

The Borders of Islam: Exploring Samuel Huntington's Faultlines, from Al-Andalus to the Virtual Ummah

Edited by *Stig Jarle Hansen, Atle Mesoy and Tuncay Kardas*

London: C. Hurst & Co., 2009, 388 pp., ISBN 9781850659723.

The Borders of Islam gives an insider's view of the so-called "Islam's bloody borders" through an examination of the countries that straddle two cultures/civilizations from across various regions. The book makes an enormous contribution to debates on "clash of civilizations" by critically examining various cases of war and conflict, which is one of the key elements of the thesis formulated by Samuel Huntington and popularized by the media. Hansen, Mesoy and Kardas take on Huntington's main thesis with an aim to falsify it. The book stands out as one of the strongest counter-arguments to the main premises of the clash of civilizations thesis. It does so by arguing that the clash sometimes is constructed, as is the case of various internal and external conflicts taking place in and around Iraq, or it neglects the division within the Islamic civilization, as is the case with Lebanon where the Sunnis have a different agenda than the Shiite Muslims, or that the clash between Muslims and Christians is not necessarily religiously-driven in Nigeria, Ethiopia or Sudan. While laying out this argument, the book sets out to understand whether religion could be considered as the most tangible source of conflicts involving groups that hold different religious faiths.

Rigby and Johansen argue that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is often oversimplified and reduced to an Islam-Judaism duality. They contend that the core of the conflict lies with the fundamental nationalists from both sides. By analyzing

approaches from fundamentalist Muslim, Jewish and Christian beliefs in Israel, they conclude that despite their differences in religious beliefs, fundamentalist are united in the same goal: boosting the potential for inter-communal conflict.

Bou Nasif's arguments are particularly helpful for the book's overall purpose of falsifying Huntington's thesis. For instance, while Huntington sees the main reason for Lebanese civil conflicts as the fight between Maronite Christians and Shia/Sunni Muslims, Bou Nasif argues that many of the bloodiest clashes were between the different Muslim sects within the country. He further contends that a sole focus "on the Muslims vs. non-Muslims side of the fault line conflicts" results in portraying "a static vision of Islam that ignores some of its major internal and deeply conflictual dynamics" (p. 43). Similar to the Lebanese case, Khory and Schulze show that the problems in Pakistan and Indonesia are *intra*-religiously motivated conflicts. They stress that at the center of problems in these countries is the politicization (Pakistan, pp. 65-82, and Ethiopia, pp. 148-150) and radicalization (Indonesia, pp. 83-98) of Islam rather than the natural givens of the Islamic faith. Therefore, it is erroneous to define the conflicts originating from these countries as specifically inter-religious (or inter-civilizational). The Sudanese case is analyzed by Gerard Prunier who gives a similar picture. In obvious disconfirmation of Huntington, Prunier shows that Sudan's ethnic identity has always been

prominent, surpassing religiosity, and that this African-Arab ethnic separation is at the very centre of the Sudanese conflicts.

Imperial historical divisions of a country are another causal pathway through which tribal conflicts, regardless of religious affiliation, play a prominent role in today's geopolitical landscape. As Ben Reid's argument on the Philippines reveals, the conflict in the Philippines is not between Islam and Christianity/Westernism, but over the struggle to end the historical legacies and consequences of the formation of the colonial Philippine state. This is also the case in Sakah Mahmud's case study on Nigeria. By categorizing the conflicts in Nigeria into three groups, Mahmud concludes that the Nigerian case presents at least three counter arguments to the clash of civilization thesis.

"European borders of Islam" are tackled through four case studies. In the Bosnian and Chechen cases, it is argued that the interaction of religion and nationalism sparked the first fire. James Hughes highlights the importance of temporality in his argument. He points out that the conflict between Chechnya and Russia initially started as a nationalist conflict. The conflict in Chechnya originated not as a historically fault line of religious war, as Huntington argued, but as a contingent secular nationalist revolution that rejected Soviet colonization (p. 173). The Chechen problem turned into a religiously motivated jihadist conflict *only after* the Russians accelerated the level of conflict from political arena to the actual fighting. Huntington's explanation for the Chechen war as a religiously motivated clash is yet another misinterpretation of a secularist nationalist conflict.

