposito, John, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford, 1995), Pp. 215-218.

⁶⁴ Available at: <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/ayaan-hirsi-ali-islam-not-a-religion-of-peace-but-could-become-one/article/2563882>

Islam weak.⁶⁵ Of course when it comes to terrorist organizations like ISIS they make no secret of their disdain for western democracy and secularization. And yet, many like Hirsi Ali, while admitting that the strict historical implementation of Islam is at odds with modernity, are hopeful that Islam can be reformed to become a peace-loving faith.

2.4.4 Can Islam be Reformed?

At the turn of the millennium historian L. Carl Brown in his book *Religion and State* wrote the following, “The Muslim period of the Prophet and the four rightly guided caliphs stands splendidly alone as the significant model to which Muslims concerned with political philosophy should repair.”⁶⁶ He highlighted how this widely held tenet had led prominent Islamic thinkers like Hasan al Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, to repeatedly stress that the early Muslim community is the perfect political model to which all Muslims should aspire. The importance of this notion was further augmented by the fall of the Caliphate and the Arab coalition’s failure to dislodge Israel from the Middle East leading many Muslims to believe that their courtship with modernization was ill-fated. Brown went on to predict that this political disenchantment would pave the way for a host of ‘reformers’ to come to the fore seeking to restore Islam back to its pristine condition.

Writing before 9/11, Brown went on to compare the modern Islamic Fundamentalist resurgence of his day to the Protestant Reformation in that they both seek to return to a literal reading of their Scriptures in an effort to find their ‘lost’ identity. He even went so far as to compare Protestant Reformers Luther, Zwingli and Calvin to

⁶⁵ Available at: <http://journal.ijreview.com/2015/12/251190-islam-religion-peace-came-politicians-need-stop-saying/>

⁶⁶ Brown, P. 48.

Radical Islamists Al-Banna, Mawdudi and Qutb.⁶⁷ Later on however Brown noted that for Islamic ‘reformists’ to adhere to a literal reading of their scriptures like Protestants have, could lead them to a quandary but trusts their ‘ingenuity’ to reinterpret their sacred text in light of modernity.⁶⁸ Sadly, in the short time since he wrote his hopeful predictions, this ‘ingenuity’ has so far only resulted in dark and dreadful interpretations of Islam’s historical tenets as evidenced by Al Qaida and its progeny.

Another important Middle Eastern scholar Fred Halliday expresses his doubt that such a reformation can genuinely take place stressing that Muslims promoting a return to Sharia Law are in fact simply reformulating ancient principles to meet modern demands. In other words he sees a genuine return to Islam’s original form and practice as untenable.⁶⁹ And yet that is exactly what groups like ISIS are espousing today in Syria. They claim to have reinstated the lost caliphate of Islam and promise to retake all the lands of the Middle East that have been lost to infidel secular states.⁷⁰ Consequently, despite all the naysayers, extremists are in fact living up to their claim of recreating Islam as it was in the time of the prophet Mohammed and they have proven quite ‘ingenious’ if not grotesquely inventive in recreating the original form of Islamic society based on their own literal interpretations of the Qur’an.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Pp. 140- 142.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, P. 178.

⁶⁹ Halliday, Fred, *The Middle East in International Relations*, (Cambridge, 2005), P. 212.

⁷⁰ Daniel Pipes, (August 5, 2014), *Caliph Ibrahim’s Brutal Moment*, The Washington Times. Available at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/aug/4/pipes-caliph-ibrahims-brutal-moment/>

2.4.5 Can Islam be Transformed?

Other post-modern Muslim scholars like Oxford's Tariq Ramadan and Mustafa Ceric, Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, stress that instead of reformation what is needed is 'Islamic Transformation.' They reject a polarized view of the world that posits a clash between the Islamic World and Western democratic values and secularism. Ramadan, the grandson of infamous Egyptian radical Al Banna, even goes so far as to claim that "Islam is a western religion."⁷¹ Consequently he and likeminded westernized Muslim thinkers advocate a synthesis, that is a new identity based not so much on religion or ethnicity but rather on common values. They believe in the 'ethics of citizenship' whereby people from any and every religion can come together under the rule of law and mutually agree on reciprocally beneficial principles. Ramadan and other post-modern Muslim thinkers urge Muslims to embrace secularism both as a necessary means of living in peace with others but also in order to keep Islam pure and unstained from politics.⁷²

And yet even as Ramadan and other like-minded Muslims educated in the West take it upon themselves to amend and alter Islam in order to make it more congenial to western ideals, leading imams and Islamic scholars from the Middle East have repeatedly decried such a compromise as anathema. For example Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas in his book *Islam and Secularism* goes to great length to lambast western secularism and democracy describing it "as poison for the true faith",

⁷¹ Brendan Goldman, (April 15, 2010) *An Islamist in Professors Garb: Tariq Ramadan returns to America*. American Thinker. Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/2636/tariq-ramadan-returns-to-america>

⁷² Esposito, John L. *Rethinking Islam and Secularism* (ARDA Guiding Paper Series). State College, PA: The Association of Religion Data Archives at The Pennsylvania State University (2010) Available at: <http://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers.asp>, P. 10.

namely Islam.⁷³ Likewise other prominent Islamic ideologues like Sayyid Qutb and Abul Ala Maududi regularly pointed to western secular and democratic ideals as a form of western imperialism and thus antithetical to true Islam.⁷⁴ Clearly Islamic thinkers are divided among themselves with western-styled intellectuals seeking to reinterpret Islam to accommodate western secular ideals while fundamentalists believe such a notion is altogether heretical. Ultimately though, it is not the western ‘reformers’ but the eastern ‘radicals’ that are actually living among the masses and thus having the greater impact.

Part of the problem is that the vast majority of academic research being done on these critical questions is taking place in staunchly secular institutions so that Muslim scholars who posit such reform have intuitively learned from the West how to distinguish secular and spiritual, a dichotomy that has roots in its Christian heritage.⁷⁵ Fundamentalists on the other hand are accustomed to interpret everything holistically in strictly religious terms. Brown highlights this essential difference when he says: “In Islam, unlike Christianity, there is no tradition of a separation of church and state, of religious organization as contrasted with political organization.”⁷⁶ Esposito concurs saying, “In the Middle East, secularism, a political doctrine that grew out of Christian Europe, has been inextricably linked with a history of foreign colonial invasion and occupation.”⁷⁷ Because of this attempts to impose western styled secularism and democratic principles on the Middle East instead of solving the problem are at least partially exacerbating the conflict.

⁷³ Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib, *Islam and Secularism*, (ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur, 1993), P. 41.

⁷⁴ Aslan, Reza, *No God but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2005), P. 138.

⁷⁵ Cox and Marks, P. 34.

⁷⁶ Brown, P. 31.

⁷⁷ Esposito, P. 3.

Still some emphasize that even if the majority of Middle Eastern states are not secular that does not preclude them from adopting democracy. Ahmet Kuru criticizes those who suggest Islamic countries cannot become democratic by stressing that secularism is neither a sufficient nor an essential condition for democracy. He further suggests that Islam is not an inherently and exceptionally political religion because a number of Muslim majority countries like Turkey and Malaysia have been able to implement secular democracies.⁷⁸ That being said, the fact that secular states tend to exhibit a higher degree of democratic values, while strictly religious states struggle to realize even the most basic democratic ideals cannot go unnoticed.

2.4.6 Can Democracy be Customized?

Some have sought to find an alternative route by instead proposing that western notions of democracy and secularism need to be recalibrated to accommodate religious involvement. Muslim scholar Nader Hashemi believes that understanding the intrinsic relationship between religion and democracy, especially after 9/11, is “the most important and pressing question of our age.”⁷⁹ He acknowledges that secularism in particular has become an object of deep mistrust and disdain in the Middle East. This is because it has been promoted at the expense of religious expression. Hashemi however highlights the fact that the development of democracy and secularism in the West far from being anti-religious was a by-product of spiritual reformation.⁸⁰ Consequently he summarizes his thoughts by stating that “the road to liberal democracy, whatever other twists and turns it makes, cannot avoid passing

⁷⁸ Kuru, Ahmet, *A Research Note on Islam, Democracy and Secularism*, (Insight Turkey, Vol. 11/ No. 4 / 2009).

⁷⁹ Hashemi, P. 21.

⁸⁰ Ibid., P. 69.

through the gate of religious politics.”⁸¹ In other words he believes that liberal democracy can become a reality in the Middle East if and when religion is somehow incorporated into the political process. In this he promotes the American style of secularism as opposed to the French *laicite*, which tends to ostracize religion from politics.

Indeed there are a variety of different democratic and purportedly secular states even in the West that accommodate state churches and even monarchies with various levels of religious connotations. Thus, as Hashemi suggests, a democratic secular state can conceivably incorporate religion in its political structure and practice. However when applied to the Muslim majority states of the Middle East the question is how much of liberal democracy would be left if it were to be melded with Sharia Law. More importantly even while western-styled Muslim academics seek to engineer a sociopolitical hybrid the question remains whether or not the overwhelmingly traditional-minded masses of the Middle East would accept such a compromise.

One of the more recent and ongoing efforts to provide a roadmap for Mid-East democracy is pioneered by Elza S. Maalouf, an Arab- American futurist and cultural development specialist. In her book *Emerge!* she details her extensive work on the memetics (value systems) of the Middle East. From the outset she criticizes Western think tanks in their efforts to alleviate the problems of the region because they fail to tap into the indigenous social realities and value systems preeminent in the Middle

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, P. 22.

East.⁸² She insists that any progress towards democracy needs to take into consideration the historic-religious context of the target region. Maalouf goes on to describe in great detail different stages democracy through which democracy has evolved. Finally she suggests that for any form of democracy to take root in the Middle East it will by very nature have to be uniquely calibrated to the social and religious realities prevalent in the region.

While efforts by Hashemi, Maalouf and others to adapt democracy to the Middle East are laudable they have yet to meet with any lasting success. Both of them suggest that the Arab Spring might offer the needed kindling to ignite much needed democratic reforms in the region. And yet to date this hopeful prediction has not materialized. Still their efforts to root any proposed remedy in indigenous cultural values and local context are important. Likewise their proposition that democracy is not a static and time-less concept but rather evolving with the emerging needs of society is significant. Finally their willingness to include religion in the discussion of any prospective democratic model for the region represents an important shift in the modern metanarrative.

