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Islam in Europe

Clash of religions or convergence of religiosities?

It is a mistake to think that religious and political radicalism among European Muslims is a mere import from the cultures and conflicts of the Middle East. It is above all a consequence of the globalization and Westernization of Islam, writes Olivier Roy.

Today's religious revival among Europe's Muslims is no importation of religious traditions born in the Middle East or the wider Muslim world. Rather, it reflects many of the dynamics of contemporary American evangelical movements. No surprise then that, instead of being tolerant and liberal, it is a movement based on dogmatism, communitarianism, and scripturalism.

The Salafism (fundamentalist religious radicalism) disseminated nowadays among teaching networks, and usually financed by Saudi Arabia, emphasizes the loss of cultural identity in traditional Islam. Spiritualism is promoted by the return of Sufist communities or even social predication (as when Imams preach to the youth in underprivileged neighbourhoods to help them out of delinquency, or American churches preach to young blacks to fight drugs and delinquency).

It is a mistake to think that the phenomena of religious radicalism (Salafism) and political radicalism (Al Qaeda) are mere imports of the cultures and conflicts of the Middle East. It is above all a consequence of the globalization and Westernization of Islam. Today's religious revival is first and foremost marked by the uncoupling of culture and religion, whatever the religion may be. This explains the affinities between American Protestant fundamentalism and Islamic Salafism: both reject culture, philosophy, and even theology in favour of a scriptural reading of the sacred texts and an immediate understanding of truth through individual faith, to the detriment of educational and religious institutions.

Religion is a mere faith and a system of norms marking the barrier between believers (the community of saints, or those who shall be saved) and others. On the other hand, both Catholicism and Orthodoxy consider religion to be profoundly anchored in a culture that cannot be shared by non-believers (hence the Pope's call for the acknowledgement of the Christian roots of Europe, which are cultural rather than linked to actual religious practice). The success of all forms of neo-fundamentalism can be explained by the fact that, paradoxically, it vindicates the loss of cultural identity and allows a "pure" religion to be conceptualized independently of all its cultural variations and influences.

This globalization of Islam also takes place in traditional Muslim countries, that is, it not only refers to the movement of men and women, but also of ideas,

cultural representations, and even modes of religiosity: the relationships that believers entertain with their religion.

The first point, essentially linked to the issue of Islam in Europe, is the uncoupling of Islam, on the one hand, and a given territory and culture, on the other. In countries with a Muslim tradition, both the believer and the non-believer, or the less convinced believer, experience religion as some sort of cultural given: by and large their society organizes and provides the space for religious practice. It is easy to fast during Ramadan in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Egypt, even if a person does not want to. Anybody wishing to observe Ramadan can do so without any problem, as society is organized around it for as long as necessary, and there are even instances of societies like Iran, where, in fact, very few people practice it, but where, officially, everything is done in order for believers to observe Ramadan.

In the countries of origin, religion is always embodied in a culture, and it is difficult, for the believer, to distinguish between what belongs to the cultural tradition — and to some extent to social conventions — and what belongs to dogma. A distinction between religion as a corpus of beliefs — as theology — and culture is not usually made by the man in the street, that is, by ordinary believers. But immigration has suddenly created a divide between religion and society, between religion and culture, to the extent that religious belief is lost sight of. Suddenly, a Muslim living in Europe has somehow to reinvent, to rediscover or, to be more precise, to define what, to his thinking, belongs to the religious world. Therefore, for a Muslim, being in a minority, or being an immigrant, compels him to ultimately think about the basic nature of Islam. He is forced to objectify Islam, to try to define the essence of Islam as objectively as possible. Let me give you a few current examples.

Religious literature is, of course, as old as religion itself, and, if you care to look at the titles of religious books down the years, from the beginning to the present time, you will find, century after century, books with very similar titles, such as "The Explanation of Secrets". Sometimes they are metaphors: "The Pearls of the Sea", "The Pearls of Knowledge", etc. Yet, for some time now we have seen titles appearing without precedent in religious literature: "What is Islam?", "What Does it Mean to be a Muslim?", "How to Experience Islam?". There is a wealth of literature nowadays that tries to provide an objective definition of what Islam is, because there is a need for such an objective definition, because there is no longer any evidence of religious belief, because there is no longer any mediation of knowledge by the *ulemas*, or legal experts. Everyone is faced with the need to invent, define, and objectify what religion means to them.