In the next chapter Kardas challenges the very basic and core premises of Hun-

tington's thesis. Who depicts Islam as a monolithic, dogmatic, essentialist, trans-historical, and ontologically different religion on a collision course with the Western world? Kardas puts to test such a view by analyzing the spectacular transformation of political Islam in Turkey in both discursive and practical terms. According to his findings, Turkey's predicaments and domestic political conflicts have largely emerged not from its Islamic credential but from the extra-political methods of securitization of the secular and Islamic identities by the state.

Bosnia is another case that contrasts Huntington's thesis. Monnesland argues that deep underlying differences in religion and conceptualization of history found in the Balkans have been engraved into conflicts, but are not in themselves the cause of the conflicts. Monnesland's chapter concludes that the conflicts in the Balkans should be interpreted as more 'normal' than is usually the case for they are mainly conflicts between competing interests, similar to conflicts found in other parts of Europe.

Complementing other chapters, Elena Arigita stresses the impact of Islam on Spanish cultural identity. She argues that the Islamic religion is one of the spiritual beliefs that have configured the historical personality of Spain. Unlike Huntington she reckons that an interaction between religions has happened and is happening and this process is unavoidable. For instance, this very interaction led two countries from two religions, namely Spain and Turkey, to initiate a project in order to tackle the thesis of clash of civilizations, i.e., the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative.

The final chapters of the book deal with the "Western borders of Islam". The main argument here is that if Huntington's claims

were correct there would be conflicts and wars where the West and Islam collide. These chapters verify this fact by emphasizing the level of radicalization among Muslims in Western societies. It is noted that a higher level of democracy would allow for various processes of radicalization among Muslims living in Western societies as is the case in Britain. For Dominique Thomas, who studies the case of Britain, the radicalization among the West's Muslim communities cannot be explained merely as a result of a clash between two civilizations. The French case, analyzed by Farhad Khosrokhavar, also shows almost the same result with regard to the radicalization of Muslims in France.

Despite many of its rich empirical contributions, the book fails to offer a comprehensive explanation of the changing nature

of 'clash.' It is undeniable that there is and will be 'clashes' between the two civilizations. What is often ignored is that such clashes may not take place in a form as envisaged by Huntington. Overall, although the book covers almost all the 'usual suspects' that fall within the ambit of the clash of civilizations discourse, it is clear that the thesis would have been better served had the book included chapters on some of the other African countries as well as India and Germany, which are on the frontlines of the so-called clash in many ways. It has never been easy to mount a sound systematical challenge to a highly topical and controversial theme of world politics, such as the clash thesis. Hansen, Mesoy and Kardas have made a bold attempt to achieve just that.

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The Almohads: The Rise of an Islamic Empire

By *Allen J. Fromherz*

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As a dynasty based in medieval North Africa and southern Spain, the Almohads have received relatively little attention from Anglophone scholars in Islamic Studies, many of whom work from a Middle Eastern perspective. Allen Fromherz's book is thus a very welcome contribution to the field. His over-arching aim is to present an account of the rise of the Almohads by looking at the Almohad movement's leader, Muḥammad b. Tūmart; the Maşmūda Berber tribal environment in which the empire arose; and the doctrines by which Ibn Tūmart galvanised these

tribes from the High Atlas mountains of Morocco.

He introduces the Almohads in a lively and engaging way, using primary sources as the basis for the arguments presented in each chapter. He begins with a brief summary of the Almohad empire's history and then he wisely discusses the sources and their pitfalls, especially their mythic and legendary aspects (although inevitably he must also rely on them for his facts). He also flags up what he considers the neglected 'Berber' dimension within accounts of the rise of the empire.