Ultimately, in the Middle East in particular, prejudices and conspiracy theories are deep-seated. Western governments and academics have unwittingly gotten accustomed to dictating democratic ideals to the rest of the world without often appreciating the chauvinism of their actions and the way it is perceived on the other end. More recently, as evidenced in the Arab Spring, Middle Easterners have voiced disdain for their secular-styled rulers, which they view as puppets of the West and

⁸² Maalouf, Elza, *Emerge! The Rise of Functional Democracy and the Future of the Middle East*, (Select Books, 2014), P. 12.

have instead sought to return to their Islamic roots. This is largely because the fundamentalist's mantra that secularism and democracy are tools of the 'Christian' West designed to weaken them has gained currency.⁸³ Ironically, even though most in the West no longer sees themselves as Christian, the fact that Middle Easterners often frame their grievances in religious terms highlights the entrenched disconnect between East and West.

Since the advent of secularism and with the spread of liberal democracy westerners increasingly see themselves as a modern post-Christian society.⁸⁴ The Middle Easterner's perceptions on the other hand continue to be strongly influenced by their Islamic heritage. Naturally until either side appreciates the perspective of the other, clashes can only be expected to continue. In order to get to the root of this conflict it is essential to understand the ongoing influence of skewed perceptions in the Middle East. While most westerners feel they have put that religious struggles behind them, Middle Easterners very much feel like they are reliving them.⁸⁵ In the end perceptions are often much more potent than reality. Consequently for there to be any hope of real change in the Middle East these perceptions need to be fully appreciated and addressed

⁸³ Salim Mansur, (Summer, 2005), *Muslims, Democracy and the American Experience*, Middle East Quarterly. Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/734/muslims-democracy-and-the-american-experience>

⁸⁴ Catherwood, Christopher, *Why the Nations Rage*, (Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), P. 96.

⁸⁵ John O. Voll and John Esposito, (September 1994) *Islam's Democratic Essence*, Middle East Quarterly. Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/151/islams-democratic-essence>

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY OF INTERVIEWS

3.1 General Procedure

In seeking to understand the root causes of the misperceptions fueling the conflict which plagues East and West relationships and hampers democratic progress in the Middle East, as noted before, most of the discussion has taken place away from the region, usually in western secular institutions and literature. Likewise many political scientists, Muslim and otherwise, have invested much energy in crafting secular and democratic models that could be implemented in the Middle East, however in all this academic flurry often not enough attention has been given to how Middle Easterners themselves perceive democracy and how they would like to see it implemented. The western assumption has been that liberal democracy is the utmost in human government and that everyone naturally aspires to it.⁸⁶ And yet democracy by its very definition is based on the sovereign will of a certain group of people. Thus to assume that western democracy is supreme and should be applied the world over is actually a contradiction in terms. People need to be able to choose for themselves, in which case their wishes and desires need to be heard.

As noted earlier, recent events in the Middle East have shown if anything that the region's conception of freedom and their ideal for government is radically different from that of the West. Consequently, no matter how much the West desires to see

⁸⁶ Harsanyi, P. 4.

democracy take root in the Middle East, as long as it does not truly represent the aspirations of the people of the region, it is doomed to failure. In the end democracy is essentially rule by the people for the people, so the sovereign right and desire of the indigenous people cannot be overlooked.

The focus of this study is to ascertain directly from Middle Easterners what they think about democracy and why it has failed so miserably in their part of the world. It aims to shed some light on what they might conceive as a plausible form of government for their societies. In order to access a representative sample of Middle Easterner's opinions on this crucial subject the student body of the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) was chosen. EMU is strategically located on the cusp of the Middle East on the eastern coast of the island of Cyprus. Since it is located in the Turkish Republic of Cyprus it naturally hosts a majority of Turkish students, which make up roughly half of the student body of approximately 20,000. There are also a large and growing number of students coming to study at EMU from countries negatively affected by the Arab Spring. All told, over three fourth of the students on the EMU campus represent countries from across the Middle East. Consequently in canvassing them it is possible to get a good picture of how the up and coming generation of the Middle East currently reflects upon democracy.

In choosing the appropriate means to canvass Middle Eastern student's views on democracy initially a questionnaire was attempted. However it was noted that simple yes and no answers were not adequate in representing people's diverse and often nuanced opinions on the matter. Consequently instead of a quantitative approach a qualitative methodology was chosen in order to better do justice to this complex and

often sensitive subject. Naturally in setting up interviews the consent and confidentiality of the prospective participant was of utmost priority.

In order to provide a maximum variation sample of opinions on the subject at hand, students representing the broad sociopolitical spectrum of the Middle East were asked to participate in the interviews. This included Arabs, Persians, Turks and Kurds from a variety of sociopolitical and religious backgrounds. Students were asked to honestly share their responses to a series of questions relating to democracy in their particular countries and the Middle East in general. In order for them to speak openly their confidentiality was reassured. When selecting the students the main stipulation was that they had spent the majority of their lives living in the Middle East. Likewise an effort was made to select seasoned students with a relatively good grasp of regional politics and ability to express their opinions intelligently. For those that prefer their native tongue, translation was available.

The fact that none of the participants are political leaders or experts in democracy may cause some to question the validity of their input. However it is the fact that they have no personal agenda or vested interests that uniquely qualifies them for this kind of research. Because of this, during the interviews they often revealed their true feeling, fears and frustrations with regard to democracy in their region. As will be evident from their responses their candor and forthrightness helps to unveil the real psyche of the Middle East. Since most of them have lived through the events of the Arab Spring they are personally aware of the complexities facing the region. Their testimonies provide raw and unfiltered data, which will go a long way in exposing the roots of the evident failure of democracy in the Middle East.

3.2 Interview Questions

The questionnaire in its full form as it was given to each participant is available in the appendix section.

The questionnaire form was presented to each prospective participant when they were asked to be interviewed. Once they agreed to participate in order to facilitate their unhindered input the interviewer took notes on their responses to each stated question. A summary of each student's response and the more salient points of the ensuing discussion were carefully noted and transcribed. Then before signing at the end of the questionnaire the student was given an opportunity to review their responses to ensure that what was recorded accurately reflected their comments. In this way during the interview the participants were able to focus on expressing their opinions instead of on completing a questionnaire form.

In chapter 4 the actual transcripts of each interview are presented. The inclusion of the participant's actual statements was deemed indispensable to this study in that they best represent the actual opinions and feelings of Middle Easterners in question. Ultimately the explanative power and influence of this research is inextricably linked to the direct appraisal of the honest opinions of the people representing this troubled region. Their unfiltered sentiments need to be heard loud and clear. Then in chapter 5 an analysis of all the responses with regard to each particular question is discussed in detail. The final chapter offers some conclusions based on the information gained from the participants.

Chapter 4

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

4.1 Students interviewed

In seeking to canvass a representative sample of Middle Easterner students at EMU, an effort was made to outline the major segments of society along ethnic and religious lines. The three major categories were Arabs, Iranians and Turks. Since most of the Middle East proper is composed of Arabs a larger proportion was allotted to them. Of the three main ethnic blocks canvassed the views of ethnic and religious minorities within them were also included. Once a list of the different social elements that make up the different Middle Eastern blocks was determined, students from that group were sought out. These were approached individually for participation in the research. Those that agreed were invited to a quiet place on campus where the questionnaire was discussed privately over a cup of tea or coffee. After recording their response to the questions and ascertaining that the notes taken accurately represent their opinions they signed at the bottom. Soon afterwards the answers of participants were entered into the research database. In most cases the very words of participants were transcribed but for the sake of comprehension and fluidity minor grammatical corrections were made. The original transcripts of the interviews with each participant were preserved for the purpose of checking if necessary. The responses of each participant are listed below in accordance with their ethnic grouping:

4.2 Arab Students

Majority Arab countries include, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Lebanon and the Gulf States. Although Arab society is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim they do have significant minority religious groups. There are also many, especially among the younger generation, that do not subscribe to any religion. A broad selection of students representing the diverse elements of Arab society, as detailed above, were chosen for the interviews.

4.2.1 Devout Sunni Muslim

Abdurrahman is an Arab from Lebanon. His friend Omer from Saudi Arabia is also joining the conversation intermittently. They are both devout Sunni Muslims, meaning they strictly adhere to Islamic teachings including daily prayers and fasting. Their thoughts on democracy in the Middle East are particularly pertinent because they represent a large majority of Muslims in the region.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?

Yes, especially after the Arab Spring in Syria and Egypt. Saudi Arabia is a kingdom and rich princes run the Gulf States. Egypt is run by the military. Algeria only has an appearance of democracy but is actually run by the military. The regional leaders are not just. There is also a lot of external controlling by the US and other countries likes Iran and Russia. This is indirect control. The elite in the government are also only serving their own interests.

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?

Socialists and Liberals in the Middle East see democracy positively. In the case of elections they think they should be free. However when it comes to freedom almost all Arabs agree that women should not be given absolute

freedom. In the area of dress for example there should be limitations. Freedom of expression needs to be qualified by respect for others. Democracy is not the solution but rather should determine the quality of the people governing. Increasingly many, maybe 70% of Arabs, believe we need Sharia Law in order to bring justice instead of democracy.

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East? *The main problem is intrusion from western powers, in particular the US. We don't hate them, but please leave us alone! We also have bad people in our countries, which we need to learn to deal with. Also those who do possess power are unwilling to leave it to others.*
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East? *No, no way! We are not living in a civil society. Many people see democracy as western manipulation so they don't trust it. They see it as a deception, like a toy to cheat children. Even if we accept democracy the West will not leave us alone because we will be too powerful.*
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *Please stop meddling in our politics.*

4.2.2 Moderate Muslim

Hala is an Arab of Turkmen stock from Kirkuk, Iraq. She is a voracious reader and studies pharmacy at EMU. She describes herself as a moderate Muslim because she does not consistently practice her faith. Her comments are significant in that she has grown up in what was supposed to be a new and democratic Iraq. More recently she has also witnessed firsthand the horrors of ISIS.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East? *Of course. Elections are one of the clearest expressions of democracy and yet*

in Iraq, the whole process is determined by religious affiliation. Even if there is a more capable leader they are unwilling to vote for him because they are afraid of the social repercussions. Minorities don't have the right to really express themselves freely. Democracy only serves the majority, but they are only stealing from the people. In many places the military has the ultimate power to intervene as in Egypt. Furthermore there are no real rights for women or free education.

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?
Democracy is seen as linked with elections. Arabs often believe democracy is an evil thing developed by the West to destroy the Middle East. Many want a strong leader instead. Generally whenever anything bad happens people think it is the Americans or Jews behind it. They see it as a part of a grater conspiracy to divide and conquer the Middle East. Politicians use democracy to achieve their own plans and ignore the minorities.
3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East?
Firstly, lack of education. Secondly blindly following religious leaders. Muslim clerics from different groups are fomenting hatred toward the others. People are being filled with a glorified version of Islamic history which they are constantly updating but really doesn't represent the truth. Sharia Law is shown as some utopic thing but those who live in it hate it. Power hungry people are applying Islam as they wish. The West is seen as 'kafr' (infidel) but they are willing to take and use their weapons. I think the lack of cooperation, mutual respect and love is the main reason.
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?
No. People first want peace even if it comes at the hands of a fascist dictator

like Saddam Hussein. ISIS has given a good excuse for irresponsible governance and social failures.

