

Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah

Olivier Roy

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This book analyzes core issues of Islamic thought in the modern era by examining Islam as both the dominant religion in the Middle East and a minority religion in the West. By considering a wide range of ideological,

spiritual, and non-violent or violent events, Roy posits that contrary to popular (and erroneous) assumptions, Islamic fundamentalism derives from globalization, not from a clash of civilizations or religions.

Roy claims that both liberalism and fundamentalism arise from globalization and deterritorialization (i.e., the spread of Muslims and Islam beyond the traditional Muslim world). He views neo-fundamentalists, Islamists, born-again Muslims, and radical violent groups as bit players in Islam's continuing efforts to come to terms with western values. For example, Islamic movements in Europe seem to be fundamentalist on the surface; but upon closer examination, they display western values (e.g., individualization, self-realization, spirituality, and the weakening of traditional ties and sources of authority). With one-third of all Muslims living outside Muslim-majority lands, Roy believes that modern manifestations of Islam in the West (e.g., radicalism, neo-fundamentalism, Sufism, nationalism, re-Islamization, neo-Islamic brotherhoods, and anti-westernism) evolve from globalization instead of a desire to return to orthodox religious practices or the allegedly "pure" Islam of an earlier time. He tells us that Islam is no longer only the traditional faith of the Salaf (i.e., the three first and most pious generations of Muslims), but also a mixture of modern sociological and cultural – even western – elements, regardless of what modern-day Salafis claim.

Roy suggests that Muslims use western terminology when calling others to Islam (pp. 214-20). For example, he cites the use of *civil society* by Turkey's Refah Partisi (Welfare party) and Khatami (Iran's former president). Additionally, religion is presented as the healer and the best way to fight drugs and AIDS (pp. 39 and 150), as well as feminism (p. 216). Moreover, "the language in which opposition to the West is expressed is often Western" (p. 32). Indeed, "sometimes Islamic violence in the Middle East seems to be a Western importation" (p. 52). The author supports his analysis with numerous examples: Palestinian violence is presented as a nationalistic secular-minded conflict between Zionism and the PLO, just like other European conflicts between Protestants and Catholics, rather than as a clash between two religions (pp. 73-74); the infrastructure (i.e., volunteers and internet sites) is centred in the West; al-Qaeda recruits volunteers from the West rather than from the Middle East (pp. 55-57); and "most jihadi websites are based in the West or in Malaysia" (p. 53).

Interestingly, some Muslim conservatives criticize the evils of western civilization by using the language of western conservatives: the discussion about homosexuality consists of perceptions (e.g., person, family, health, protecting society, and womanhood) that "are closer to the conservative

Christian values (and to the utilitarian moral conception of society) than to the *hudud* Koranic conception (it is forbidden because God has forbidden it and He knows best)” (p. 215). Roy also deals with how the West perceives Islam. He draws an important distinction between religion’s role in Europe (often accepted only in cultural terms) and the United States (often fervently believed). These different approaches (religion v.s. religiosity) affect European and American attitudes toward Islam.

The author implies that Islam, as a religion, no longer depends only on the Muslims’ traditional territories or culture, or even the Arabic language. Therefore, it has split from its traditional roots. Deterritorialized and globalized, as Roy explains in chapter 5 (“Islam in the West or the Westernisation of Islam?”), Islam is being reshaped and heavily influenced by western languages, cultures, and ways of life. For example, “the nuclear family is tending to replace the traditional extended family among Muslims not only in Europe but also in Muslim countries” (p. 217) and “Muslims also tend to use the concepts of human rights and minority rights to promote their values, and consequently express these in a Western manner...” (p. 218). Another support for the statement mentioned above would be *halal* food or clothing. These are being considered as part of the new global cuisine, just like health food or Mecca-cola versus Coca Cola.

Roy’s sociological theories cast a refreshing light on Islam’s role as a minority religion in the West. The book’s strengths lie in its diversity of case studies, such as Khaled Kerkal’s French Islamic terrorist group and its terror campaign in 1995 (p. 149) or Islam’s fading social authority even in Muslim countries (p. 154). He makes clear that Muslim young people, even those who wear hijab, live a modern life: they wear jeans and sneakers, eat western food, and can choose their spouse. Furthermore, its multiple premises and inter-Islamic correlations (i.e., the relationship between different Islams within Muslim lands due to different extents of globalization’s influence) are remarkable. This means that understanding a certain theme, such as human rights, in Muslim circles is affected by globalization in accordance with the domestic events of each specific context.

Roy’s scope of knowledge is impressive. However, many details and terms are not explained clearly, if at all. Thus, this complex sociological and political analysis of Islam seems to be written for readers already familiar with the fundamentals of Islam. It highlights the importance of sociological factors in shaping modern Islam in the Arab countries and in the West.

Globalized Islam is in the same category as Werner Schiffauer’s *Die Gottesmänner: Türkische Islamisten in Deutschland: Eine Studie zur Her-*

stellung religiöser Evidenz (God's Men: Turkish Islamists in Germany: A Study To Produce Religious Evidence (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000) and Ursula Spuler-Stegemann's *Muslimen in Deutschland: Nebeneinander oder Miteinander?* (Muslims in Germany: Side-by-side or with Each Other?) (Freiburg: Herder, 1998), both of which describe Islam in Germany and show effects consistent with Roy's analysis. For example, given that even radical Muslim Turks play according to western rules and think in European terms, their Islam is no longer the traditional Turkish form of Islam. Roy, however, takes the research further by introducing more theories and elaborating upon broader contexts. His social explanations, which go beyond the traditional calls for revising Islam as a religion, are refreshing.

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