This does not mean that the *ulemas*, the scholars, have disappeared; they are still here. However, the knowledge they produce is no longer practical for the believer; their traditional and scholarly knowledge does not provide the answers the new believer is looking for. A lot of these books, with titles such as "What Is Islam?", "Living with Faith", and "Being a Muslim in the West", are written by non-scholarly authors. A lot of them are engineers, people of a secular tradition with a very modern outlook, who have educated themselves in Islam.

The first significant aspect of this phenomenon of people moving from one country to another, therefore, is the uncoupling of religion and culture, and the need to define a religion with criteria that are purely religious, and totally internal to the religious domain. This is exactly what I mean by

"globalization". Globalization means uprooting from given societies in an attempt to develop systems of thought that are no longer linked to a given culture, systems of thought or practices, behavior, taste, and modes of consumption.

A lot of ink has been spilled in France on the resistance to globalization, or Americanization, or to be more precise, the rejection of fast food and McDonald's restaurants, which are seen as imports of American culture. In fact, however, it is nothing of the sort, it is simply a mode of consumption that is not linked to any culture, and that is adaptable to absolutely everywhere, which is why it works. Therefore, when asking the question "Under what conditions is Islam compatible with Western values?" we are asking the wrong question.

The problem is not "What does Islam say about this or that?" The history of Islam has given rise to a lot of liberal scholars who have written books offering solutions: solutions, for example, insisting on a metaphoric reading of the Koran, solutions insisting on the message rather than the letter, solutions insisting on the spirit and the values more than norms and judicial rules. This is nothing new. The Westernization of Islam is not necessarily through "*aggiornamento*", or theologian liberalization. It can also assume fundamentalist forms. Modern fundamentalism is also a form of the globalization of Islam, a form of Islam's Westernization. I have to stress this point, because it is what preoccupies people the most.

There are, of course, liberal and modern thinkers in Islam. These thinkers do exist, and always have. In France, for instance, there is Professor Mohamed Arkoun, who is both a renowned philosopher of French culture and a scholar of Islam. The problem is: Who reads Professor Arkoun? Who buys his books? What influence does he have on the Muslim youth of today?

The real question is not an intellectual or a theoretical question about Islam; the real issue here is about the tangible practices of Muslims. What forms and religious beliefs are in circulation among young Muslims today? The forms of religiosity witnessed in Islam today are transversal, they are more or less the same as the ones found in the most popular Western denominations: Catholicism, Protestantism, even Judaism. In our contemporary world we are now witnessing the uncoupling of religion and culture, in other words, contemporary believers put far more stress on faith, on spiritual experience, on individual and personal rediscovery of religion, than on legacy, culture, transmission, authority, and theology.

Today, we see forms of religious revival leading to the "born again" phenomenon, in other words, people are born again into their religion. It is perhaps the most striking phenomenon of contemporary religiosity in all denominations. It is these "born again" believers who now define religious belief, for the large part, and not what we call the sociological believers. A born again believer is someone who rediscovers faith and decides that from then on his or her life will be put totally in the perspective of this rediscovered faith, in other words, he or she will rebuild his or her self in his or her relationship to that faith. This is what I call "religiosity."

Religion is easy to define: the corpus, the revealed texts, the interpretations, the theological debates, the dogmas, and so on. As for religiosity, it is the manner in which the believer lives his relationship to religion. And, today, religiosity, everywhere, is far more important than religion. The young people

gathering to see the Pope during the world meeting of Catholic youth are not looking for theological explanations. They are looking for a spiritual and personal experience. They seek an immediate experience, an enjoyment of religious fervour. They are not seeking to understand, they are not seeking an authority. They cannot be found attending mass on Sundays or attending seminaries. There is said to be a return to religious belief in Christianity nowadays and millions of young people go to meet the Pope every year. However, at the same time, the seminaries and the vocations are losing ground and fewer and fewer people want to become priests.

Therefore, what we have is not a contradiction, but two totally different trends: one is the crisis of religions as institutions and cultures, the other is the return of religiosity. The return of religiosity acts against religion. It is very visible, for instance, among the charismatic fundamentalist protestant movements, where faith is first of all experienced as an individual experience and a break with tradition. Today, religious revival everywhere takes the form of a break with tradition, rather than a form of continued legacy. This explains, for example, why the debate about the place of religion in the European Constitution, in my opinion, is totally misplaced, totally beside what is happening nowadays. That is why this debate is of no concern to anyone, except, of course, the religious establishment — more specifically, the Catholic establishment.