5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *Even the Middle East does not understand itself. Radical groups are not showing an accurate picture of Islam and this is causing problems for Muslims living abroad. The soil of the Middle East is not ready for the seeds of democracy. What is happening on the ground is a dirty political game.*

4.2.3 Moderate Arab

Hatem is a prominent Palestinian political activist from the West Bank. He is finishing up his degree in International Relations. He is Sunni Muslim. The fact that he has grown up in one of the most volatile regions of the Middle East at the epicenter of much controversy regarding Israelis and Palestinians makes his comments noteworthy.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?
Totally. The way the Middle East views democracy is totally different from the rest of the world. We have often heard it from candidates wanting to be elected but we have hardly ever seen it put into practice. In Palestine we have no freedom of speech. The two main parties, Fatah and Hamas don't get along. Neither allows criticism of the leaders and social media is heavily restricted. They indiscriminately bring people in for interrogation and beat them. We don't really have freedom of political expression.
2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?
Most Palestinians see democracy as certain ideals and rights that are never put into practice. But they still want democracy. The rest of the Arab world,

aside from Palestine and Lebanon, enjoy very little democracy. We joke about how Saudi women still can't drive or dress freely when our women are comparatively much more free. Palestine is also much more educated with a very high literacy rate.

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East? *There is a long history of political struggle in the region. Colonialism left a lot of damage and Arabs in general still suffer from lack of education. Often times unhealthy focus is given to certain issues like the Palestinian cause which serves as an excuse for leaders to ignore the real problems in society. We have incompetent and autocratic leaders. Our religion also poses a problem. From the beginning when other leftist groups tried to get involved in politics Islamic groups pushed them out. Religion is a big factor. People see America as Christian so they are hesitant to import their democratic ideals for fear of losing their faith. There is also much fear of our own intelligence services. We say: "The walls have ears."*
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East? *I don't think so. Especially nowadays. It is still a long ways out. The Arab Winter, as we call it, shows how hard it is for Middle Easterners to fully accept and implement democracy. The economy and education is just not ready.*
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *The West needs to know that democracy is not the same everywhere because the situation is different in every place. We need education and stronger economies. We are not ready for full democracy. Freedom of life does not even exist.*

4.2.4 Christian Arab

Eliya is an Arab Christian from Jordan. Having lived all his life as part of a minority group in the Middle East he offers a unique perspective.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?
In most places of the Middle East it seems to have failed. Some countries are trying to copycat the West with varying levels of success. However in a few countries like mine, Jordan, we have a good degree of democracy.
2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?
As a good thing of course, but they don't always understand it. Jordan is different because we are ruled by a royal family like the UK. However most other countries in the Middle East that have experimented with democracy have ended up with dictatorships.
3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East?
People don't know how to express their opinions. The leaders also abuse power. Autocratic governments were the real reason for the Arab Spring. They were thieves. And yet today even Syria was more democratic before ISIS.
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?
It is becoming a reality in countries like Jordan. Even in Saudi Arabia women are pushing for certain rights like driving in public.
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them?
The Middle East doesn't know what they want. Not every Arab or Muslim is a terrorist. There are peaceful and modern parts of the Middle East. Westerners need to come and get to know us independently.

4.2.5 Minority Arab

Nancy has a mixed background and has experienced many different sides of the Middle East. She was born to Egyptian parents in Oman but because of their Baha'i faith they were forced to move often and she ended up living in Libya. She just concluded her under-graduate studies in the International Relations department.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?

Obviously! In Libya there were lots of spies so people were afraid to speak openly about politics. They were not free to express their opinions. Parliament was a charade. The government routinely handed out money to get people to cooperate with them. The strong military presence also instilled fear in people. There was no real freedom of press or access to accurate information. This is true across the Middle East in varying degrees. And yet today in Egypt some activists are increasingly willing to risk it all for greater freedom.

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?

Some say that the region is not ready for democracy. They view democracy as very utopic. In fact not even the West is fully democratic. In the Middle East people believe that the elite are behind everything. They largely see democracy as coming from the West that is why they don't want it although it is appealing.

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the

Middle East? Mainly because they distrust the West, especially America, and see democracy as an extension of it. There is also a lack of awareness in political culture. Girls in particular are very restricted. People don't think politics can change anything. They don't trust their own governments so they

believe their voice is nothing. Because most uphold Sharia law and democracy is seen as coming from the West, not from God, it is viewed as 'kufr' (blasphemy). Furthermore the application of Sharia law on everyone rules out individual liberty because it is incompatible with democracy.

4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?

I don't think so, maybe with time. There is really no pure democracy anywhere. It can only begin to develop when people realize that religion and politics don't mix. Religion is personal. Many are beginning to hate religion with many in Egypt turning to atheism. Awareness needs to be raised but it needs to be tailor-made for the Middle East. Each country needs to discover their own form of democracy.

5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *We don't need your help! Cooperation would be better but getting involved in the internal affairs of Middle Eastern countries is not helpful. Meddling irritates Middle Easterners who believe that the West is only trying to use them, especially when they threaten cutting military aid. They sense a superiority complex in the West because they want the rest of the world to be like them and yet Middle Easterners are not so sure they want to be like the West.*

4.2.6 Agnostic Arab

Jacob is an Arab from Mosul, Iraq. He was recently forced to flee because of the invasion of ISIS. Although growing up in a Muslim family he holds to no religion.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?
Yup, 100% yes! Now we have democracy in name but the Shia majority control everything in Iraq. Even in the old rich emirate states, although there

seems to be democracy on the outside, people are not free to criticize their leaders. Egypt has had two revolutions but still no democracy. In the Middle East if you disagree with someone and they happen to know a policeman you can get in trouble.

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?
First thing, it is 'haram' (forbidden)! They will ask you, "Do you want your sister to be free to work with men, have a boyfriend and walk around without a hijab?" Of course not. Many want democracy but only for themselves, only for men. They use democracy to describe silly little bad things that they want to legitimize like smoking cigarettes. They know it is not good but they claim they are acting democratically by copying the West.
3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East?
In my opinion the root of the problem is Islam. Also people have very little knowledge, they don't read. In Islam we have limiting rules. Islam does not allow freedom to criticize leaders. Supposedly we have an elected government but you can't hold them accountable. Because of Islam equality is not possible.
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?
No way! We could never be like Europe. Arabs who go to Europe and even become citizens still consider those governments 'kafr' (infidels). In the Middle East we may learn to wear shorts and call it democratic progress. Ultimately we have a problem with our heads.
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them?
Islam will never change. It is based on a book, which claims to be Allah's unchanging revelation. Also, Arabs cannot

fully separate state from religion. For now we need good leaders more than we need democracy.

4.3 Iranian Students

The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the major actors in the Middle East as it represents the bastion of Shia Islam. Although Iran claims to be overwhelmingly Muslim many of the students interviewed express open disenchantment with the repressive nature of their own country's government. The different participants below represent a sampling of the different ethnic groupings in Iran.

4.3.1 Devout Shia Muslim

Roozbeh is Persian completing his PhD in Mechanical Engineering at EMU. As a devout Shia Muslim his comments potentially represent the views of a majority of educated Iranians.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?
Yes, but remember it is a process. Democracy is still in a very early stage of development in the Middle East. The philosophy of democracy is western so it will take time for it to be realized in the Middle East. Governmental and educational infrastructure is still lacking. It is impossible to transplant democracy to the Middle East directly.
2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?
It depends on the country. In Iran, since the revolution we have gone through many different phases in our relationship to democracy. Initially we had a more socialist version of democracy thinking that embracing a common religious ideology would bring greater freedom. However with time we are moving closer to a more western understanding of secular democracy. At this time finding common interests is the key.

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East? *In the Arab Spring the revolts were a reaction to the dictatorships that people perceived as supported by the West. Because of this the Middle East in general mistrusts the West, in fact the poor policies of the West have given them an excuse to resort to violence. Now Arabs in general want to be independent of the West and its interests. Iranians see things differently. They see democracy as a positive thing and yet in their private life they still act like the Taliban, beating their wives. This is because of lack of education. Democracy needs to become more rooted. Actually right now the newer generation is very open to democracy. They are mainly working underground but I believe they will come forward to change our country. Ultimately people need to take initiative to remake the government according to the will of the nation.*
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East? *Of course but it needs to be combined with local culture and traditions. What the majority of people want is ultimately what is most important.*
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *They should respect the cultural and historic heritage of the region. We don't all have to be the same. Each country develops differently. The western media also needs to be careful to not always take the bad picture of the Middle East and generalize it. It should instead emphasize the positive. The West in general should not be thinking only of their security and national interests but rather of the welfare of real people in the Middle East.*

4.3.2 Non-religious Persian

Lark is Iranian from Azeri background. He studies mechanical engineering and claims no religious affiliation.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?
Of course. Different aspects of democracy exist in some countries but overall because of Islam democracy is truncated. In Iran we have an elected president with no power. Young women are forced to wear the hijab. There is no real freedom or equality to speak of.
2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?
Most believe that it is a good thing. And yet some Arabs see freedom for women to be out on the streets as a negative product of democracy.
3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East? *Obviously because of Islam. From the beginning Islam was based on extortion of money from peoples around and conquest. In this way power was given by God to his appointed leaders. So today regional religious leaders continue this tradition. This is further strengthened by the petrodollars. There is not equality in society; one man's testimony in court is equal to that of two women.*
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?
Maybe when the oil runs out. Otherwise no way, because people are not ready to accept those freedoms.
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *The West seems to want to maintain the status quo in the region for their own financial purposes and geopolitical goals. They need to recognize the selfish ambitions of their own governments.*

4.3.3 Christian convert

Koresh is a medical student from Iran who grew up in a Muslim family in Tehran where he later chose to become a Christian. While there he suffered for his faith and has continued to experience pressure from the Iranian government even while studying in Cyprus.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?

Yes I agree, of course. Iranians do not appreciate Western values. In the Middle East there is no male-female equality. Conversion to another religion is not allowed. Man is over his wife and she cannot divorce him. Girls cannot marry and travel freely. The money required for the killing of two women is equal to the compensation for the damage to a man's testicle.

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?

Everything is allowed, free sex and alcohol abuse. They are not thinking in terms of equality. The government and religious leaders portray democracy as western poison to push people away from Islam because if people know true democracy they will begin to question government and religious rules.

