

**“ISLAMISM AND ISLAM”****Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2012.**

pp. xx + 340, ISBN 978-0-300-15998-1

After publishing twenty-eight books written in German, eight books in English along with numerous articles, and a scholarly career of almost forty years, Bassam Tibi opted to retire and leave the academic stage. His last book *'Islamism and Islam'* is the subject of this review. As an opening remark, I have to say that this volume is must-read for scholars, students and all those interested in the field of religion and politics and particularly in Islam and politics. As Tibi states 'I write... as a political scientist who has devoted his career to the study of Islam'<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this book represents the crown of his academic achievements, experience and knowledge. His method of dealing with Islam is not a descriptive one, but rather operates within the framework of what he calls *Islamology*, which refers to 'a social science-based inquiry that relates Islamic realities to the study of international conflicts in world politics... Islamology deals with the relations of Islamic civilization not only with the West but more generally with the world at large.'<sup>2</sup> The influence of both German and North Americans methodological schools can be found within this book. Throughout the book Tibi addresses contemporary pertinent questions and puts his own concerns to the foreground. His answers are detailed and argument strong in a volume which is well-constructed and leaves little unexplained.

In technical sense, this book consists of preface, acknowledgments, nine chapters, notes, a glossary of Arabic terms, bibliography and an index. Chapter's titles are: 1. Why Islamism is not Islam; 2. Islamism and the Political Order; 3. Islamism and Antisemitism; 4. Islamism and Democracy; 5. Islamism and Violence: The New World Disorder; 6. Islamism and Law: Shari'atization as an Invention of Tradition; 7. Islamism, Purity and Authenticity; 8. Islamism and Totalitarianism; and 9. Civil Islam as an Alternative to Islamism.

The main message of this book to the readers is that there is a difference between Islamism and Islam. Being aware that many persons (even some schol-

---

1 Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, p. ix.

2 Ibid.

ars) cannot identify the difference between these two terms, Tibi commences his first chapter by asking what is the difference between Islamism and Islam? According to him, the essential answer is that Islamism is about political order, not faith. Therefore, Islamism is religionised politics and this is an essential fact for grasping the basic argument of this book.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Tibi argues that the major creed of Islamism is expressed in Arabic term *din-wa-dawla* (unity of state and religion) under a system of constitutionally mandated shari'a law. Thus, according to Tibi, Islamism is not faith but rather the imposition of a political system in the name of faith. Or in other words, Islamism is a specific interpretation of Islam, but it is not Islam. Islamism calls for a return of Islamic history and glory, but the state to which it seeks to return is an *invented tradition* (Tibi i borrows this term from Eric Hobsbawn) and this is important part of the Tibi's puzzle. According to him, this imagined system of God's rule has never in fact existed in Islamic history. Thus, in his point of view, Islamism does not herald a revival of Islam but is rather an re-invention of tradition. In order to clarify the distinction between Islamism and Islam in the light of invention of tradition, Tibi identifies six themes, and each of them forges the discrete chapters of the volume. These are:

- the interpretation of Islam as *nizam Islami* (state order);
- the perception of the Jews as the chief enemy conspiring against Islam because they are believed to be pursuing a 'Jewish world order' in conflict with the Islamic goal;
- democratization and the place of institutional Islamism in a democratic state;
- the evolution from classical jihad to terrorist jihad;
- the reinvention of shari'a; and
- the question of purity and authenticity, which determines the Islamist view of secularization and desecularization.<sup>4</sup>

Tibi argues that the first step in Islamist's invention of tradition is to develop a new understanding of Islam sa *din-wa-dawla* – religion united with state order and the second chapter of this book is dedicated to this theme. However, Tibi argues the opposite based on the invention of tradition. His argument is that the term *dawla* (state) appears in neither the Qur'an nor the hadith (the canonical accounts of what the Prophet said and did). This is the same with the terms *nizam al-Islami* (Islamic system) and *hukuma Islamiyya* (Islamic government). A similar situation is evident with the reinvention of shari'a law. In the Qur'an we can find this term only once (sure 45, verse 18) but its literal meaning is a *path leading to water*, which has implicit meaning of a right path. In contrast, Islamists interprets shari'a tradition in a way that cannot be found in the Qur'an, according to Tibi. As a professor of international relations at University of Göttingen (Germany), Tibi

---

3 Ibid, p. 1.

4 Ibid, p. 6.

noticed that this shari'a state envisioned by Islamists is not a political order that can be incorporated into the Westphalian system of sovereign states.

The third chapter is dedicated to Islamism and Antisemitism. Here Tibi argues that anti-Semitism of Islamism is different from both old Islamic Judeophobia and modern pan-Arab nationalist anti-Semitism. Islamists give this ideology a religious background which can be summed in series of allegations: Jewish conspiracy against Islam has existed since 622, Jews seek to rule the world, Jews employ different forms of 'secret forces' like Freemasonry to further their goal of world domination, Jews are using Christians as their proxies, and USA is ruled by the Jews.

