

Archives de sciences sociales des religions

136 (octobre - décembre 2006)
Les Archives... cinquante ans après

Stephan Clauss

Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad, Militancy, Morality, Modernity*

Londres, Hurst & Company Ltd, 2005, 184 p.

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Référence électronique

Stephan Clauss, « Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad, Militancy, Morality, Modernity* », *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* [En ligne], 136 | octobre - décembre 2006, document 136-34, mis en ligne le 12 février 2007, consulté le 10 février 2012. URL : <http://assr.revues.org/3913>

Éditeur : Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales
<http://assr.revues.org>
<http://www.revues.org>

Document accessible en ligne sur :
<http://assr.revues.org/3913>

Document généré automatiquement le 10 février 2012. La pagination ne correspond pas à la pagination de l'édition papier.

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Pagination de l'édition papier : p. 115-283

- 1 In the Western World, the view on Al-Qaeda is deeply coined by its violence. In many cases, analysis solely focus on this aspect in trying to explain the nature of Al-Qaeda, the causes and content of its violence. Yet, this discourse risks to become enlaced in an arguable discussion about the relations between Islam and violence. There generally is a divide between people claiming violence to be inherent of Islam while others serve as apologists of the Muslims. In any case, taking this approach many aspects of Al-Qaeda remain undiscovered. So F. Devji, in his book *Landscapes of the Jihad*, takes a broad approach exposing many very interesting aspects of Al-Qaeda and its character.
- 2 Al-Qaeda, for the author, differs from other terrorist or fundamentalist movements like the Palestinian claiming an own state and self-determination, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas or Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah which aim at establishing a fundamentalist Islamic state. According to a conventional political perspective, Al-Qaeda has in such no coherent vision or plan for the future. It is not about ideology, revolution, liberation or self-determination. F. Devji characterizes Al-Qaeda's actions rather as an "ethical gesture". It is a response to the politics primarily of the United States that Al-Qaeda hold responsible for the oppressive conditions faced by people throughout the Muslim world. Therefore, it is a moral action rather than a political one. In consequence of Al-Qaeda's actions, new patterns of beliefs and practices have emerged which F. Devji refers to as "landscapes of the jihad".
- 3 In six chapters he describes these various landscapes, taking many different perspectives starting from theology, history, philosophy to cultural and political aspects. His analysis leads him to the conclusion that Al-Qaeda breaks with traditional structures, ideologies and authorities in the Muslim world. In fact, he claims that Al-Qaeda and its jihadism is a recent development along with the global changes after the Cold War. Terms like geography, citizenship and state progressively become obsolete terms. Al-Qaeda is a typical organisation of this development, it is a globalized organisation that has a lot in common with other global movements such as social justice or environmental activists. All of them achieve to unite rather diverse people that take actions as individuals out of an ethical impetus. They are motivated by the observation of oppression rather than the experience. Finally Al-Qaeda neither does require an institutional unity in order to become active. In its dynamics, F. Devji compares Al-Qadea even to the dynamics of global business such as the stock market or multinational companies.
- 4 Taking this different point of view allows the author to go even further. He claims that the violence is rather an expression of the lacking possibility to effectively participate on a political level. In such, F. Devji sees violence, though at the moment of great impact, not central to Al-Qaeda and on the long run "superficial and short-lived". Accordingly, the chief impact of Al-Qaeda is not its violence but its above mentioned breach with traditional Muslim structures triggering the reorganisation of Muslim believes and practices. He estimates the impact on the Muslim world through this globalized jihadism might be rather significant. Through its characteristics like fragmentation and individualisation he even talks about tendencies of democratisation that are started as a quasi accidental side effect.
- 5 F. Devji's book is certainly a brilliant, comprehensive and profound analysis that shades a lot of new light on Al-Qadea and jihadism. He does not miss to prove his outlines by continuously quoting from statements, interviews or documents by various actors of Al-Qaeda. In all, however, though Arab terms are usually explained, some passages require a high back knowledge about Islam and its history. Furthermore a few chapters are very discursive and

philosophic thus requiring a high ability of abstraction of the reader and sometimes far-fetched. Finally it is written in a high level English making it difficult to read for people with only a fair level of English. Yet, the new insight that can be gained is definitely worthwhile the effort.

Pour citer cet article

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Droits d'auteur

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