

## BOOK REVIEW

**Radical Arab nationalism and political Islam**, by Lahouari Addi, translated from the French by Anthony Roberts, Washington, Georgetown University Press & The Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 2017, xii + 276 pp., \$34.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-62616-450-5

Lahouari Addi is rare among social scientists who follow the Middle East and North Africa in having a good command of both Western philosophy and political sociology. This book, although somewhat repetitive, is an important contribution to the extensive literature on the political uses of Islam and the unfinished task of building secular nations in the region.<sup>1</sup> It is a brave call for Islam to renew its medieval encounters with philosophy and to move beyond the Sufi embrace of Plato, to assimilate the Kantian underpinnings of constitutional democracy.

Some readers may question Addi's underlying assumption that secularisation is an inevitable and universal process, and equally applicable to Muslim and Western societies. In his words, social differentiation is 'an ineluctable trend', so much so that various social science disciplines have emerged to study the differentiated phenomena of modern society. Thus political science, for instance, 'is dedicated to the study of Western states with a secularised political culture', whereas political anthropology is 'methodologically better equipped for ... Arab countries [which are not yet] societies according to the sociological meaning of the word' (70–72). In this reviewer's opinion, Addi's equation of Westernisation with (inevitable) modernisation and social differentiation is worth pursuing, however unfashionable and outdated this approach may appear. In these times of populism and intellectual relativism, his Kantian critique of radical Arab nationalism and Islamism offers a path toward a fruitful rethinking of Islam.

Addi looks first at the emergence of nationalism in the Arab world. He sees in Wahhabism a sort of 'proto-nationalism' that would subsequently subsidise Islamism. More mature nationalisms derived from European experiences gradually penetrated the region in the nineteenth century. Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, for instance, inspired a liberal nationalism that 'seduced the Egyptian urban elite' (17), but liberalism needed Islam to carry the nationalist idea beyond such elites. In Addi's view, religious reformers such as Mohammed Abdu did not go far enough to differentiate religion from politics. Instead a sort of syncretic populism developed into radical Arab nationalism shared by Nasser's Egypt, Boumediene's Algeria, Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and Hafiz al-Assad's Syria. Their economic failures and widespread corruption as well as military defeat led, after 1967, to the rise of Islamism. Addi is critical of literature teacher Sayyid Qutb and especially Abul A'la Mawdudi, a Pakistani journalist, for knowing little about Islam and using it for political purposes. The latter's worst error was to translate the modern concept of sovereignty as *hukamiyya*, or divine judgment, and then criticise democratic parliaments as seeking to substitute themselves for God (191).

Critical as he is of Islamism, however, Addi opposed both Algeria's interruption of free elections in 1992 and the Egyptian coup in 2013 against a democratically elected Muslim Brother. The full development of secular societies and modern nations in the Arab world requires further interaction between nationalists and Islamists, even at the cost of temporary regression. One positive sign was the 1995 talks sponsored by the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome between Algerian Islamists and secular parties, although the Algerian military-backed regime rejected them outright. Addi also notes that the Islamist firebrand Ali Benhadj, after calling democracy 'impiety' in 1989, was affirming it in 1990 and doing so in much greater detail following Abdelaziz Bouteflika's election in 1999 (155–156).

Addi sees further positive signs of post-Islamism in Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, and even Iran, 'where there has been a demand for the separation of politics and religion to protect the sincerity of the faith' (160). In Tunisia, Rached Ghannouchi declared in 2016 that Ennahda was no longer an Islamist party but rather a democratic one based on Muslim values. In Morocco, the Parti de la Justice et du Développement also allows for distinctions between religion and politics.

Addi's originality lies in his uses of Kant and Hegel. He juxtaposes Kant with Ernest Gellner's theorising about nationalism and concludes in one of his panel inserts (108–109) that Gellner should not have objected to Kant being recognised as the theorist of the modern secular nation.<sup>2</sup> Anyone who has read Kant's essay 'Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmopolitical Plan' will realise that the process of building democratic secular states, given man's 'unsocial sociability', was

through war, through the taxing and never-ending accumulation of armament, through the want which any state, even in peacetime, must suffer internally, Nature forces them to make at first inadequate and tentative attempts; finally, after devastations, revolutions, and even complete exhaustion, she brings them to that which reason could have told them at the beginning and with far less sad experience, to wit, to step from the lawless condition of savages into a league of nations.<sup>3</sup>


Hegel spun out Kant's tentative teleological view of history into a Hegelian dialectic that Addi finds relevant to colonial situations. He might have further focused on these situations that gave rise to those formally sovereign but exclusive, incomplete, and syncretic states. He could have elaborated on the Tunisian colonial dialectic that more deeply absorbed liberal nationalism than Egyptians under the Wafd. Tunisian mobilisation gave rise to '*le pays réel*', as Bourguiba called it, or civil society that penetrated the countryside – at least the Sahel – more than Egypt's, fenced in by a Wafd of landowners. Elsewhere in much of the Arab world, independence was gifted to urban elites whom predatory military officers then removed from power. Consequently, the officers and Islamists will continue to struggle until more secularised oppositions and satiated officers accept representative democracy in more inclusive nation states.

For these societies to develop into fully inclusive, secularised states, Addi argues, a full reformation of Islam is needed. This will entail a return to dialogue with philosophers and their progression from medieval appreciations of Plato to modern philosophy: '*le nécessaire passage de Platon à Kant*', which, Addi so

informs us (250), is the subtitle of his next book project, on the crisis of Muslim thought.

## Notes

1. Lahouari Addi's book was published in the original French in 2017 – after the publication of the English translation – by Éditions Barzakh in Algiers, under the title *Le nationalisme arabe radical et l'islam politique*.
2. For Addi's writings on Gellner, see his *Deux anthropologues au Maghreb: Ernest Gellner & Clifford Geertz* (Paris: Éditions des Archives Contemporaines, 2013).
3. Immanuel Kant, 'Idea of a Universal history on a Cosmopolitical Plan (1784)', The Seventh Proposition. <http://philosophyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/IDEA-OF-A-UNIVERSAL-HISTORY-ON-A-COSMPOLITAN-PLAN.pdf>.

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