
Stephen Schwartz, who currently directs the Center for Islamic Pluralism, not published too long ago his *The Two Faces of Islam* in which he demonstrated the variegated character of Islam. Schwartz continued his scholarly journey by researching and highlighting in the book under review the dimension of Islam that is attractive, adaptable and amenable to contemporary democratic reforms. According to Schwartz’s informed opinion based upon first hand ‘field work’ experience, Sufism represents a form of ‘moderate Islam’ or more specifically ‘Islamic pluralism’ (p. 14). He argues that it is indeed ‘the other Islam’ that provides an aspect which has generally been overlooked and neglected by foreign policy makers and other major stakeholders in international affairs. In his view, Sufism represents a significant voice that can assist in bringing about a meaningful understanding and significant reconciliation between the liberal, democratic West and the conservative, undemocratic parts of the Muslim world.

The author opens his book, which contains 6 chapters, with an introduction that explores ‘Islamic Spirituality in a World of Fear’ (pp. 1–34); and he concludes it with an acknowledgement page (p. 241), a set of notes (pp. 243–246), a list of ‘Works Consulted or Recommended’ (pp. 247–260) and an index (pp. 261–275). There is little doubt that Schwartz embarked on an ambitious project that scrutinized *The Other Islam* (the title) with its special focus on *Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony* (the sub-title). A text such as this may be described as ambitious because anyone wanting to write the social history of Sufism, which has a rich and long history within the house of Islam and one that has passed through three different organizational phases (p. 16), will find it extremely difficult to offer an even-handed socio-historical sketch of this phenomenon.
Schwartz, who is aware of this and does not provide a detailed socio-historical outline, demonstrates how it functions in and outside the Muslim world and how Sufi movements have emerged as significant voices in civil society that have spoken out against the autocratic rulers in countries such as Saudi Arabia. Schwartz being a practitioner of Sufism and someone who has been exposed to and has experienced its essential values advocates that it is “an indispensible element in any real solution to conflict between Islam and the West” (p. 30). Mention should be made of the fact that Schwartz worked on his research for this book in 2007. The year that marked the 800th birthday of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (d. 672/1273) who is one the foremost and celebrated Sufi figures in the Muslim world (p. 73) and whose Sufi thoughts and practices gave rise to the famous whirling dervishes. And it also signified the year when Doris Lessing (1919–   ), who left behind Marxism to join the metaphysicians of this world, was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Nonetheless, let us see how he goes about tackling Sufism and shows how it acts as a sober and reasonable response to what has been described as ‘Islamic fundamentalism.’

In his chapter on ‘The Great Age of Early Sufism’ (pp. 35–72), Schwartz reflects upon key personalities who laid the foundations of Sufism. He, for example, discussed Ḥusayn ibn Maṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) who “symbolized the unrestrained love of God” and viewed as ‘the saint of the poor’ and elaborated on the ideas of Abū Ḥamdūd Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) who was known as the ‘proof of Islam.’ He also showed how these and other Sufis influenced the ideas of prominent Jewish philosophers such as Bahya ibn Pakuda (fl. 11th century CE in Spain) and Abraham Maimonides (d. 1204) as well as Christian thought in Spain and Italy respectively (pp. 63–65). In fact he underlines that during the Muslim Spanish period there was a fruitful exchange of metaphysical ideas and practices that unified individuals and traditions with God and a lesson that is invaluable for current societies that are at logger heads with one another.