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the

Middle East? The primary obstacle is Islam, which denies the basic democratic values. Democracy and Islam are opposite like night and day. Because of this people don't have the necessary background to implement democratic freedoms. It is like running Windows 7 on an old computer that is not equipped to handle it. The operating system is not compatible with the new program. So long as people's mind-set doesn't change dressing the country up in modern clothes ultimately will not change anything. Democracy cannot be imported or super-imposed on a society that is not prepared for it.

4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?
This is currently impossible. People's mind-set needs to change not just the government. First they need to put Islam aside, then they need to open communication with the world. This interaction will bring democracy and secularism. However we should also question whether Western democracy is really the answer to the world's problems.
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *Don't compare each other's societies, democracy will not necessarily respond well in the Middle East. The greatest problem of the Middle East is Islam, it is like a cancer that cannot be treated symptomatically. Saying it is a religion of peace is not true. The core problem is religious and until it is diagnosed healing cannot begin. Islam teaches hatred which is not compatible with democracy. Mixing politics and religion has created havoc in Iran because religion is used to manipulate society. They often say, 'Our politics are our religion and our religion is our politics.'*

4.3.4 Non-Religious Kurd

Hiwa is a PhD civil engineer student from the northwest of Iran. He is of Kurdish stock. He claims to believe in God but does not have a religious preference.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?
Absolutely. In Iran we have a religious government. In the revolution of 1979 Iranians were hoping for more freedom but got less. Elections don't change anything. Countries around us are no different. To the east fundamentalists are ruling. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria to the south show the absence of democracy. In Egypt despite the recent revolution the government was taken

over by radicals, which were later crushed by a militarist regime. Even Turkey, the most promising country of the Middle East, with the rise of Erdoğan is changing dramatically. As power is increasingly concentrated in one man democracy is decreasing. Sadly, the Middle East is the center of tension in the world.

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?

There are different social layers in the Middle East. Some see democracy as a good alternative because they want individual freedoms. Others see it as a trap set up by western powers to enslave Islamic countries. Some talk about Islamic democracy, but that seems like a contradiction. They say human rights need to be subjugated to Sharia Law. Some think they can reform Islam to fit democracy. Iranians have been fighting for democracy for 200 years but have not succeeded. There is still no consensus on how democracy can work in the world of Islam.

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the

Middle East? There is no unity in people's thinking regarding democracy. Middle Easterners are religious people and religion plays a key role in society because most are Muslims. And yet Islam is not capable of preparing the ground for democracy because it teaches revenge, oppression and jihad. People are obligated to fight for Allah. Even amongst Sunni and Shia there is constant fighting. They are filled with hatred and see each other as enemies. As people become more religious they tend to become more radical. The young generation is very impressionable and is bombarded with propaganda. Education is not a solution on its own but it can help. Ultimately the cultural

gap between East and West is too great with Middle Easterners preferring strong religious leaders.

4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?
Maybe with time. Every country is unique. The Middle East is 100 years behind the West. First Islam needs to decrease because it is currently blinding people.
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *They need to find ways to reconcile people and circumvent the government. They need to teach us good political culture and societal democratic values. They need to understand that Middle Easterners think very differently. Christianity teaches peace and obedience to government, but Islam teaches aggression. There is no separation of state and religion in the Middle East. Democracy and Islam are not compatible. Somehow Islamic influence needs to be faded out.*

4.4 Turkish Students

As the only living remnant of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has always played a prominent role in the Middle East. Ever since the secular reforms of Atatürk, Turkey has often been held up as a model of democracy in the region and yet more recent developments have brought increased polarization. Turkish universities are often a living representation of the bitter ideological and ethnic rivalries that divide national politics in their country and EMU is no exception.

4.4.1 Devout Muslim

Veli is a PhD student managing a dormitory at EMU. He is a devout Sunni Muslim and strong proponent of Turkey's ruling AKP. His perspective is critical because at

the present time his kind of thinking represents a strong majority of people living in Turkey.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?

Not at all. On the contrary the West doesn't have true democracy since most of them are still ruled by kings and queens. Turkey however has a democratically elected parliament in which every group of society is fairly represented. In short, Turkey is more democratic than Europe. Regarding the rest of the Middle East, they are much like Europe, ruled by kings and princes.

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?

Since 1923 democracy began to be established in Turkey. Especially since 2002 until today it has hit its high water mark. The Arabs however do not understand democracy. Actually the Middle East was introduced to democracy with the advent of our prophet. The caliphs after him were all chosen democratically by the will of the majority of Muslims. Sadly since then things did not go well for democracy in the region. This is mainly because of the plotting of Imperialists and Zionists in the region and the dictators they have set up in most countries.

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the

Middle East? Western Imperialists powers of course and the leaders who are serving their interests in the Middle East. In Egypt for example the people democratically chose Morsi but the West used Sisi and the military to stage a coup and removed the elected government. Thousands perished.

4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?
Impossible. Imperialists powers in the region don't want Middle Easterners to be fully free and democratic.
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them?
Leave people to their own choices. One size does not fit all. Everyone should not be forced to think the same. Western powers should remove their hands from the natural resources in the region. If they want to help give us education. Everyone needs to learn Islamic culture better. The West instead of imposing their own culture should equip us to teach our own cultural values.

4.4.2 Secular Turk

Barish is Turkish but considers himself a deist. He is studying psychology at EMU. This young man is a strong proponent of secularist ideals as put forward by Atatürk. Kemalists and secularists like himself make up a significant portion of the population in Turkey.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?
I agree. In the Arab Peninsula women's rights are still suppressed. In Turkey, up until recently, minorities were not free to express themselves openly. Many countries in the Middle East are being used to fulfill American programs in the region. In Arab countries people are still forced to wear certain clothes against their will. They are furthermore ruled by kings, which shows a lack of democracy.
2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?
In my region of Hatay democracy is perceived positively. It is usually associated with educational improvement. In poorer areas however democracy is not

well understood because a type of feudalism continues. Where political awareness is weak democracy is not well accepted.

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East? *The first reason is lack of education. Secondly exploitative western states don't want our people to be fully free. This is particularly evident in their use of our petrol. Thirdly feudal social structures continue to govern people's lives on the local level. Lastly, religion is increasingly being used by leaders to govern people. In Islam women are not equal to men. Strict and militant Islam is an obstacle to the development of democracy. The current religious establishment in Turkey is eroding the foundation of secularism because everything is ruled by the will of one man. The only reason Turkey is somewhat better than the other countries in the region is because of the secular reforms instituted by Ataturk.*
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East? *If Islam could undergo a reform like the Protestant Reformation then it is possible. Also if education is improved it is feasible but this will take much time and would probably require a strong revolutionary to step up.*
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *The West acts selfishly in some areas. They need to know that the main problem is persisting feudal networks and lack of education. Our people are still looking to follow a tall, muscular leader with a big stick.*

4.4.3 Alevi Turk

Sevgi is of Turkmen stock from Izmir, Turkey. She grew up in an Alevi home and is a strong defender of that tradition. According to most estimates Alevis (an offshoot of Shia Islam) make up roughly 20% percent of the Turkish population.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?

Yes, it would be hard to claim that there is democracy in the Middle East. Even in Turkey people are no longer free to speak their mind. We are going backwards. Women are still marginalized in the private and public spheres. As Alevis we have always felt discrimination. We are still not allowed to establish our places of worship (Cem evi). Now there are religious classes in school that forcibly teach only one strand of Islam.

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?

Democracy is something all of us want and we view it positively. However the current administration thinks they are employing democracy but this is really only for themselves. We do not feel that equality has been reached. Theirs is a self-styled democracy serving their own interests.

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the

Middle East? Mainly because of our leaders. They are trying to govern our country like the Saudis, so we are going backwards instead of forwards. Women's rights are still not valued. People want everyone to think and believe like they do, they have no tolerance for variety. Religion is the driving force in this. Real democracy puts the people's will front and center and yet our leaders only put their wishes first.

4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East? *It*

seems difficult the way we are going. I'm not very hopeful.

5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *Western nations needs to approach us as independent groups aside from their own vested interests.*

4.4.4 Kurdish Muslim

Mehmet is an ethnic Kurd born and raised in southeastern Turkey. He is a prominent activist for political liberties and studies architecture at EMU. He considers himself a Muslim. Ethnic Kurds make up at least 15% of Turkey's population.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East? *I agree, because every government puts forward its own system. There is always a desire to impose a dominant culture and undermine other cultures. Clearly some governments in the Middle East are supporting ISIS. Leaders elected in the region although they claim to win with overwhelming majority clearly do not represent the interests of the majority.*
2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy? *Middle East people want a strong leader because they don't trust themselves to rule. Democracy is a good and necessary thing but it is viewed as utopic. People have not been taught what it really is or how it works.*
3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East? *Our people are hot-blooded and only know how to speak with guns and bullets. Tolerance is not prized. We cannot accept different kinds of people rather we are fixated on developing one type of person. In Turkey the ideal is to be Turkish Sunni Muslim otherwise you are treated as a traitor. Sharia Law is increasingly enshrined as God's government, but only protects certain people and marginalizes the rest.*

4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?
Of course but with time just like it took much time in Europe and America. Sooner or later people will have to accept democracy.
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *There are some democratic movements in the Middle East, which need support. The West needs to intervene militarily against groups like ISIS. Because of their reluctance to do so many are wondering if they are not in fact supporting ISIS.*

4.5 Other Participants

There were a few participants that do not fully fit any of the categories above. And yet their input sheds important light on the state of democracy in the Middle East.

4.5.1 Non-religious Kurd

Serdar is from Kurdistan in northern Iraq. He used to be a muezzin, doing the call to prayer at the mosque but now he claims no religious affiliation. He is currently completing his PhD at EMU.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?
Yes, People in the Middle East are acting very selfishly, seeking monetary gain. Even though we are brothers, we don't care for each other. The leaders of the Middle East only think of themselves. However in Kurdistan we have democracy. Women are free and treated as equals with males. Our government is elected and has good relations with Turkey and the West.
2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?
As Kurds we see democracy as necessary for society. Equality is essential. The younger generation in the Middle East really wants democracy but the

older religious institutions stand in the way when they call democracy 'haram' (forbidden).

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East? *Because we lack the necessary religious infrastructure. Every religious group keeps trying to pull people to their side. Religion continues to hamper democracy. In fact often it is the covered women that commit the greater sins.*
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East? *Impossible. Without implementing the necessary educational framework it is not possible. The only way is for people to revolt against religion. Currently people continue living in fear of what others will say and what religious institutions will do to them.*
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *They need to help us but without seeking their own national interests and getting involved in wars. First of all educational infrastructure needs to be developed. People need to be taught to love their people more than their religion.*

4.5.2 Turkish German Muslim

Pelin is a devout Muslim studying to be a teacher at EMU. She is a unique case because although she was born and raised in Germany to Turkish parents, she is distinctly Middle Eastern in her outlook.

