**Book Review: The Unspoken Discourse on the Will to Understand Middle Eastern Affairs Through the Political Science Lens**

Marc Lynch, Jillian Schwedler, and Sean Yom (editors)

*The Political Science of the Middle East: Theory and Research Since the Arab Uprisings*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, 307 pp.

Middle Eastern studies and political science studies are two fields of research and study that are fundamentally different since Middle Eastern studies naturally belong to the humanities. In contrast, political science studies belong to the social sciences. These two disciplines are not only at opposite ends of research, but they developed differently, for different reasons, and under different constraints. There is no doubt that the study of political science had its foundation in ancient Greece when the classical philosophers tried to stand on the nature and essence of the state and had an obsessive discussion of the importance of the desired leadership skills. This field was neglected for centuries until it flourished in Europe in the 16th century and beyond.

On the other hand, Middle Eastern studies, or Oriental studies, began to germinate in Europe in the 17th century when they became interested in the religion of Islam and its believers who lived under the Ottoman Empire. The initial research began from the theoretical point of view of the "religion of Muhammad." It touched less on the study of Muslim society and certainly did not touch on geography and history. This lack of research will be completed when more and more Western empires will rub shoulders with the Ottoman Empire and, in the future, will lead to its overthrow.

In modern times, when the disciplines were already established in universities, both in research and teaching, a meeting between the two worlds seems like it could be more likely and necessary. Even today, we will not find departments that simultaneously teach both fields under one roof (there are exceptions), certainly not in advanced research, where the research methods are entirely different. The study of political science increasingly touched on issues related to the Western world and, from time to time, tried to learn and apply the accumulated theories to non-Western audiences. Even when the study of the Middle East developed; still, the study of political science hardly touched its theories on Middle Eastern models.

Recently, Oxford University Press released *The Political Science of the Middle East: Theory and Research since the Arab Uprisings,* an articles book that discusses issues from the world of political science when their test cases concern the study of the Middle East. Three renowned editors: Marc Lynch; Jillian Schwedler; Sean Yom, edited this book with twelve articles and 44 authors. Most of them are from the field of political science, and a minority are from the field of Middle Eastern studies. In the introduction and acknowledgments, the editors note: "The study of MENA politics has become a truly global understanding…". (p.1).

The difficulty existing in political science models to identify the Arab Spring and the rise of Islam is essential. However, there are other roles of political science - prediction and forecasting, but to dive into the political, social, and religious research of the region's peoples. This study did not delve into the understanding of the internal social processes, but it must also be honestly said that the research fields in the Middle East are also inhospitable; they deceive and usually do not cooperate, and even if they do, then the people of the region are very suspicious of the research motives of Western researchers.

This collection of articles touches on a variety of issues derived from the content world of political science, where the control groups are the test cases in the Middle East, such as authoritarianism, protest, military, political violence, international relations, political economy, religion, identity, and minorities, immigration, and deportation. However, it was also necessary to research leadership, parliamentarians, women's and minority rights, sexual communities, higher education, peace agreements, and tribalism.

The first article (Introduction) covers the theses presented in the study of political science and the study of the Middle East. It even details the essential points that every article discusses. However, the essential points that this chapter raises are that the Middle East has contributed to a renewed understanding of terms previously discussed in historical contexts and that its emphasized presence in the Middle East (for example, authoritarianism) allows comparative research with other authoritarianisms worldwide. The same is true of the democratization and de-democratization processes.

"In sum, personalism may yet be a losing strategy for authoritarianism around the world, but regime practices in the MENA such the trend and signal a need for more creative rethinking about how and why personalistic politics takes hold in the autocratic system." (p. 43).

Although the book provides a unique answer to the discussion of political science issues from the study of the Middle East and, within it, the events of the Arab Spring, it is still a drop in the ocean since there is no authentic summary discussion of the issues in which the Middle East has contributed to a renewed understanding of issues in the field of the science of imagination and politics, for example as Feminism, religious studies, parliamentarian, international law and peace agreements. At the same time, the book is an opening shot for an in-depth and consistent discussion of the internal processes that the Middle East is going through, that these events have the power not only to shape local societies but also to influence (as it does influence) the entire world.

Prof. **Ronen A. Cohen**

The Department of Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science, Ariel University

[ronenco@ariel.ac.il](mailto:ronenco@ariel.ac.il)