

BOOK REVIEWS

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ASPECTS OF ISLAMIC RADICALIZATION IN THE BALKANS AFTER THE FALL OF COMMUNISM

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Aspects of Islamic Radicalisation in the Balkans after the Fall of Communism may be described as a comprehensive and thorough book presenting the current state of Islamic radicalisation in the Balkans. Each chapter offers a unique analysis of different countries in the region, moving beyond simplistic stereotypes to offer an insightful account of Islam in the mentioned area. The book provides a deeper and more critical engagement with the diverse and complex realities of Muslim communities in this historically rich region.

In the preface, Isa Blumi critically assesses the widespread misunderstanding of Islam in the Balkans. His compelling narrative invites the reader to see Balkan Muslims in a new, more profound way, recognising their unique experiences and deep-rooted presence in the region.

The introduction by Mihai Dragnea focuses on the post-communist Balkans and highlights how the fall of the socialist regime triggered a security crisis fuelled by ethnic and religious conflicts, especially during the Yugoslav

wars. The way this instability prompted Islamic communities in the Balkans to move closer to the wider Islamic world and fill a gap in religious education and practice is described. The influx of Islamic organisations, including radical groups, into the region is noted along with the fact that previous research on Islamic radicalisation in the Balkans overlooks important aspects such as local traditions.

In the first chapter, Joseph Coelho examines how Islam became a security problem in post-war Kosovo. The combined efforts of local elites and international actors in Kosovo are investigated, portraying foreign Islamic influences and devout Islam as a threat to political communities. The author relies on the theory of securitisation to understand how Islam was transformed into a security problem, drawing on political speeches and strategic documents. International actors are shown to view Islam as a threat to the liberal order of the West, while Kosovar elites are attempting to maintain their power and depict Albanians as secular, “European Muslims” detached from global Islam.

In the second chapter, Henriques Schneider applies the “multilayered identity” concept to analyse Islamic radicalisation in Kosovo. It is argued that individuals and social groups can possess and harmonise several identities at once and adapt them depending on the context. Schneider assumes that while religiosity, including radical forms of Islam, is on the rise, this is more of a shift in narrative than any active change. He concludes that

the possible Islamic radicalisation of Kosovo should be seen as an additional layer of identity rather than a direct turn to religious-political militancy.

Gianfranco Bria's chapter deals with Salafism in Albania, particularly in Tirana, and examines how Salafists are challenging local Islamic traditions and the secular values of Albanian society. The Salafists' doctrinal critique of Sufi practices and their efforts to create a strict, normative Islamic identity are outlined. Bria attributes the rise of Salafism in post-socialist Albania to the disillusionment of young Albanians with Western and local culture, which they regard as corrupt. In his view, Salafism offers a higher moral order and a strong, empowering identity that differs from the secular and traditional Islamic practices in Albania.

In her chapter, Iris Luarasi analyses how mainstream and online media can be used to counter violent extremism in Albania. The author emphasises the influence of online propaganda while recruiting young people for terrorism. She addresses the alarming trend of young isolated or marginalised Albanians being targeted by extremist groups online. Luarasi underscores the media's crucial role in promoting awareness and countering extremist narratives. It is suggested that by using alternative narratives and teaching media literacy the media can help disrupt the radicalisation process among young people.

The chapter by Marko Savić and Almedina Vukić Martinović considers why the Muslim community in Montenegro has largely stayed away from Islamic radicalism. The authors examine various factors, including the

community's deep-rooted integration and the country's strategic domestic and foreign policy. The importance of the historical and socio-political context, the role of soft power and public diplomacy, notably in relation to Türkiye, is highlighted. It is concluded that Montenegro's multidisciplinary approach, encompassing comprehensive strategies and co-operation between different sectors of society, has been key to fostering a community that resists radical influences.