1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East? *I think people in Turkey are free overall and in fact have an excess of liberties. But in the rest of the Middle East I don't see democracy.*

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy? *It is not fully understood. In seeking to be free people abuse democracy. People pick up placards and protest everything but this only causes more civil unrest.*
3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East? *Leaders in the Middle East are not protecting human rights. There are economic inequalities. Women are mistreated and people are just not valued.*
4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East? *Never, because western states are very strong and they don't want us to have democracy. In the Middle East the necessary framework is still not in place. Germans are very orderly and honest but that cannot be said for Turkish people. Turkey has so much going for it but they are not able to utilize it.*
5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them? *Western states see themselves as the greatest and look down on us. It is always Muslims that are persecuted. In Germany the Turks are always despised, because if Turkey becomes too strong it can rule the world.*

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS OF DATA

5.1 Overview

The following section will seek to find common threads amongst the responses of the sixteen participants. This will help create a more or less cohesive and comprehensive picture of the current state of democracy in the Middle East. In turn this will assist in forming better conclusions regarding the state and progress of democracy in the region as well as how it can be improved. The participant's responses to each question will be elaborated upon in turn.

In general it can be observed that the participants were very forthright about their opinions and overall agreed that democracy is failing in the region. The perception of democracy was likewise very enlightening in that it shows the glaring difference between what westerners view as democracy and what Middle Easterners conceive. The reasons given for the lack of democracy although varied, form a clear pattern that is helpful in delineating the main problems. The responses to the final questions about the future of democracy in the region and the relationship with the West although rather dismal and disheartening, provide some helpful ideas as to how to improve the situation. As stated earlier the greatest benefit of these reactions is that they provide very forthright and genuine feedback from young thinkers with limited prejudice but a huge stake in the future of Middle East.

5.2 Question 1: Failure of Democracy?

The object of the first question was to assess the general state of democracy in the Middle East and in the countries of the participants in particular. The overwhelming majority of participants from around the region agreed with the statement that democracy is failing in the Middle East. The only exceptions were Veli and Pelin from Turkey who believe that their country in fact epitomizes democracy. Veli, who endorses the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) currently in power, goes so far as to claim that Turkey is more democratic than Europe. This however is hotly challenged by the other minority Turks canvassed who believe their country is in fact going backwards. Other participants further noted that Turkey, which has long been held as the prime example of secular democracy in the region, has in recent years moved towards a more autocratic style of government.

Again, although the participants almost unanimously agreed that democracy has not taken root in the Middle East several notable exceptions were mentioned. Lebanon with its very multi-cultural sociopolitical make-up was hailed as more or less democratic in nature and practice. Jordan to a lesser degree was also noted for its stability especially in light of the Arab Spring revolts racking the region. Interestingly, Palestine was noted for the freedom women enjoy there. Lastly Kurdistan, that is the northern autonomous region of Iraq, has in recent years evidenced a higher level of democracy in the region with relatively competent elected officials, freedom of expression and association and equality among its different ethnic groups including broad liberties for women and minorities.

In discussing the status of democracy in the Middle East several common complaints were voiced the most important of which was autocratic governments and leaders. More than two thirds of the participants mentioned the gross abuse of power, injustice, corruption and general ineptitude of regional leaders as clear indicators of the lack of democracy in the Middle East. Although many Middle Eastern countries hold elections, the participants were quick to note that these were no more than a charade with most leaders peculiarly being elected over and over with an overwhelming majority of votes despite large public opposition. So even though one of the hallmarks of democracy, namely elections, is in effect, they are clearly neither free nor fair.

Almost half of the participants also made mention of the lack of basic freedoms of speech, religious affiliation and political expression. People in the Middle East are not generally free to openly express their discontent towards their leader's policies. This is amply demonstrated by how Turkey's government, the most 'secular' of the lot, has in the last years incarcerated scores of journalists and even under-aged civilians for allegedly criticizing its policies.⁸⁷ From several comments it was also evident that there is a general sense of trepidation pervading the society so that people are always wary of being spied on or turned in to the local authorities for any variety of trumped up charges. This is particularly true in the area of religion.

In this part of the world where the population is overwhelmingly Muslim and many governments like that of Saudi Arabia and Iran even espouse Islam as central to their legitimacy, it is difficult if not impossible for minority beliefs to subsist in peace and

⁸⁷ Burak Bekdil, (January 3, 2015), *Erdoğan in Wonderland: Press "Freedom" in Turkey*. The Gatestone Institute. Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/4961/erdogan-in-wonderland-freedom-in-turkey>

security. It is even harder for those who like Koresh have abandoned Islam for another religion. Mernissi from Morocco facetiously describes freedom of religion in the Middle East as “freedom of belief and opinion, with one sole condition: do not leave Islam.”⁸⁸ Muslims in the Middle East are generally taught that they are born Muslim and that to change their faith is tantamount to apostasy, which will result at the very least in social alienation and may go as far as capital punishment, depending on the country.⁸⁹ Clearly the basic freedom of speech and tolerance for religious expression is lacking in much of the Middle East.

With regard to egalitarianism, a few participants made mention of the lack of social liberty and equality with regards to the rights of women in particular. The majority of women in the Middle East, particularly in Arab and Iranian societies, are compelled to wear the hijab and abstain from majority-male contexts. However even in secular Turkey women are increasingly facing social pressure to adopt the religious head-coverings. Especially in rural communities across the region marriages are often arranged and women’s movement and travel is restricted. As several participants noted, in countries where Islamic Sharia Law takes precedence women do not have equal standing with men before the law and often face social and legal discrimination.

Lastly there was some mention of the lack of education and the meddling of foreign powers in regional affairs however the participants seemed to put the burden of responsibility on their own dictatorial leaders and deficient societal framework. With few exceptions it seems abundantly clear that democracy despite almost a century of

⁸⁸ Mernissi, P. 49.

⁸⁹ Safa, Reza, *Inside Islam: Exposing and Reaching the World of Islam*, (Charisma House, 1996), Pp. 48-49.

'progress' is still appallingly defective in the Middle East. And this notwithstanding the recent 'Arab Spring' during which many western political scientists were hopeful that the Middle East might discover democracy. It seems that on the contrary, democracy instead of evolving in the Middle East is rather devolving into further chaos and despotism.

5.3 Question 2: Perception of Democracy?

In seeking to understand the failure of democracy in the region it is essential to gauge people's general perception and perspective of democracy. As can be seen from the responses, unlike the West that virtually venerates democracy as sacred, the opinions of Middle Easterners is much more varied and even polarized on this crucial matter. Although roughly half of the participants said that democracy was viewed as positive and indispensable, an equal number of objections were voiced with regard to Middle Easterner's hesitations regarding democracy. Interestingly none of the participants expressed democracy in the typical Western terms of popular sovereignty, equality and civil liberties. Instead they generally spoke of it as a door to increased freedom. It is this same notion of freedom that scares many Middle Easterners and makes them wary of democracy because freedom alone is a tool that can be used for good as well as for evil, as has been abundantly exemplified by the recent events of the Arab Spring.

Many of the participants noted that Middle Easterners see democracy as a means of becoming more western and/or copying the modern world. This in some cases becomes an excuse for elected leaders who use the term democracy to sugarcoat their oppressive regimes and self-serving policies. Likewise average citizens evidently use the term to justify any actions linked to the West like smoking or

drinking, which would otherwise not be allowed in their society. From the participants canvassed it appears that a majority of Middle Easterners see democracy not so much as a universal ideal or governmental paradigm but rather as very Western in source and nature. Consequently, democracy is shorthand for the West.

In this way democracy is also held suspect for any and every abuse that might be remotely linked to the West. Naturally Middle Easterners main window into the western world is the television and internet. So as western media becomes more profligate Middle Easterners are increasingly suspect of Western senses of freedom as enshrined in democracy. The Arab students in particular pointed out how democracy is often associated with the moral decadence Middle Easterners witness in western media outlets. In societies where women are still largely sheltered, common place scenes of nudity and marital infidelity emanating from the West cause them to question the moral foundation of democracy. This has led the more fundamentalist Muslims to label democracy '*haram*', meaning unclean and forbidden for pious Muslims.

A good number of the participants made reference to the broadly held conspiracy theories regarding western involvement in the Middle East. It is often purported that America is out to get the oil of the Middle East. Because of this any effort on the part of the US or the West in general to further democracy in the region is only seen as another political scheme and/or economic ploy. This even leads some to conclude that the West is in fact working hard to hamstring democracy in the Middle East in order to ensure their submission to the West's ongoing imperialist stratagem. Consequently for many democracy is a 'western poison' designed to lull them to

sleep, all the while allowing America to steal their natural resources and leave them empty-handed.

From the many comments it is evident that the Middle East suffers from some form of cultural schizophrenia. On the one hand they desperately crave the freedoms offered by democracy. And yet they also deeply mistrust the West and its liberal ideals going so far as to claim that the democracy it offers is in fact a sham. Because of this contradiction many of the participants conclude that the implementation of democracy in the Middle East is simply too far-fetched and utopic. This kind of thinking is largely responsible for the current cross-cultural impasse because it has given radicals and Islamists governments alike ample justification for setting up social and religious barriers that prevent democratic principles from effectively taking root in Middle Eastern society. Consequently the more the West seeks to push for democracy in the Middle East, the more the indigenous people are suspicious of its real intent. This again is because they are not able to differentiate democratic ideals from what they see happening in the West. Ultimately it may be this conflicting perception of democracy that hampers its growth and development in the Middle East the most.

5.4 Question 3: Reason for Failure?

This question seeks to explore the main reasons behind the failure of democracy in the Middle East. Naturally the blame can hardly be pinned on any one thing. It is a complex matter but from the answers of the participants a number of very clear arguments come to the fore. Many were frank enough to blame the selfish incompetence of their own leaders. Widespread corruption has led to deep distrust engendering a society paralyzed by fear and uncertainty. It was noted repeatedly that

the Arab Spring was particularly born out of a grass-roots rebellion towards entrenched autocratic leaders in the region. Some saw these leaders as mere puppets of the West. Others included religious leaders among those who abuse power and foment denominational divisions and general intolerance.

