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**Book Review: Tibi, Bassam. *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Inquiry*. 2nd Ed. Ed. and trans. Marion Farouk-Sluggett and Peter Sluggett. NY: St. Martin's, 1990.**

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Kelli McAllister

## Book Review

Tibi, Bassam. *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Inquiry*. 2nd Ed. Ed. and trans. Marion Farouk-Sluggett and Peter Sluggett. NY: St. Martin's, 1990.

There is no simple explanation for the conflict between Islam and the West in the modern age. Nor is the erosion of the nation-state in the developing world easily dismissed. However, if we look at the changes wrought by history from a social-theoretical perspective, we are able to pinpoint the ideological and actual forces which helped shape international politics in the world today. Bassam Tibi's latest book, *Arab Nationalism*, which adheres to the school of Social History, contributes much to the study of Arab and Islamic political thought, a study which has, in the past, been too much obscured by bias and ill will. Tibi provides the framework for this study by first reviewing ideological approaches to nation theory in the underdeveloped countries of the Third World. He then begins his social/historical analysis of the Arab world, from the origins of the nation-state in Europe to the present-day revival of Islamic fundamentalism. Tibi gives

us the tools for understanding certain patterns in world politics.

Perhaps the most revealing part of Tibi's study is his discovery of the roots of Arab nationalism, a discovery which simultaneously makes clear the reason for the failure of this movement. Tibi looks in depth at the written records of great Arabic scholars and thinkers whose ideology helped shape the course of history and the direction of the national movement in the Middle East and North Africa. His assertion that "history is always an interplay between the actions of man and the existing structures which form their constraints"(8) is demonstrated in a straightforward and frank discussion of the convergence of circumstances that make up the Arab story.

Tibi's book serves as a timely reminder that what makes each community unique is its particular approach to culture, law, justice, and religion, and that one community's belief system cannot be imposed upon another without dire consequences. Tibi explains Arab nationalism as a reaction to western colonialism, which inspired Arab and Muslim European-educated intellectuals to encourage solidarity and the formation of a national consciousness. As a case in point of his assertion that nationalism means different things to different peoples, Tibi examines the word "nation" from a French, a German, and an Islamic point of view. He shows that while *la nation* in French is conceived to be the state proper, the German concept of nation is a group of people sharing a common culture, history and language. Although the Islamic concept of *umma*, or community, is yet different from either of the European definitions, the German concept is the one adopted by early Arab nationalists. According to history, Tibi's study shows that the adoption, however voluntary, of one people's concept of nation by another people, is destined to fail. When Arab nationalism failed to achieve its goals, it was delegitimized as an ideology.

Tibi's study ends with the present-day revival of Islamic fundamentalism. Tibi shows us why the politicization of Islam is an inevitable course of events considering the historical and social climate in the Middle East. Tibi looks at the fundamentalist movement for universal Islam as a myth created by Arabs who cannot adapt to the political reality of an international system of nation-states. He further shows us that the Arab conflict has always been a conflict of allegiances. The question of what constitutes a nation has never been more obscure, and Tibi's book shows us that there is no one answer. How ethnicities, and religious and cultural sects react to the administrative and Western notion of the nation-state will set the stage for world politics in the coming century. Unfortunately for us, Tibi's predictions are not encouraging.