What we today label as Islamic fundamentalism, the re-Islamization, is happening not only in the Western world, but also in a lot of Islamic countries, under the same conditions as the revival of religious belief in Christianity, be it Protestant or Catholic. Therefore, far from witnessing an expansion of Middle Eastern and traditional Islam, which would assert itself against an equally traditional Christianity, what we are seeing is the globalization and Westernization of Islam from within, including in its most fundamentalist forms.

I mention fundamentalism because it is the subject that concerns people the most, and that is the issue at stake. A liberal Muslim worries no one, and does not appear to be an issue, even though such Muslims form the vast majority of Muslims living in the Western world. I am going to discuss a minority, not only because this minority is making headline news, but also because radical movements are often symptoms of underlying trends. Radical movements may be pathological, but, as often as not, it is pathology, or the absence of it, that defines good health.

What do we call Islamic fundamentalism today? We use other names: some call it "wahhabism", from the official name of the doctrine in Saudi Arabia. They themselves use "Salafis" as their preferred terminology. "Salafi" means "a return to the way of the pious ancestors", i.e. of the prophet and the prophet's successors. Personally, I use the term "neo-fundamentalism", but this is merely a question of terminology. What are we talking about? The Salafi or neofundamentalist movements are above all movements that criticize traditional Muslim cultures. They are anti-cultural before they are anti-Western. Let me use an example we have all heard about, the Taliban in Afghanistan.

When the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 1996, their enemy was not the Western world: they had an excellent relationship with Americans and foreigners. Westerners could travel freely in Afghanistan between 1996 and 1998. What the Taliban were fighting was not Christianity, not the Western

world, but the traditional Afghan culture. They waged a cultural war: they forbade music, poetry, dance, all forms of games, everything resembling spectacle and entertainment. Movies, tapes, novels were all forbidden. They forbade forms of cultural activities that were very traditional among Afghans, such as caged songbirds at home, or the use of kites. Why forbid the use of songbirds? Why forbid the use of kites? The rationale of the Taliban was very simple: this world is simply made available to the believer to prepare for his or her salvation. This is a theme found in all forms of fundamentalism. The role of the state is not to put in place a fair society, but to create opportunities, even if they are coercive, for believers to find their way to salvation.

This kind of coercion was found during the Inquisition of yesteryear. The Inquisition never punished people because they went against the social order. On the contrary, the Inquisition approach was to allow believers to find their salvation and then, possibly, they could be handed over to the secular order. The Inquisition's obsession was with salvation, not punishment.

So, for the Taliban, to be a believer, to be a Muslim, meant strict observance of religious obligations — for instance, praying five times a day. If interrupted when praying, however, one had to begin again from scratch. The Taliban argument is the following: if you are praying and the bird in your room starts singing, you will be distracted and your prayer will be nullified. If you are a good Muslim, you will have to stop immediately and start all over again. But we are not sure you are a good Muslim and that you will have the strength to start all over again. Therefore, it is easier to ban the birds, since then they cannot bother you and distract you from your duties. Same thing with kites: a kite can get tangled in trees and, if it does, you will climb up the tree to untangle it because you paid good money for it. However, from the top of the tree, you can look over your neighbour's wall and you run the risk of seeing a woman without her veil, which is a sin. Why run the risk of burning in hell for a kite? Kites are banned.

This rationale is pushed to its limits, in other words, this form of religiosity cancels out culture, by the following reasoning: either culture belongs to religion and therefore culture is not needed or culture is something different from religion, and therefore must be eliminated because it distracts you from religion. Indeed, this denial of all distraction, of all that is not linked to religious practice and the seeking of salvation, is a line of thought found in a lot of religions. It is the standard line of thought and can even be found, for instance, in some forms of American Protestantism.

This type of fundamentalism is also a major cause of the loss of cultural identity; in fact, it vindicates the loss of cultural identity. It considers not having any cultural identity as positive. And even if this type of fundamentalism has appeared in geographical zones that are, not surprisingly, rather tribal societies — Saudi Arabia, Taliban Afghanistan — it is perfectly suited to a modern loss of cultural identity. It offers young people an excuse for their crisis of cultural identity. The Mullahs, and the Wahhabi Imams or Salafis, who live in Europe and talk to young people from an immigrant background, tell them things very simply and clearly. They tell them: "You have not inherited your grandfather's Islam because your grandfather did not pass his Islam on to you, your grandfather came from Morocco, from Algeria, your grandfather claims to be a Muslim, and sees himself as one, but he did not pass on his Islam to you. But that's good, because your grandfather's Islam is not the right Islam.

