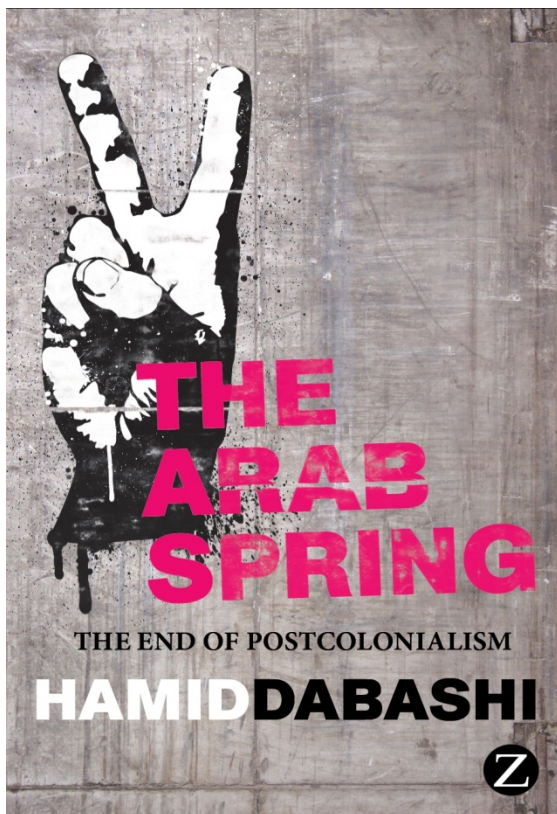


BOOK REVIEW

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The Arab Spring The End of Postcolonialism

Hamid Dabashi

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The Arab Spring that started in Tunisia in late 2010 and soon swept through the entire Middle East is one of those seminal events that grips the attention of the world and changes the social consciousness in many countries. As the wave of revolutions slowly unfurled in various parts of the Middle East, it triggered debates amongst academicians and politicians regarding understanding of basic terminology like democracy, security etc and their application to the Middle East. Hamid Dabashi's book *The Arab Spring: The End of*

Postcolonialism is an attempt by the renowned Iranian author to combine an extended commentary of the unfolding events and integrate them within a broader theoretical framework.

Dabashi is clear that the Arab Spring marks the end of post-colonialism and the beginning of a 'new world order'. He does not see this wave of revolution confined only to the Middle East instead looks at it as a means to unite the world against the negativity of post-colonialism like issues of war, environmental degradation, supremacy of a single power etc. He calls for a unified and global understanding of such issues that affect all but are perceived differently because of geographical positions.

He argues that the old world order symbolized by words like 'West' and 'non-West' and perpetuated by means of academic writings, journals and especially the 'National Geographic' magazine has come to an end because of the Arab Spring. He writes, "The ethnographic manufacturing of the 'non-West' is central to the conceptual engineering of the 'West'. 'National Geographic' is the mirror of the Other, so that by staring at it 'the West' will believe in its self...The Arab Spring is the removal of that mirror – the end of 'National Geographic' magazine." (p.50)

Dabashi points out that Arab Spring marks the beginning of discontent that gave impetus to movements in Europe as well as in North America. He argues that the discontent amongst the people across the world has made them aware of the futility of existing borders. He urges the readers to understand these movements and revolts from a different perspective rather than through existing metaphors used by the western academicians such as words like 'revolutions', 'sovereignty', 'orientalism' etc.

In an attempt to view the reality through a yet-to-be-created lens, Dabashi criticizes various metaphors like socialism, nationalism, nativism etc which he argues were born during the colonial era and perpetuated the creation of the post-colonial era. He argues that the global wave of discontent has put such ideas on their death bed and new metaphors with global understanding like 'cosmopolitanism' have emerged. However, one feels that Dabashi's reading of 'colonial metaphors' in the Middle East has a fundamental ambivalence to it. To understand the ambivalence one needs to understand what post-colonialism stands for and its impact on the Middle East. In short, post-colonialism is the moment when the power shifted from the colonial powers to the colonizers through the transfer of sovereignty. This sparked debates and writings that looked at the colonized states from a different perspective rather than the old colonial one. In the Middle East, despite the end of colonialism and change in regimes, post-colonialism had a complex relation with the region. Countries like Egypt, Syria or Iraq were deeply swayed by socialism and nationalism. However, this was just a brief sojourn and their failure to bring about the desired changes brought back the 'colonial metaphors' in power. Islam defined the 'Colonial

metaphors’ which made it different from the Eurocentric version of these metaphors. Ideas like nationalism, sovereignty or democracy were present in the garb of Islam and were interpreted to suit the political climate of the region.

Dabashi also emphasizes the end of ‘militant Islamism’ (p.11) due to the rise of cosmopolitan worldliness. He argues that ‘Islamism is exhausted’ (p.225) and points out the absence of its symbols and expressions in the uprising. One can argue that writing during the unfolding of the Arab Spring, Dabashi could not predict the rise of Islamic parties to power in various countries. The rise of Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East in the wake of the Arab Spring can certainly be seen as the beginning of new politicized Islamic governance in the region.

The creation of a global ethos as Dabashi envisages is also fraught with several potholes. One of which is the unique cultural identity that most countries have created in pursuance of nationalism. The Arab Spring spread in different parts not only because of discontent with the prevailing governance but also because of a common cultural identity – the Arab. Ignoring the cultural aspect of such movement and viewing it as a global one, denies the existing reality.

In the conclusion, Dabashi reiterates his own agenda of writing this book. He writes, “The regime of knowledge we have inherited, not just from the colonial world but even more so from the colonial interlude must be dismantled with the self same determination that has ensured that the political regimes are overthrown” (p.235). The agenda is not only commendable but also provokes scholars to rethink the ideas one takes for granted while studying global politics.

The book is not only inspiring but is a fast read as well. One major drawback for the reader is that the ideas of the author are deeply buried in academic jargons and discourses which make it a difficult read for anyone outside the social science field. However, it is an important contribution to the existing literature on the subject as it provides a different albeit unrealistic viewing of the Arab Spring.

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