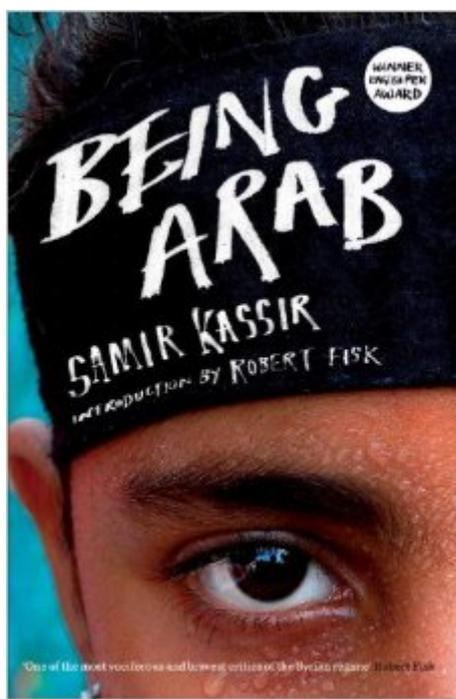


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Being Arab



Synopsis

Before his assassination in 2005, Samir Kassir was one of Lebanon's foremost public intellectuals. In *Being Arab*, a thought-provoking assessment of Arab identity, he calls on the people of the Middle East to reject both Western double standards and Islamism in order to take the future into their own hands. Passionately written and brilliantly argued, this rallying cry for change has now been heard by millions.

Book Information

Paperback: 112 pages

Publisher: Verso; 1 edition (March 12, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1844672808

ISBN-13: 978-1844672806

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.4 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (6 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

A quick read, compelling, and very relevant. It contains an introduction by Robert Fisk with the title, "Who killed Samir Kassir?" Kassir was assassinated on June 2, 2005, presumably for his work as a journalist. He died outside his home as a result of a car bomb. Kassir argues in this book that the Arab world is neither static and unchanging nor regressing towards fanaticism. Not only was there the Islamic civilization's flourishing between the 7th and 11th centuries that was one of the richest periods in human history, but that in more modern times the Arab world has continued to contribute to humanity in ways that should be celebrated, and that this occurred while the Arab world was also changing, adapting, and modernizing. His book calls on the West to stop controlling and subjugating the Arab region (echoing the period of colonialism/imperialism) and on Arabs to give up a sense of victimhood and/or impending doom and instead "finally see our real history, so that we can then be true to it" (p.92). Kassir writes, "The despairing view of Arab thought and culture as permanently ensnared in conservatism and fanaticism has obscured several phenomena that could prepare a way out of the crisis" (p.87). I think he does a very good job of fairly and accurately portraying the

difficulties that have led to the present situation. Kassir has written a "call to arms" - but in this case, it is a call for thought and examination - on Arab identity: "It is not just the West that needs to re-examine its stance. The Arab world in particular needs to make a profound effort to eradicate the ambiguities that encourage a logic of cultural confrontation" (p.86). A good quote: "We must not confuse terrorism with resistance, as the West confuses resistance with terrorism" (p.86)

The point of the book is that the Arab world should realize that they are a part of modernity, not opposed to it. Kassir says that by doing this it will make it easier for Arab society to move on from the current sense of victimhood which is holding it back. I thought the book was a concise, easy read for such a complex subject. Kassir's opinions are way more interesting than anything you see on TV. I'm surprised by the cover art of the latest paperback edition, which doesn't match the book's message very well. I'd get the hardback edition.

I thought that Kassir was going to revel greatly in deploring his people's abysmal malaise. But once he said how bad things are, he launched into a passionate review of the whole Arab past, and I was surprised how much hope he has in the power of memory. Kassir argues that the malaise of impotence and rage in Arab society stems from an impoverished self-story. In that truncated tale, the Arab Islamic "nation" was once the light of the world, as its founding fathers established a society of true greatness. Since then, however, it's been downhill all the way to the present state of weakness and depravity. The only way to make the "nation" great again is a complete return to the original practices of Islam's founding fathers, rejecting all innovations that have led the people astray. Does this sound familiar? In response to this popular tale of moralistic self-loathing, Kassir calls for a bigger story that includes the whole range of accomplishments and setbacks down the centuries under all Arab or Islamic states. He argues that the past efforts in art, literature, republic-building and internationalization have not been failed experiments, but learning experiments. Kassir sees a vast wealth of experience to be learned from rather than trashed. His answer to despair is not to dump history, but recall it more fully.

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