In the sixth chapter, Bogdana Todorova considers the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bulgaria and how the fall of communism created a vacuum that led to the search for alternative concepts of social order. Todorova analyses the influence of Salafist jihadism from neighbouring countries and Ankara's neo-Ottoman policies using case studies and a phenomenological approach. The chapter underlines that the concern with Islamic radicalism in Bulgaria is shaped by the centuries-long politicisation and ideologisation of Islam. It also examines the influence of Turkey on Bulgarian Muslims and the influence of foreign organisations on local Islamic traditions. In the conclusion, it is suggested that the unique Bulgarian model of Islam faces new challenges from foreign influences.

In Cornel Andrei Crişan's chapter, the significant changes in Romania's Muslim community over the last 30 years are analysed. Focus is given to the influence of Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait that have introduced ultra-conservative Islamic

values through literature and an on-line presence. These organisations have increased interest in conservative Islam among Romanian Muslims. The chapter adopts a socio-anthropological perspective, which includes a documentary analysis of Islamic content in Romanian communities and reveals the considerable influence of these external NGOs in determining the religious landscape in Romania.

In chapter eight, Mijo Beljo and Lucija Zadro analyse the Mujahideen's engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) between 1992 and 1995, detailing how the Mujahideen as foreign Islamic fighters cooperated with the Muslim-Bosniak political and military leadership, which led to them being officially included in the BiH army. The activities of the Mujahideen in central BiH, including crimes against Croats, and the difficulties faced by the Bosniak leadership in dealing with the Mujahideen presence are outlined. The authors conclude that the role of the Mujahideen, while significant, was complex and has not been thoroughly researched. Their religiously motivated military actions had an impact on inter-ethnic relations and raised fears about links to global terrorist networks.

The next chapter by Michalis Marioras examines the role and influence of foreign fighters in global jihad, concentrating on BiH. The influx of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq, in particular to join ISIS, are discussed while tracing their historical involvement in conflicts like in Afghanistan during the 1980s and later in regions such as BiH, Chechnya, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Somalia and Mali. Emphasis is given

to the concept of transnational identity and its development within the Islamic Ummah, which unites Muslims around the world. The considerable threat posed by returning foreign fighters, who often return with radical ideologies and combat experience, which can lead to the spread of radicalised Islam in their home countries, is highlighted as well.

The chapter by Zhidas Daskalovski examines the factors that have limited Islamic radicalisation in North Macedonia. The multi-ethnic and multi-confessional composition of the country, notably the relationship between the Macedonian majority population and the Albanian Muslim community, plays an important role in maintaining stability. The author considers the response of Muslim officials, government and party leaders in preventing the spread of radicalisation and presents the influence of Islam in the socio-political struggles. It is pointed out that while North Macedonia experienced a rise in Islamic radicalism and saw its citizens join the foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, the likelihood of future radicalisation is low. The conclusion describes how future radicalisation is unlikely largely due to the Albanian elite's pragmatic support for the policies of the USA against jihadism and terrorism.

The chapter by Klemen Kocjančič examines the involvement of the Balkan Muslim diaspora in Europe in Islamist terrorism and looks at their connections and activities from Central to Northern Europe. The historical presence of Islam in Europe, its development and the growing radicalisa-

tion in the Balkan diaspora, especially among Bosniaks and Albanians, are outlined. The author examines the role of this diaspora in terrorist activities and its involvement in attacks. He also discusses the interconnectedness of organised crime and terrorism and presents various sources to paint a comprehensive picture of Islamic terrorism in Europe, stressing its importance alongside terrorism in North Africa and the Middle East.

In the concluding chapter, John Nomikos and Joseph Fitsanakis refer to the rise of Islamist militancy in the Balkans and emphasise the role of terrorism as a strategy for provoking fear for political ends. They note the spread of militant Islam in the region after the

1990s, as fuelled by ethnic conflicts, economic changes and influences from Saudi Arabia. Pointing to concerns about the return of jihadists, the influence of foreign fighters and the role of Türkiye, the authors suggest that the future of Islamist radicalism in the Balkans depends mostly on broader global political and social dynamics.

This book is not simply a historical account, but a powerful reminder of the ongoing global fight against extremism and the crucial role of integration and deradicalisation strategies in securing the future of a fragile region.

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