Another main reason highlighted was the often self-serving intrusion of Western powers in the affairs of the Middle East represented by the embellished conspiracy theories it has spawned. Even before the days of colonization the West was often portrayed as Christian or Crusader and thus '*kafir*', that is infidel and enemy to the Muslim world. Later with the disenfranchisement of the Ottoman Islamic Empire and the ensuing colonial ambitions of the West, a deep-set mistrust of the infidel West has been perpetuated.⁹⁰ Since World War II, the West has often pursued its economic and ideological interests in the Middle East, at times leading the region to war. Israel in particular, seen as a puppet of American imperialism, has likewise become a favorite target of Arab antagonism.⁹¹ More than any other region in the world the West has repeatedly fought wars in the name of democracy in this region and yet they have repeatedly failed to gain the trust and respect of the local people. All of this conflict in general has sown the seeds of suspicion that continue to bear the fruit of resentment and revenge.

One major reason often linked to the failure of democracy in the Middle East is the lack of education. The general sense is that the region is not prepared to handle democracy in action. In fact there is a pervasive notion that the West is knowingly withholding education from the Middle East in order to ensure their economic

⁹⁰ Mernissi, Pp.18-19.

⁹¹ Daniel Pipes (March, 1991) *Israel, America and Arab Delusions*, Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/pipes/205/israel-america-and-arab-delusions>

servitude. Other participants point out that the necessary sociopolitical infrastructure for free and fair elections, civil liberties and social equality are just not extant in the Middle East. Thus to continue to force feed democracy on a society not capable of digesting it very naturally only results in further bitterness and social convulsions.

However the question as to what the main reason for the failure of democracy in the Middle East is still looms large. The majority of those canvassed gave a strong although often guarded intimation as to where they felt the real obstacle lies. More than two thirds of those interviewed pointed to Islam as the real source of conflict. Several pointed to the implementation of Sharia Law as incompatible with democracy. Others noted that this is because strict observance of the historical tenets of Islam does not allow for full equality of men and women for example. Some pointed to the fact that according to Islam leaders are elected by Allah and must submit to His laws as prescribed in the Qur'an. Consequently to have a popularly elected government adhering to the laws and decrees of man-made institutions like parliament is seen as untenable. Of course, the Turkish participant would disagree here claiming that the first four caliphs were all democratically chosen, this however flies in the face of historical evidence from Islamic sources to the contrary.⁹²

As can be noted, many reasons can be given for the failure of democracy in the region. What is clear is that whether because of the Middle East's strained past with the West, or their ongoing struggle with their own autocratic leaders, or because of the constraining nature of the predominant religion, the Middle East remains very stony and sterile soil for the seeds of democracy.

⁹² Gabriel, Pp. 137-138, Cox and Marks, Pp. 25-26.

5.5 Question 4: Hope for Democracy?

In this question participants were asked if they could envision the kind of democracy practiced in the West become a reality in the Middle East. Aside from a few tentative and wishful affirmatives, the great majority of participants made it clear that the Middle East as it stands today is not prepared for democracy, especially the kind of liberal democracy flaunted in the West, and that they don't expect it to be ready any time in the near future. Some regurgitated classic conspiracy theories that the West actually doesn't really want the Middle East to attain full democratic status. Arabs and Turks in particular tended to portray a deep-set distrust of the West and its motives. A number of the participants actually noted that the Middle East in fact does not want democracy because they don't trust it or the West. Persians and Kurds on the other hand evidenced a much more positive view of western democracy.

Several highlighted the fact that democracy is a process that needs time to fully develop into maturity. Just as America and Europe took considerable time to fully understand and implement modern democracy it will surely take some time for democracy to become established in the Middle East. In the mean time, as several noted, there are more pressing matters like the lack of peace and justice that need to be addressed. Because of this many Middle Easterners are willing to resort to autocratic leaders in the short term in order to ensure their security.

A number of the participants reflected on the fact that democracy at its core is rule by the majority, consequently whatever form of democracy takes root in the Middle East will ultimately need to be tailor-made to fit their unique societal needs. In this regard the Middle East cannot be expected to fully emulate the West. For this to take

place several participants highlighted the need for better education and stronger economies. Others stressed that the general mind-set of Middle Easterners needs to change so that they can fully appreciate democratic values and seek to implement them in their own societies.

According to several of the participants the most important matter that needs to be addressed in order for there to be hope for democracy in the Middle East is Islam. While some suggested that religion should be extricated from politics in order for everyone to be treated fairly, the majority stated that Islam should somehow be incorporated into government. The views on the role of Islam in the future of the Middle East ranged from those calling for religious reformation, which, depending on the stated intent, can have very different if not antithetical implications, to others calling for a complete abandonment of Islam. Although the latter seems highly unlikely at this time, the opinion that traditional Islamic tenets pose a serious obstacle to the future of any tenable form of democracy in the region seems to be a widely held. While some were adamant in stating that Islam and democracy are not compatible, for a majority Muslim society to have any hope of democracy, the nature and role Islam will play in their government needs to be clearly specified.

5.6 Question 5: The Response of the West?

In the last question the participants were given the opportunity to speak to the West expressing exactly how they feel the rest of the world should help them. While a couple of participants stressed that the West should not view all Middle Easterners as terrorists several more emphasized that western governments need to see Islam for what it is, namely fundamentally opposed to democracy. While some called for reformation of Islam several participants stressed that real change is not possible in

Islam because it is ultimately based on the written and unalterable revelation of Allah as expressed in the Qur'an. So, they claim, for western leaders and political scientists to try and reinterpret the foundational teachings and make them more apropos to modern notions of democracy will in the end only be met with frustration and disappointment. In short the West needs to understand that although most Muslims are very decent people the religion they ascribe to poses an insurmountable barrier to liberal democracy.

Almost half of the participants stressed the need for western powers to honestly evaluate their own national and often selfish interests in the Middle East. Several were blunt in stating the common held belief that the West needs to stop meddling and interfering in the Middle East. One pointed out how any western interference belies a superiority complex. Interestingly though, another participant was adamant that western powers urgently need to exercise their military superiority to address the growing threat of radical Islamic groups in the Middle East. Several others stressed that the West needs to provide more educational opportunities to the Middle East. This seems like a classic example of not being able to please everyone. When the West intervenes people cry foul but when they withdraw and everything goes foul, people complain of their absence and indifference. Along these lines, several also mentioned that the Middle East often doesn't know itself what it really wants or needs.

Regarding the implementation of democracy in the Middle East many of the participants highlighted the point that democracy is not a 'one size fits all' model. Every society is unique in its history, culture and core values. Consequently when

the West seeks to transplant its version of democracy to the countries of the Middle East it is often unsuccessful because it does not often account for the distinctive traits of Middle Eastern society. Notwithstanding it is also often viewed as a foreign imposition with strings attached. Ultimately if democracy is ever to have a chance in the Middle East it needs to be uniquely tailored to fit the complex sociopolitical realities of the region.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Recalibrating Democracy

Democracy has clearly failed miserably in the Middle East and from the various comments of the participants it is evident that persistence in imposing it on the Muslim majority countries of the region will only result in further turmoil. The reasons for this include deep mistrust of the West and its policies, disgust towards its alleged immorality, rampant corruption in their own governments and inability to meld modern democratic ideals with historic Islamic tenets. From the evidence collected it seems abundantly clear that liberal democracy as it stands will not work in the Middle East. What can be done about it?

First of all it must be noted that what most Middle Easterners are reacting to is not democratic freedom itself but the licentious expression it has found in modern liberal states of the West. Most of the participants made it clear that their people want freedom and democracy but not the type they see practiced in the West and definitely not one with political and economic strings attached.

Sadly, democracy in the West has come to be known for its absolute tolerance of anything and everything to the point of being intolerant of those critical of it. A striking contemporary example is the gay rights movement. While the majority of people around the world and, at least up until recent decades, a majority of

Americans would not normally condone such sexual expression and behavior, because of the persistent lobbying of gay rights activists and resulting legislation passed by liberal administrations, today people are forced not only to tolerate but also to accommodate such conduct or be penalized.⁹³ The current Obama administration has gone further seeking to push their gay rights agenda on other countries using American Embassies all under the guise of fostering global democracy.⁹⁴ Recently the Pope criticized this practice calling it “ideological imperialism” akin to the Nazi propaganda machine.⁹⁵ Ironically most Muslims would agree with him on this issue because they also view homosexuality as sinful. Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi of the Islam Society of North America said: "Homosexuality is a moral disorder. It is a moral disease, a sin and corruption..."⁹⁶ Notwithstanding, propagating this kind of far-left ideology in the name of democracy on the rest of the world actually feeds the anti-democracy narratives of fundamentalists.

As noted above democracy in the modern-day West has gone far beyond merely safeguarding free and fair elections and human rights to instead championing unfettered social even sexual expression in the name of political tolerance. Middle Easterners canvassed on the other hand stressed that democracy must include reasonable boundaries, moral standards and should be qualified by the will of the people. Interestingly Fatima Mernissi notes that the hijab, which for most modern westerners stand as a symbol of repression, actually serves as a consoling symbol of

⁹³ Tanner Brumbarger, (June 10, 2013) *When Tolerance becomes Reverse Bigotry*. Available at: <http://thecollegeconservative.com/2013/06/10/when-tolerance-becomes-reverse-bigotry/>

⁹⁴ Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/28/obama-gay-rights-abroad-embassies-activism>

⁹⁵ Available at: <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/pope-francis-compares-pushing-gay-agenda-to-hitler-youth-indoctrination>

⁹⁶ Available at: <http://www.missionislam.com/knowledge/homosexuality.htm>

boundaries to most Muslims, giving them a sense of safety and security.⁹⁷ This is completely foreign to the way most modern liberals in the West view freedom. Interestingly not just Muslims but also Christians in the West are increasingly uncomfortable with the direction of socially liberal democracy and militant secularism. Consensus on a number of important ethical issues like same-sex marriage, abortion and euthanasia is becoming more lopsided with the traditional Christian communities feeling more and more ostracized.⁹⁸ Ultimately if democracy is rule by the people for the people, it must represent the real interests and beliefs of the people. And yet sadly in much of the West, democracy has become a pretext for liberalists, left-wing agenda and otherwise objectionable moral behavior.

Getting back to the basics, democracy is rule by the will of the people. This does not necessarily preclude cultural or religious values, on the contrary it assumes their inclusion. On account of this, as many participants noted, democracy is not a one size fits all policy. Rather ideally it can and should take different shapes and directions depending on the will of the people it claims to represent. So it should come as no surprise that when a western liberal form of democracy is transplanted to a country on the other side of the globe the chances of it flourishing are minimal. Ultimately for democracy to have a fighting chance of budding in the Middle East, it needs to meet their social criteria and be representative of their cultural norms. This may mean that the majority of people in any particular country may not choose to grant equal freedom to women and gays, or that they might desire a different kind of government where a strong leader is given more power rather than a representative

⁹⁷ Mernissi, Pp. 7-8.