Schwartz then takes us on a journey to Turkey where he examines ‘Turkish Sufism and Interfaith Coexistence’ (pp. 73–110). He begins his chapter by naturally focusing on Rūmī, one of the most respected Sufi personalities and gives a detailed insight into Rūmī’s ideas and influences. After this fairly comprehensive overview of Rūmī, Schwartz shifts to different regions such as Kosovo and Bosnia that came under Ottoman Turk influence to show how Sufism is weaved into the fabric of these communities and how certain Sufis such as Hojja Ahmad Yasawi (d. 556/1161?) and Hajji Bektash (ca. 606–669/1209–1271) who left behind their rich legacies that are still prevalent today in the Central Asian region.
Even though Sufism spread unevenly over the ages throughout the Muslim world, there were occasions when its representatives such as Muḥyi Ḣ-Din Muhammad b. ‘Ali Ibn ‘Arabi (560–638/1165–1240) came into conflict with those Muslim theologians and jurists who preferred the literalist interpretation of the primary — and even secondary — sources. Schwartz brings this to the fore in his chapter on ‘The Wars Against Sufism’ (pp. 111–140). He assesses how the tension between the Ṣarī’ah oriented and fixated theologians stood up against Sufism as a whole and how theses theologians influenced the governments of the day. One classical example that gave birth to contemporary fundamentalist Islam is Wahhabism, a movement that was initiated during 17th century Arabia by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792), who came under the influence of Abū ‘l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328). This movement, Schwartz shows, is an organization that developed into a formidable opponent of Sufism to this very day in and beyond Saudi Arabia; in fact, we note that Schwartz’s general treatment and discussion about Wahhabism has been very negative.

Sufism, which has developed into various strands and branches over the centuries, is a significant element in majority and minority Muslim societies. In chapter four Schwartz outlines ‘Sufis in Today’s Muslim World’ (pp 141–171) and in it he gives us an account of the Qādirīs, Ni’matullāḥīs, Arabian ‘Alawīs and Bektāshīs. He immediately follows up this chapter by narrating the status of ‘Sufis in Crisis States’ (pp. 172–212) in chapter five. From among the different Sufi groups, Schwartz spends a few pages on the ‘Alawī Sufi order, which was born during the early part of the 7th/13th century, in both chapters. He, of course, concentrates on its role and status in Saudi Arabia because of the non-violent approach it has adopted in confronting the Saudi authorities who have had difficulty in destroying this and other Sufi orders in and outside Saudi Arabia. Schwartz thus describes and discusses the ideas and impact of Sayyid al-Mālikī al-‘Alawī.

Schwartz concludes his text by assessing ‘Sufism in Transition’ (pp. 213–239) in places such as Indonesia where Abdurahman Wahid (d. 2001) has supported Islamic pluralism as a vehicle to break the stranglehold of Wahhabism in the Southeast Asian region especially in Indonesia and the Uighur region (north west China) where Muslims have been clamouring for autonomy from Chinese rule and where Wahhabism has — to some extent — also been trying to influence the socio-political and religious outcome. Whilst we would like to take issue with Schwartz on some of his interpretations of Wahhabism and for not critically reflecting on some of the negative dimensions of Sufism, on the whole we concur with his assessment of Sufism. Schwartz offers a fairly good understanding of Sufism’s position in and outside
the Muslim world and he demonstrates how Sufism as a metaphysical tradition is able to play a more prominent role in overcoming the misunderstandings between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds respectively. Anyone who wishes to familiarize himself/herself with Sufism will find Schwartz’s style and presentation generally very pleasing, uncomplicated and unambiguous. And it is basically a good read.

Muhammed Haron


Studies on gender in the former socialist societies in Central Asia have been on the increase after the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991. The present anthology intends to cover an unexplored issue, namely what impact the economic and political changes have had upon social transformation in general and upon social stratification and culture in particular in these societies. Various contributors to the book discuss social processes going on in the transition from planned economy to a market economy. The book even deals with another unexplored issue: Turkey’s strong historical link with Central Asia and Caucasus and its sharing of cultural and religious trends with this region. That Turkey has recently re-established these ties through economic entrepreneurship, student exchange programmes, migration, etc., makes the link between these regions even more pertinent.

The focus of the study is gender, thus the methodologies and theoretical framework are taken from a gender studies perspective, in both the two points on which the anthology is focused: economic development on the one hand, and religious, educational changes as well as changes in the family on the other.

The first part deals with the transformation of the economic system in the former Soviet states and the impact this transformation has had on gender. Lourdes Beneria indicates how the economic transition has disempowered women in these societies. As women in the region had, to a great extent,