"Your grandfather's Islam is the Islam of the Marabouts, Moroccan Islam, the Islam of the Sufis, traditional Islam, which has nothing to do with the teachings of the prophet. So, it is really good that you have lost the traditional culture of your family. You don't feel French or Spanish or Italian, you don't feel European, which is fine because Europe is not Islam. You don't feel anything in particular; which is perfect, as it puts you in the best possible situation to become a real Muslim, that is, to live your Islam like a pure religion, like a set of norms and values without any social or cultural content."

It is a coherent and structured discourse. It is what, for example, an association called the Tabligh say when they go preaching from door to door. They are not radicals, they are not terrorists, they are even people who scrupulously abide by the laws of the country they live in. But they are people who consider that we live in a world where Islam is not embodied by a society or a territory and that this is an opportunity rather than a loss, because Islam has finally been detached from any given culture. This explains why fundamentalist ideologies have a lot of success among young Muslims with Western experience. Here, fundamentalism is not at all the protest of an original culture; on the contrary, it vindicates the disappearance of the original cultures. It would be a huge mistake to link modern forms of fundamentalism to the idea of a clash of cultures, or a clash of civilizations, because there is no culture any more, there is no civilization.

Today, we express the issues of religious conflicts in cultural terms. This is wrong and pointless, because we are beyond cultural differences. That is why the answers we in Europe try to bring to these religious fundamentalist issues are always blind to what is actually happening. It is not a Middle Eastern issue, and young people are not joining fundamentalist groups because the Palestinian issue is not resolved. That has nothing to do with it. Young people do not become fundamentalists because their parents' culture is ignored by Western civilization. That has nothing to do with it either.

When these young people join neo-fundamentalist ideologies, they enter a universe where they rebuild their religion on the basis of their individual selves, and for them it is the experience of the Almighty, an experience of creation, which can also be found among Protestant fundamentalists. All these forms of fundamentalism are based on the same aspects: the loss of explicit cultural identity, individualization, the rupture of family ties and social ties, and "positivization" — the fact that this rupture is considered to be positive.

This religious revival is also a generation thing. It is true of Catholicism, it is true among Muslims, and it is very often the case among young Protestants. The young are returning to religion against the religion of their parents, or alongside the religion of their parents, rather than as an extension of it. Protestants set great store by these words from Jesus: "Leave your family, leave your friends, leave your home and join me." This idea that religious revival must happen through rupture has always been around, of course. The words of the Gospel have been here since the beginning, but, as always, different paradigms have been taken from the sacred texts at different times in history. Muslims do the same: the Koran provides answers to everything, but nowadays verses are chosen that match this religious fervour.

This religious reconstruction is done on an individual, generational basis, and in a religion conceived as a set of codes, norms, and values, rather than a theological corpus. We live in times where theology is despised. Theologians have disappeared: in the 1950s and 1960s, famous theologians had an audience

among Catholics and Protestants alike. Theological issues were discussed. This is over now, even in Catholic circles. Of course, theology fellowships in famous seminaries still exist, but theologians as a body, as a corporation, no longer do. It is the Curia in the Vatican, not theologians, that manages religious orthodoxy today, and this is true of all religions.

The same thing is happening with Islam. The *Ulemas*, or doctors of the faith, the ones who tell the truth, have lost their legitimacy, but, at the same time, people still need truth, hence the emphasis on norms and/or values. And the whole difference between the fundamentalist radical forms, on the one hand, and liberal forms, on the other, will depend on whether we attach more importance to norms or values. That is the difference between liberalism and fundamentalism today. But the forms of neo-fundamentalism that we are now witnessing are forms of reinvention of the norm, which can be very variable: some groups of neo-fundamentalists will insist on physical norms, such as dress codes, where the way one dresses matters. This explains the importance of the current Islamic veil issue.

That said, it is interesting to note that the issue of the Islamic veil is a contemporary issue. 30 or 40 years ago, there was no debate about the veil. There has been some debate in cabalist Turkey about the banning of the veil, but even in Turkey, it is only in the last 15 years that the veil has become the subject of fierce public debate; in the 1950s, it was not the subject of any public controversy. Suddenly, this issue of marking religious identity becomes extremely important. Today, the issue of the external religious sign is so because all the religious communities are refashioning themselves as more or less closed communities.