⁹⁸ Thio Li-ann, *The Christian Response to the Liberal Agenda*. Available at: <http://www.gcf.org.sg/resources/the-christian-response-to-the-liberal-agenda>

body. And yet judging on their on-going reaction to perceived human rights abuses worldwide, western liberal activists would not stand for such ‘undemocratic’ developments.

Ultimately this exposes the Achilles’ heel of democracy. Most westerner activists have come to believe that they have a sacred and universal responsibility to protect the rights of the oppressed, all in the name of democracy. They further assume that theirs is the golden standard of democracy. And yet a pure form of democracy would give different societies equal justification in choosing and enforcing their own set of political standards and moral values. In fact for any one society to foist their form of democracy on any other society would be considered out-and-out undemocratic. This simple logic highlights the handicap of democracy in that without any higher and universal moral authority it can only be applied in limited and local measure. The fact is that since its emergence on the international scene, democracy has abandoned its primary legitimizing foundation and thus forfeited its ethical authority.

Initially the founders of the United States, who in many ways crafted modern democracy, were overwhelmingly religious men who did not see religion and democracy as incompatible at all.⁹⁹ Because of this, references to God and universal unalienable truths predicated on divine sovereignty and revelation permeated their memoirs and ultimately found their way into the foundational documents of the United States, like the Declaration of Independence.¹⁰⁰ The signers of this historic manuscript, the first legal treatise to enshrine democracy, justified their revolution on two ‘self-evident truths’: human equality before God and divinely ordained rights,

⁹⁹ Hashemi, P. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Harsanyi, P. 7.

which included life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Precisely because of the assumption that these democratic ideals were divine in origin, subsequent American generations have felt justified in propagating them to the other nations.¹⁰¹ In other words because these liberties were seen as emanating from the universal Creator then it was only reasonable to assume that all creatures were entitled to them.

Almost simultaneously France was undergoing their revolution and professed to adopt democracy as the foundation of their new republic. However unlike the American form of democracy that was grounded in religious experience and rhetoric, the French chose a much more secular form of democracy that divorced religion from governmental affairs. For the French the will of the people and ultimately the state replaced God's revelation. Ultimately the people choose what was right or wrong according to their own will and wishes.¹⁰² With time this has paved the way for secular humanism where the definition of values are constantly being reshuffled depending on the will of the people.

Today this French version of democracy has resulted in whole schools of thought such as post-modernism where right and wrong are entirely relative. Although not all subscribe to such ideas, the impact of secularism on the West cannot be overstated. Much of Europe has followed in the steps of France by disavowing any on-going relationship between democracy and divine revelation. America, likewise has with time abandoned their adherence to morally driven democracy in deference to the

¹⁰¹ Herring, George, C., *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*. (Oxford University Press, 2008), 304-305.

¹⁰² Hurd, Elizabeth, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, (Princeton University Press, 2008), 53-54.

more egalitarian French version.¹⁰³ Democracy, as the majority of the people in the West understand it, although admittedly rooted in Christian heritage no longer has any need for God and yet the assumption persists that it is still universally binding in nature. What most fail to realize is that without a claim to divine revelation and authority this form of democracy holds no legitimate universal credence. Nader Hashemi calls this biased notion “false universalisms”, namely the assumption that the historical experience of the West with its accompanying social and political framework is somehow normative for all societies.¹⁰⁴

The larger question is this: Can there be talk of universal democratic principles in the increasingly secular if not relativist paradigm adopted and propagated by the West? For example westerners often chide the Middle East about their lack of democracy pointing to discrimination of women and minorities, but what moral standard are they using to define such behavior as wrong? For that matter Muslim societies deem the West’s promulgation of same-sex marriage as wrong, and they at least have some Scripture to back it up. Western societies, for their part, have overwhelmingly rejected their historic Christian beliefs choosing liberal relativism instead so they are clearly not indexing their cultural norms on Biblical revelation. The moral values of the West, although still somewhat influenced by its religious history, are increasingly turning relativistic so that right and wrong is deduced by the will and practice of people, which means that moral values are in constant flux.¹⁰⁵ This however can hardly be considered universal in nature. Ultimately it is the propagation of this kind

¹⁰³ Hashemi, P. 111.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, P.177.

¹⁰⁵ Olivier, Roy (2013) *Secularism and Islam: The Theological Predicament*, (The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs, 48:1, 5-19), DOI: 10.1080/03932729.2013.759365

of liberal democracy and ever-fluctuating morality that the Middle East and others find particularly distasteful and untenable.

Once the ‘Divine’ footing is removed from the concept of democracy it no longer retains a universal claim to truth. Western liberal democracy for its part is no more than the reflection of its current evolving society and cannot therefore presume to be superior to any other society. Neither can it be held up as the perfect model for all peoples. If democracy hopes to reclaim its universal appeal and authority it needs to have divine prerogative. Along these lines, Hashemi says, “Religion is a key and often ignored variable in the long and torturous struggle for liberal democracy that social scientists ignore at their own analytical peril.”¹⁰⁶

The Muslim majority societies of the Middle East for their part are staunchly religious and look with disdain on the moral bankruptcy of western countries. Most Middle Easterners believe in a Creator God who sets the rules, determining what is right and wrong for all mankind. This is a fundamental difference between East and West that continues to cloud the democracy dilemma. On the one hand Middle Easterners want the freedom that democracy promises but on the other hand they detest the immorality that secularism and relativism has engendered in the West. This again is due to their very strong and deep-rooted religious convictions.

6.2 The Religion Factor

The fact that religion is the heavyweight in the Middle East cannot be denied. As several participants noted, Islam heavily influences not just daily life but also the political process in the region. It is essential to understand this fact and account for it

¹⁰⁶ Hashemi, P. 177.

in any attempt to dialogue with the Middle East. Unfortunately this is the one thing that the increasingly secular West does not comprehend and instead seeks to minimize. This again is because the West largely views itself as having shed the vestiges of medieval religion and sees no significant role for it in modern political affairs. For the Middle East however religion is always front and center and refuses to be marginalized. The recent upheaval racking the region and people's innate reaction to turn to religion for political leadership, offers abundant evidence of the tenacious grip Islam continues to have on the Middle East.

This powerful resurgence of religious fervor evidenced particularly in the sharp rise of fundamentalism in the Middle East continues to befuddle western academics and politicians. This is largely because the notion that technical advancement brings inevitable secularization, which in turn would render religion obsolete and defunct, has proven erroneous.¹⁰⁷ Especially with regard to the Middle East, freedom has regularly been posited as the perfect antidote for religious extremism. For example, after 9/11 the Bush administration made a concerted effort to push for democratic initiatives in the Middle East often bypassing local governments in efforts to reach the people. Unfortunately their efforts to instill freedom in the masses instead of breeding more democracy inadvertently resulted in fomenting new waves of revolts against the established autocratic leaders of the region paving the way for unprecedented religious extremism.¹⁰⁸ Clearly religion is here to stay but westerners need to be reawakened to its formidable influence and authority.

¹⁰⁷ Keller, Timothy, *The Reason for God*, (Riverhead, 2008) P. x.

¹⁰⁸ Steward, Dona J., *The Middle East Today: Political, Geographical and Cultural Perspectives*, (Routledge, 2009) P. 185.

Fox and Sandler in their book *Bringing Religion into International Affairs*, describe in detail how religion has been deliberately ostracized from the political sciences for most of the last century. They further note that this is true particularly in the arena of International Relations. They point to three main reasons why the study of religion has been largely marginalized: 1. Social sciences have at their root a rejection of religion's explanatory power. The field of International Relations in particular has evolved from the premise that religion has no place in the modern world. 2. International Relations is arguably the most western-centric of social science disciplines in which case it is almost solely influenced by western liberal academia. 3. International Relations tends to be fixated on behavioralism and quantitative studies often ignoring less measurable elements like religion. 4. International Relations studies' premises mostly focus on state and power relationships, which generally precludes the subject of religion.¹⁰⁹

This tendency to minimize religion has its roots in the secularization process begun by the French revolution, which actively sought to extricate religion from the public sphere. With the spread of western ideals during the colonization period these secular philosophies gained international currency.¹¹⁰ All along notable western thinkers like Comte, Freud, Marx, Nietzsche and Voltaire, responsible for the formation of the modern social sciences, all believed that the age of enlightenment would eventually replace religion as the principal means of understanding and governing the world. Later 'Secularization Theory', which rose to prominence in the 1990's, posited that the forces of modernization and democracy would remake the

¹⁰⁹ Fox, Jonathan and Shmuel Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Affairs*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) Pp. 9-10.

¹¹⁰ Esposito, P. 3.

social fabric of the world so that religion would be replaced by scientific rationalism.¹¹¹

On account of this, up until recently, most International Relations faculties largely ignored the subject of religion treating it as passé or hardly relevant. Bernstein however notes how quickly things have changed, “No one today believes what was once, only a short time ago, an unquestioned dogma: that with rapid global modernization, religion is or will be disappearing.”¹¹² And yet even as the relevance of religion to global politics only seems to grow with every passing day, western academics, steeped in liberal secularism as they are, seem to have been caught totally off-guard by this unwelcome renaissance. And yet, particularly since 9/11, the subject of religion and its impact on world affairs has demanded increased attention especially because of events transpiring in the Middle East. International Relations academics have begrudgingly had to concede that the majority of the world is not following in their tracks towards liberal utopia. Religion is still a substantial sociological factor with far-reaching political implications that needs to be addressed.

There is in fact a strong case being made that liberal modernization and globalization instead of stamping out fundamentalism and extremism are actually fomenting its resurgence because they are promulgating increased freedom for trans-continental communication and cooperation.¹¹³ This is particularly evident in the Middle East where western technology has been instrumental in recent uprisings. Furthermore, on account of the saturation of Western media in the Middle Eastern markets and

¹¹¹ Fox and Sandler, P. 11.

¹¹² Bernstein, P. 33.

