

Olivier Roy, “One of France’s Top Experts On Islamic Terrorism” (Part II)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



In his recent book “Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State,” Roy argues that about 70 percent of these young people have scant knowledge of Islam, and suggests they are “radical” before even choosing Islam. He dubs them “born again Muslims” who lead libertine lives before their sudden conversion to violent fundamentalism. – [Haaretz](#)

It’s hard to know where to begin with this. Who decides what constitutes “scant knowledge of Islam”? One would like to see what questions were asked to determine this. Were those interviewing the “young people” (a cohort, one assumes, consisting of those who had gone to join the Islamic State and returned) Muslims themselves, who might have a stake in downplaying the “Islamic” knowledge of those they question? Were these ignorant Muslims unaware of the 109 Jihad verses? Some of them? All of them? And what constitutes leading “libertine lives”? Drinking alcohol? Having premarital sex? Smoking marijuana? Would indulging in only one of those Western vices, like Salman Abedi with his occasional cannabis, be enough for someone to feel the need to atone by becoming a *shahid*? And when Roy says these Islamic terrorists were “radical” before “even choosing Islam,” why was it, does he think, that Islam was chosen, why did Islam turn out to be the perfect fit, the right vehicle, for those “radicals” who were hellbent on aggression and destruction, if Islam, so we are often told, preaches peace and tolerance?

As for leading “libertine lives,” it is true that some Muslim

terrorists, before “returning to Islam,” seem to have been inattentive to its rules, and indulged in Western “decadence” by drinking alcohol, or having premarital sex, or smoking marijuana. As has been well documented, some of those who re-embrace Islam after having fallen away may do so with a fanaticism that can be explained as a kind of atonement for ever having violated the rules on Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong. But not all Muslim terrorists follow Olivier Roy’s own “narrative”; many had always been unbending in their faith, and were not atoning for anything when they acted on their beliefs and became Jihadists. They were simply carrying out what the Qur’an commanded. And Salman Abedi had always been one of the latter: a devout Muslim, from a very devout family, and a hafiz to boot.

“It’s the Islamification of radicalism that we need to investigate, not the radicalization of Islam,” Roy says, begging the question of why radical youths would choose violent fundamentalist Islam over other destructive creeds to engage in terrorism.

Islam does not need to be “radicalized” nor radicals “Islamized” for Muslims to become terrorists. The Qur’an, hadith, and sira supply all the “radicalization” – that is, the inculcated violence and aggression toward Infidels – that “radicals” require. But there is not a mainstream Islam and another, quite different, “radicalized” Islam. The same texts and teachings are to be found in mainstream mosques and madrasas as in those some describe as preaching, or teaching, a “radicalized” Islam. There may be differences in emphasis and tone in an imam’s khutba, but not in the essence of the message, which is to be found in the same Qur’an, in same Hadith and sira, that all Muslims read. The Muslim terrorist is not violating, but following, the commands, and the great example, of the Muslim prophet Muhammad.

These “new radicals” embrace the Islamic State’s narrative as

it's the only radical narrative available in the "global market of fundamentalist ideologies," Roy says. "In the past they would have been drawn, for example, to far-left political extremism." Half of violent jihadis in France, Germany and the United States also have criminal records for petty crime, just like Abedi, who appears to have been radicalized without the involvement of the local mosque or religious community, an element that mirrors patterns in the rest of Europe.

According to Olivier Roy, these young Muslims choose the Islamic State's "narrative" just because it's the only radical one available. In the past, he says they might have been drawn to "far-left extremism." Well, there is an Islamic past, some 1400 years of it, easily available for study, and Roy might discover that numerous Muslims during all those centuries behaved very much like the "Islamized" radicals today, conducting Jihad through whatever means, including especially violence, proved most effective, and determined to continue that Jihad until Infidels were subjugated, and were converted, or killed, or agreed to pay the Jizyah. Muslims were always required to conduct Jihad, a duty which does not end until Islam everywhere dominates, and Muslims rule, everywhere. For a long time Muslims were successful in their conquests, but Europe eventually surpassed them in military technology and strength. The European counterattack lasted for roughly the last two centuries (since Napoleon entered Egypt in 1798), and led, among other developments deemed disastrous by Muslims, to the end of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. But in recent decades, several factors have made possible a renewed campaign against the West by aggressive Jihadists.