Let me come back to my Catholic example: 30 or 40 or 50 years ago, in France, anyone who was not a Protestant or a Jew was assumed to be Catholic, and the Catholic church lived as the expression of society, or culture, even if there was a conflict with the state. This was reflected in a very simple fact: anyone could get married in church, even if they were not churchgoers and did not take communion. Today, with the new generation of clergymen, you cannot get married in church so easily if you are not a member of a parish, or a community. You must prove you belong to the community; you must take religious training classes, and so on.

The religious communities of today are no longer the expression of cultures or societies. They are reconstructions made on an individual and voluntary basis. Today, all religions are lived as minorities, even when they represent the majority. For example, in the United States, 80 per cent of Americans say they are believers and practicing churchgoers. At the same time, preachers, be they Protestants, Catholics, or Muslims, all say the same: "We live in an atheistic, materialistic, and pornographic society...", a society where 80 per cent of the people say that they are believers. Thus, either there is a contradiction, or they are right. And in my opinion they are right. In fact, societies are no longer religious, even if believers represent a majority in society. Societies are built on other forms of cultural representation, of modes of consumption, of norms, of values, of economy, of anything we care to think of. There is no religious evidence any longer, even in societies with religious majorities.

Therefore, the question, "What is a religion?", today becomes the question of a community of believers. But this community of believers no longer has a cultural basis, and less and less of a territorial basis. Therefore, we are in the middle of a reconstruction effort of a virtual community. It is easier for some.

The Catholic Church has the huge advantage of being an institution, of having a Pope, of having a global dimension, and of being supranational. Thus, the Catholic Church can survive this globalization crisis, but other religions, which lack those very institutions, are suddenly faced with the problem of "What does the norm say? Who is speaking the truth in religious matters?" This produces the paradox that the debate is totally open, but nearly always ends in favour of the fundamentalists. Why? Because they have the clearest ideas of what the norm is.

Take the Fatwa websites on the Internet: they are all in English, because this is the language of globalization. Nobody would read a Fatwa website in Arabic if it existed. Furthermore, you can ask questions and there are always people, Muslims, young people usually isolated in a world that is not part of the Muslim world, who ask questions such as: "How can I manage?" And the person who answers — usually a fundamentalist, of course, because they are the ones who are interested in questions of this kind — knows only too well that the judicial norm cannot be activated or implemented. They know you cannot punish someone who does not follow the religious law. So, even fundamentalists are inclined to use a discourse based on morals and values and the supremacy of value over norm.

That does not mean that we are heading towards a more liberal Islam — which would be a possibility — but that the forms of religiosity, even in their fundamentalist dimension, are profoundly modern, contemporary, and, in a way, perfectly compatible with other religions. When Pim Fortuyn in Holland decided to lead a campaign against the influence of Islam, it was not in defence of the traditional values of Christianity and Europe, but, on the contrary, in defence of the values of sexual freedom (defence of homosexuals). The Moroccan Imam, whose preaching on Dutch television had shocked Pim Fortuyn, adopted a conservative stance that could have been a Christian one (homosexuals are sick and in need of treatment rather than being acknowledged as a minority with rights). On subjects like family, sexual freedom, homosexuality, or abortion, religious Muslims in Europe side with conservative Christians. There is a clash of values, but it does not oppose East and West, the Orient and the Occident, or Islam and Christianity. The debate is an internal debate in Europe, questioning Europe's values and identity.

Assuming that what I claim is true, that we find ourselves in a common matrix of religiosity, this still does not explain Islamic political radicalism. Osama Bin Laden is far more within the legacy of a tradition of Western radicalism than merely an expression of traditional political violence in Islam. Contemporary activists, apart from Saudis and Yemenis, who are an important exception, have all been reintroduced to Islam in a Western context: Mohamed Atta, Zacharias Moussaoui, Daoudi, all these people had become "Born again Muslims" here in the West, not in Egypt or Morocco, but here among us, in Marseilles, London, Montreal. They all benefited from a modern, Western education. None of them except the Saudis came from a religious Koranic school. They had all broken with their family. None had adopted the religious tradition of their parents. There is one absolutely common trend among them: when they were arrested, their families stated that they had not seen them for one, two or three years. And when they adopt radical opinions in the West, where do they go to wage *jihad*?