The fourth chapter deals with Islam and democracy and where Tibi asks important question – is Islamism compatible with democracy? Within this chapter Tibi shows that he is truly familiar with growing literature on this debate, both from Islamist 'founding fathers' and Western scholars. If we follow the work of Sayyid Qutb, Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi and al-Yusuf al-Qaradawi the conclusion is easy to make – Islamism is not compatible with democracy. Tibi believes that Islam as a faith and system of religious ethics could be made compatible with democracy if combined with the will for religious reform.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Islamism does not operate with either Islamic ethic or the democratic values of pluralism and power sharing. Tibi believes that democracy and democratization offers the best promise for the better future of the world of Islam. For example, he finds civic Islam of Indonesia very favorable for the advance of democracy.

In fifth chapter Tibi accepts the fact that no one can write about Islamism without touching on the subject of jihad. However, he finds both Islam and Islamism inconsistent with violence. Evolution from classical jihad (as it is prescribed by Qur'an) into modern jihadism was launched by Hasan al-Banna. Jihadism is found as an instrument in the process of a remaking of the world order according to the tenets of a reinvented shari'a.

The next chapter is about reinvention of shari'a law and shari'atization of Islam. This chapter is particularly significant. In the concept of reinventing the tradition, return to shari'a law is the central feature. Tibi argues that, even though many scholars will argue the opposite, Islamist understanding of shari'a law is fundamentally a new one which in crucial respect differs from traditional shari'a. His argumentation is as following: shari'a law has three different meanings: a scriptural one (where it is found as a guide to moral conduct); a meaning derived from Islamic legal tradition in the beginning of the eighth century (where we can find civil law and cult rules); and finally in the context of Islamism (where shari'a is found as a claim for a state law and written in national constitutions). The last meaning Tibi finds as entirely new phenomenon within Islam with its claim to restore historical institutions, and that is precisely what Tibi argues con-

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

stitutes the invention of tradition. However, he is aware that this invention by Islamism was necessary because the claim that the laws are from the will of God is central to its ideology.

In chapter seven Tibi deals with the question of how authentic is the Islamist worldview. He claims that the West and Islam share a history of both conquest and mutual cultural borrowings. A more positive legacy needs to be revived against those obsessed with rhetoric of a clash of civilizations. Islamism and its revolt against the West confuse civilizational encounters and cultural borrowing with Western hegemony. Thus, it can be understood as cultural uprising against Westernization. Instead of preserving and advancing Islamic culture as a legitimate alternative to the West, this revolt becomes reflexive – an anti-Semitic rejection of all things Western. Therefore, the fight for authenticity is identified within an agenda of purification that combines anti – Americanism with anti-Semitism. Tibi concludes that Islamism is neither traditional nor authentic.

Following the work of Hannah Arendt, Tibi in chapter eight interprets Islamism as a new kind of totalitarianism. He is limiting his reference to Arendt on first two levels of her argumentations – ideology and movement, without political rule as a third level. According to Arendt, the most important feature of totalitarianism is ‘the permanent domination of each single individual in each and every sphere of life... totalitarian movements can command the same total loyalty in life and death.’<sup>6</sup> According to Tibi’s argument, this is the same loyalty that all Islamist movements demand from their followers. After a deep analysis of the totalitarian roots in Islamism, Tibi concludes that totalitarianism can be ascribed to Islamism, but not Islam.

In his final chapter of the book, Tibi concludes the major arguments: ‘In a time of both normative and structural crises some Muslim political activist have reinvented Islamic traditions to produce something new, called Islamism.’<sup>7</sup> Figures like Hasan al-Bana, Sayyid Qutb, Abu al A’la al-Mawdudi and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, along with many other successors bring elements of invented traditions, previously marginalized in Islam, to the center of interests. According to Tibi, they used selective Qur’an passages and commentaries and hadith stories, removing their original meaning. This results in one antidemocratic, totalitarian vision that aims to reshape the order of the state and entire system of world politics. Yet, there is still many liberal Muslims, like Tibi, who believe that Kantian idea of democratic peace is far nobler than the agenda of global jihad.

This book indeed represents a significant effort to contribute to the debate over Islam and politics. Many will disagree with Tibi’s interpretations and argumentations. However, his years of expertise in this field which he brings into this book lead us to a conclusion that his message should be at least considered

6 Ibid, p. 213.

7 Ibid, p. 225.

as a hopeful alternative to the clash of civilizations by showing that religion and culture of Islam is open to tolerance, respect and sharing with other religions. Unfortunately the contemporary political situation in the world is a powerful challenge to Tibi's ideas. In conclusion of this review I would like to recommend without any reservations this inspiring but in many ways disturbing book to any scholar interested in the field of politology of religion.<sup>8</sup>

**Marko Veković<sup>9</sup>**

Примљен: 12.06.2013.

Прихваћен: 24.09.2013.

---

8 See more about politology of religion in: Miroљub Jevtic, 'Political Science and Religion', *Politics and Religion Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2007.

9 PhD student in Political science, University of Belgrade, Serbia. E-Mail: marko.vekovic@fpn.bg.ac.rs