¹¹³ Ibid., Pp. 12-13.

through the internet, the Muslim majority people of the region have witnessed first-hand how the West has become increasingly irreligious and in their view, immoral. This in turn has heightened the urge to revitalize their religious heritage and protect their youth from modern contamination and secular adulteration which fundamentalists call ‘westoxification.’¹¹⁴

For the Middle East religion has always been an integral part of their society and governance. Fox and Sandler note that Islam from its inception has been a political religion, so that politics and religion are inseparable.¹¹⁵ Historian Bernard Lewis makes the following comparative observation:

“Muhammad was not, like Moses, forbidden to enter his Promised Land; still less did he suffer, like Jesus, physical death by martyrdom. Nor were his followers obliged to struggle for centuries as a proscribed and persecuted minority under a hostile government. Muhammad became a sovereign during his lifetime. He himself founded the first Islamic state and governed it with his Companions.”¹¹⁶

Clearly Muhammad, despite starting as a mere spiritual guide and prophet, soon became a political ruler with a host of subjects at his beck and call. From then on, up until their defeat at the gates of Vienna in 1683, the historic trajectory of the Islamic State founded by him is replete with astonishing stories of success and conquest. Throughout this time and on until the fall of the Islamic Ottoman Empire in 1923, the Christian West was always viewed as their great rival. Lewis goes on to note that the very involved process of colonization that ensued actually had its roots in the historic clash between Islam and Christendom.¹¹⁷ Of course the West today, caught up as it is in modern secularism, often fails to appreciate this historic backdrop, but

¹¹⁴ Brown, P. 90.

¹¹⁵ Fox and Sandler, P. 90.

¹¹⁶ Lewis, P. 4.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., P. 17.

for Middle Easterners this is still very much part and parcel of their sociopolitical narrative and heritage. The denial of the relevance of religion to the political world on the other hand is a staunchly western and modern notion.¹¹⁸

There are multiple and complex repercussions to this basic misunderstanding between East and West. While the West proceeds on the assumption that secular democracy, as they understand it, is the utmost in human government and needs to be disseminated world-wide, Middle Easterners on the other hand, remain skeptical seeing it as a potential Trojan horse designed to infiltrate their ranks. Islamic notions of tolerance and proper form of government are markedly different than those espoused by the West. Historian Peter Mansfield notes that for Muslims the ideal would be to return to the ways of the Prophet in whose days Islam was preeminent and triumphant. He goes on to highlight an important misconception,

“In the West this is usually described as fundamentalism, but in a real sense all Muslim believers are fundamentalists, because they know that the Holy Koran was God’s final message to mankind. The triumph of the West in the last two or three centuries is seen by Muslims as an aberration of history.”¹¹⁹

Clearly there is a great dichotomy between the core expectations and aspirations of Westerners and Middle Easterners.

In short the issue of religion, especially when it comes to the Middle East can be ignored no longer. If the West has any hopes of engaging Middle Eastern societies in any form of productive dialogue they need to appreciate their unique cultural and historic viewpoint and act accordingly. Lambasting the rest of the world with liberal democracy cannot hope to ever fully succeed, in fact it will only continue to nurse

¹¹⁸ Fox and Sandler, Pp. 16-18.

¹¹⁹ Mansfield, P. 15.

resentment and offer further justification to extremists. Similarly the West needs to gain a new appreciation for the value of religion and how it relates to global politics. It must likewise come to grips with the moral bankruptcy of modern relativism and militant secularism, which has succeeded in creating a gulf between them and the Middle East in particular. Only then can there be any real hope of progress towards peaceful global dialogue.

6.3 Toward a Democratic Middle East

Returning to the question of what kind of democracy, if any, could be effective in the Middle East, what is clear is that modern liberal democracy is not welcomed by the Muslim majority societies of the region. Secondly whatever form of democracy takes root in the region, it must account for and accommodate religion. Most have grown accustomed to assuming that secularism, namely the marginalization of religion, is a precondition to democracy however if the majority of the people in a society are religious then a religious democracy is in order. The Middle East is clearly dominated by Islam in which case whatever democratic paradigm is to be adopted it needs to take the majority religion into consideration. Naturally the place religion should take in society needs to be determined by Middle Easterners, it cannot be imposed from the outside.

Having said that, it is clear from the many participants interviewed that there are serious human rights abuses in the Middle East, many of which are perpetuated in the name of Islam. Furthermore, Islam's teachings and historical precedent are legitimatizing much of the radical extremism sweeping the region. Mark Gabriel notes for example, how radicals justify their extremist aspirations and activities by

chanting, “Our constitution the Qu’ran!”¹²⁰ Thankfully, many Muslims in the region and the world over would concur in decrying extremist’s actions as inhumane and ungodly. However if Middle Easterners want to have any semblance of democratic order and government in their region they need to take the initiative in not only denouncing but also countering and ultimately eradicating such aberrations from their societies. All too often they have grown accustomed to relying on western intervention, which although bringing some relief ultimately only feeds the narrative of extremists. True change and progress will only happen when Middle Easterners forge their own democracy and secure peace for themselves.

When it comes to Islamic Reformation, as evidenced earlier, there are many naysayers claiming it can never fully integrate with western democracy. This is largely true, because as stated above Middle Easterners don’t see their religious values as compatible with the liberal democracy evidenced by the West. However it is conceivable that Islam could incorporate the essence of democracy, namely representative government. Still, even for a rudimentary form of democracy to be established in the Middle East, Islam would have to undergo a rigorous reformation process. The question then is what direction such a reformation process will take.

Middle East expert Raymond Ibrahim makes the case that Islam has been undergoing a reformation of its own for some time, only instead of becoming more democratic it is becoming more autocratic and intolerant as evidenced by fundamentalists and radicals. He points out that at the root of the Protestant Reformation in Europe was a desire to return to the primacy of its original scriptures, *sola scriptura*. Likewise

¹²⁰ Gabriel, P. 93.

today many extremist groups are calling for a return to Islam's core teachings as enshrined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the example of Mohammed. The end result however is very different from the emancipating developments of the Reformation. Instead of more freedom and equality, more despotism and tyranny is resulting. Ibrahim summarizes the quandary as follows:

“How Christianity and Islam can follow similar patterns of reform but with antithetical results rests in the fact that their scriptures are often antithetical to one another. This is the key point, and one admittedly unintelligible to postmodern, secular sensibilities, which tend to lump all religious scripture together in a melting pot of relativism without bothering to evaluate the significance of their respective words and teachings.”¹²¹

According to Ibrahim for Islam to reform by returning to its original teachings can only have and is indeed evidencing cataclysmic consequences the world over.

Others however, like Historian Daniel Pipes, argue against essentializing Islam as somehow evil and intransigent. Pipes suggest that like any religion or ideology Islam, given enough time, can be molded and melded to adapt to modern times. He proposes that moderate Muslims need to rise to this historic challenge in order to counter not just terrorists but Islamists who use religion for their political aim.¹²² Ultimately who will prove correct about the reformability of Islam, time will tell.

One thing is clear, if Middle Easterners will chose to seek reform they will also have to be forthright in evaluating their religious doctrines and history. Holding religion above scrutiny, as it is commonly done today, only leads to the misuse and abuse of it. Baroness Cox notes how Islamists regularly take full advantage of western

¹²¹ Ibrahim, Raymond, (June 20, 2014), *Islam's 'Protestant Reformation'* Available at: <https://pjmedia.com/blog/islams-protestant-reformation/?singlepage=true>

¹²² Pipes, Daniel, (July/August 2013) *Can Islam be Reformed?* Middle East Forum, Available at: <http://www.meforum.org/4689/can-islam-be-reformed>

freedoms to express their criticism and open disdain for western society and its values. However when it comes to accepting criticism of their history or sacred tenets they prove completely intolerant with some resorting to threats. She calls this prejudicial behavior “an asymmetry of criticism.”¹²³ If indeed Middle Easterners want Islam to undergo some form of reformation akin to the Christian Reformation they need to understand that it will require intense examination and purification. It will also require the emancipation of the people’s wills and minds.

In the West, up until the Protestant Reformation, much of Christendom was confined to ignorance and ruled by quasi-religious aristocrats. However once the masses began to read and evaluate their core beliefs and societies for themselves, the result was much questioning and criticism of established institutions. This in turn led to an unprecedented proliferation of knowledge resulting over time in social emancipation.¹²⁴ The process though was arduous even torturous, including extended wars and resulting in a total restructuring of society. Were Islam to face such a process of reformation people would need to be set free to think for themselves and evaluate the truth of their historic tenets. They would also need to be set free to realign their beliefs as their conscience dictated to them. Only then would there be hope for freedom and a semblance of democracy in the Middle East.

In summary any form of democracy to flourish in the Middle East, first the concept of democracy needs to be stripped of liberal post-modern addendums and return to the essentials of ensuring representative government and respecting divinely ordained basic human rights of life, liberty and justice. At the same time Islam needs

¹²³ Cox and Marks, P. 33.

¹²⁴ Schaeffer, Francis, *How Should We Then Live*, (Crossway books, 1995), P. 105.

to pull back the veil and allow its proponents the freedom to ask the hard questions about their faith and chart their own future. Otherwise, as Mernissi suggests, to believe that Islam can only flourish by imposition is in fact an insult to the legitimacy of Islam¹²⁵ If it is true, let it stand on its own, otherwise let it fall. Only when individuals are finally free to choose their own faith and fate will there be some hope for peace and justice in this troubled region of the world.

¹²⁵ Mernissi, 65.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Form

DEMOCRACY in the MIDDLE EAST

- The purpose of this study is to assess the opinions of people living in the Middle East with regard to democracy. For clarity sake democracy is usually defined in terms of civil liberties, social equality and popular sovereignty.
- Please feel free to express your honest opinions and thoughts on the matters listed below. In order to ensure the safety of participants their real names may be changed. What name would you like us to use for you? _____

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Demographic Information:

- a. What country are you from?
 - b. What is your ethnic background?
 - c. What is your religious affiliation, if any?
1. Do you agree with the notion that democracy has failed in the Middle East?
Explain -

2. In your opinion how do Middle Easterners in general perceive democracy?

3. What do you think are the main reasons democracy has struggled in the Middle East?

4. Do you think liberal democracy could become a reality in the Middle East?
Explain -

5. What are the most important things the West needs to understand about the Middle East in order to help them?

In order to acknowledge that the information recorded above represents your personal opinions and was given with your free consent without any promise of remuneration please review the notes taken during our interview and sign below.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix B: Participants of Survey

The students that participated in this survey were the primary source of data for this research. Although their actual names were changed in some cases according to their request, in order to protect their identity, they deserve credit for their invaluable participation. Here they are listed in order of appearance:

1. Abdurrahman from Lebanon (Sunni)
2. Hala from Iraq (Moderate)
3. Hatem from Palestine (Activist)
4. Eliya from Jordan (Christian)
5. Nancy from Egypt (Secular)
6. Jacob from Iraq (Agnostic)
7. Roozbeh from Iran (Shia)
8. Lark from Iran (Azeri)
9. Koresh from Iran (Convert)
10. Hiwa from Iran (Kurdish)
11. Veli from Turkey (Sunni)
12. Barish from Turkey (Secular)
13. Sevgi from Turkey (Alevi)
14. Mehmet from Turkey (Kurdish)
15. Serdar from Iraq (non-religious)
16. Pelin, Turk from Germany (Sunni)