The first factor is that Muslim countries became immensely rich from the sale of oil. They have been the recipients of over \$25 trillion dollars in oil revenues since 1973 alone, money which has helped fund the worldwide building of mosques and madrassas, of Islamic community centers, and of subsidies

to an army of Muslim missionaries, as well as paying for apologists and propagandists for Islam, by no means all of them Muslim. And that money has also come in useful for the bribing of political figures, diplomats, representatives at the U.N., who have helped distract attention from what has been rightly labeled, by Robert Spencer, the Stealth Jihad.

The second factor has been the large-scale immigration of Muslims to the West, that is, of people who have been inculcated to be permanently hostile to their Infidel hosts. There are now close to 50 million Muslims in Europe, behind borders that they have always been taught to regard as enemy lines. Very few are integrating into their host societies. Very many are now a permanent threat to those whose lands they have so thoughtlessly been allowed to share.

The third factor is technology – the advances, from cell phones to the Internet, from satellite television to YouTube videos, that have made spreading the full message of Islam all over the world much easier. By now no Muslim can claim ignorance of his duties, both of Jihad and of What Is Commanded and What Is Forbidden. The Internet presents Muslims with the same access everywhere to materials – not just the main texts of Qur'an, hadith, and sira, but also the works of the historians of Islam, the commentators on the Qur'an, the most authoritative hadith scholars, those who today, like Yusuf al-Qaradawi, provide counsel and answer the questions of Believers – all that once to be found only in good-sized mosques and madrasas and libraries, but now only requires a click or two on the Internet. The effect of money, migrants, and technology helps explain why non-Muslims in the West have been insufficiently alarmed about Islam (all those well-paid apologists and propagandists have successfully silenced or misrepresented thoughtful critics as "Islamophobes"), why campaigns of conversions, now so well-funded, meet with success among non-Muslims, of the kind who desperately need, and find that Islam provides, an Instant Bruvverhood, and a

Complete Regulation of Life.

Finally, the tens of thousands of mosques and madrasas that have been built in the West with oil money help explain why those young Muslims who may indulge in an interlude of Western decadence return, with a vengeance, to Islam. But let's be clear: not all terrorists are ex-libertines atoning for their libertinage. Some, like Abedi himself, do not fit Olivier Roy's template at all – which has not prevented him from claiming otherwise. Abedi was always a devout Muslim, and had nothing, from an Islamic point of view, save possibly for a few intermittent puffs of cannabis, to atone for.

According to Roy, while ultraconservative Salafi Islam is certainly a problem ? its followers object to the basic values underpinning a tolerant and secular Western society ? it shouldn't be conflated with violent extremism. And when evaluating the origins of young men like Abedi, one shouldn't overstate the role of Muslim revanchism in the developing world, a political strand feeding on the West's colonial legacy and interventionism in the Middle East.

It is not “Salafi” Islam alone whose “followers object to the basic values underpinning a tolerant and secular Western society,” but rather, the followers of mainstream Islam itself. Islam is not tolerant, Islam does not admit of any equivalent to “post-Christian” secularism. In what Islamic country are the rights to full equality of non-Muslims, women, homosexuals recognized? In what Muslim – not just “Salafi” – country, is there anything like freedom of religion and of speech, the “basic values underpinning a tolerant and secular Western society”?

In one respect Roy is certainly right, however, in wanting to deemphasize Muslim resentment over the West's “colonial legacy” as a cause of terrorism. He knows, as a Frenchman, how little of a “colonial legacy” there was to be resented by

Muslim Arabs, for only in Algeria was there a “colony” in the accepted sense of that word. The four Arab territories that were previously guided by European mandatory authorities to statehood – Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria – were never colonies. Nowhere on the Arabian peninsula was there a single European colony. In Egypt, Lord Cromer’s men ran the civil service from 1882 to 1922, but Egypt was not a British colony. In North Africa, there was no wholesale transfer of French “colons” (colonists) into Morocco and Tunisia, as occurred in Algeria. Olivier Roy minimizes the “colonial legacy” correctly, but for the wrong reason. It is because he seeks his explanation for Muslim terrorism neither in the ideology of Islam, nor in the history of Muslim encounters with, and resentment against, the West, but in the psychology of individual Muslims who, according to Roy, have been “radicalized” and now seek to give their “radicalization” an Islamic cover and coherence.