Let's take the example, in France, of a young French Muslim of Algerian descent, whose family is of Algerian origin, who becomes a "Born again Muslim" in the suburbs of Paris, and who decides to wage *jihad*. You might

think all he has to do is to go to Algeria for his *jihād*, as there are lots of opportunities there. However, there are no examples of a young person of Algerian descent acquiring radicalism in France and going to wage *jihād* in Algeria. Where do they go? They go to Bosnia, to Chechnya, to Afghanistan, to Kashmir, to New York, or to the West. No one goes back to his or her country of origin. This means that they do not in any way see the Middle East as the heart of a Muslim culture and the heart of a territorialized Muslim civilization that could be attacked and put under siege by crusaders. They live in a global world, not as Middle Easterners.

Most of them, at least half, have married women of European descent, who have sometimes agreed to go with their husbands and, when they have a family life, they live in a modern family structure, in the structure of a couple. The memoirs of the wife of the killer of Commander Massoud in Afghanistan have just been published. She is Belgian, but of Tunisian descent. She is currently on trial in a court in Brussels, and she explains in her book how she came to be married, how she went with her husband to Afghanistan, how they lived as a couple among the Mujahideen and the Taliban. Their family structure was therefore entirely modern. There was no patriarchal structure, where the father or grandfather is to be obeyed. On the contrary, there was a break with the father or the grandfather.

There is one final phenomenon: converts. In all the radical networks recently discovered, there are a growing number of converts. About a third of the Begal network, the latest to be arrested in France, were converts. Some Islamist terrorist actions in Muslim countries are apparently orchestrated in the West by converts. The terrorist attack on the synagogue in Djerba, in Tunisia, was carried out by a young Tunisian — himself a Tunisian from Tunisia, but whose whole family lives in Lyon, France. The French police have recently arrested a German citizen with a Slavonic name, a Polish name, a convert to Islam, who the police think is the man behind this attack and the link between this young Tunisian and bin Laden. Richard Reid, the man who tried to blow up a British plane, José Padilla, John Walker Lindh, the American Taliban, are all converts. It is a growing phenomenon.

We need to study these converts, because, even though they do not represent large numbers, their existence is highly symptomatic, and very interesting from an intellectual point of view. We can observe a conversion phenomenon in underprivileged neighbourhoods in France today. That is what I call the "protest conversion", for example, a youth, of French origin, leads a dog's life, as we say in France, in poverty, not only and often not even material poverty, but rather moral and psychological misery, with no job prospects, no social advancement, sometimes dealing in drugs, stealing cars, living in the small world of the underground economy, of delinquency, like a parasite. He converts and joins a group of local Islamic activists, formed by his friends, his acquaintances, the guy who lives next door, in the same apartment building, and he joins because the group is actively fighting the system.

The far left in Europe today has abandoned zones of social exclusion. This is a fact. We have good reason to rejoice in the disappearance of a violent and radical far left, but it did have a function, which was to contain and hold in check a certain revolt, often also based on the generation gap. But this is over: a 30-year-old, in France, who would have joined the proletarian left, the Maoists or *Action Directe*, who, in Italy, would have joined the *Brigate Rosse*, who, in Germany, would have joined the *Rote Armee Fraktion*, this young person no longer has the opportunity to join left-wing movements, and if he or

she wants to fight the system, and use violence, he or she has only one role model: and that is bin Laden, or the local Islamist networks, and his or her friends. And what do they do? They do the same thing that far left radicals used to do in the 1960s: look for likely freedom fighter movements. They went to the Bekaa plains to learn how to use Kalashnikovs with the Palestinian left, and they hijacked planes with them. Today, they go to Afghanistan to learn how to handle Kalashnikovs with "Binladenists" and they also learn how to hijack planes; in the meantime, their skills have greatly improved. We are therefore witnessing a kind of quest for mythical, messianic, transnational liberation movements, all targeting the same enemy — American imperialism — that is perceived as the modern form of domination, of capitalism.

Bin Laden's struggles form part of a history, and of a matrix that is far more Western than strictly Middle Eastern. Bin Laden's people do not live in Egypt, in Syria, in Lebanon, or in Iraq. We went to look for them with 200 000 troops, but we did not find them. They are not even in Algeria; they are here among us — because they are the product not of our history, but of a fusion of all histories, a product of globalization.

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