“Had he been concerned about acts of Western imperialism, he would have mentioned the British attack in Libya in 2012, making his act political in one way or another,” Roy says.

Abedi was very much part of the British youth culture he attacked, “he killed himself as part of that society,” Roy says from his office in Florence, where he’s a professor at the European University Institute. “Had he been imbued with Islamic culture and bent toward the ambition of establishing an Islamic state in the Middle East, he would have probably not have known about pop singer Ariana Grande,” Roy notes, adding that “he would have traveled to Syria or Libya instead.”

Roy is wrong. Abedi was not, as Roy claims, “very much part of the British youth culture he attacked.” Nor was he confused, betwixt and between Islam and Western secularism. He was indeed “imbued with Islamic culture.” He was a *hafiz*, that is, someone who had memorized the entire Qur’an. He was by all

accounts devout, never tempted to indulge in Western “decadence” other than a bit of marijuana. He was a loyal son in a family whose paterfamilias had been involved, back in Libya, with a group that had links to Al-Qaeda. He chose to attack the Manchester concert because it was both an easy and a high-value target, with more than ten thousand Infidels (the venue could hold 21,000) gathered conveniently in one place. Roy thinks that “if he were imbued with Islamic culture,” then he “would have travelled to Syria or Libya instead.” Nonsense. Abedi knew that his attack on that high-value target in Manchester would and did receive far more attention than any attack in the Middle East would have been given. In Syria or Libya, he would have been just one more Islamic State fighter, at a time when those ISIS fighters are on the run, under withering attack in Syria and Iraq and Libya, faced with massive defections of fighters. Abedi’s attack in Manchester was an atrocity, but it was also, from his point of view, a success, which Olivier Roy refuses to concede (he says it was “of little strategic value”): it did indeed “strike terror” in the hearts of Infidels. And Abedi did not “kill himself,” but died a *shahid*, a martyr for Islam.

If comments by French Interior Minister Gérard Collomb are confirmed, Abedi will join the long list of returning jihadis who have struck in Europe after fighting in Syria. But Roy also notes some positive news: Hundreds of foreign fighters from Europe are seeking a safe return to Europe by turning themselves in to their embassies in Turkey, according to the Italian press.

“This means they don’t have the suicidal instincts characterizing terrorists like Abedi,” Roy says, though he warns that the “hegemony of secularism” and the rejection of “all forms of religiosity” in the West have created a spiritual vacuum that can be a breeding ground for fundamentalism.

Hundreds of Muslims who left Europe to join the Islamic State are now trying to return to the European countries they left. They are fleeing in fear both of attacks by Infidel bombs, and even more, of being killed by the most fanatical members of IS fanatics, who have been killing their own fighters for not fighting fiercely enough, or in some cases not fighting at all. Roy seems to believe that these returnees will be no threat once back in Europe. But in fleeing the Islamic State, have they ceased to believe in violent Jihad? Isn't it possible that, if let back into the European countries they left, they might now wish to atone for their previous "cowardice" in fleeing the Islamic State, and possibly engage in terrorist acts at home? Or are we expected to believe that in fleeing from the Islamic State they have also abandoned, and forever, their Islamic faith, and their desire to kill Infidels? They may no longer be willing to die as *shahids*, but that doesn't mean they are no longer dangerous. Their return to Europe is not, *pace* Olivier Roy, "positive news." They can still attack Infidels in the countries to which they are allowed to return, can still encourage other Muslims to fight the Infidels in Europe, while dissuading them from going off to join the Islamic State whose prospects in the Middle East are now so grim. These are all unpleasant possibilities, but perfectly plausible. Plausible to all of us, that is, except for Olivier Roy.

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