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Handbook of Political Islam in Europe

Activities, Means, and Strategies from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood and Beyond

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Actors of Political Islam pursue the political goals that are derived from the idea that Islam, as they understand it, should play the central role in shaping political, legal, social and cultural systems worldwide. While it is a broad and diverse movement with different interpretations, variations and organisations, there are some common characteristics associated with Political Islam in general. The first and most important is the integration of religion and politics. Political Islam emphasises not only the integration of religious principles and values into the political sphere, but the priority of religious values in politics. It seeks to establish an Islamic system of governance based on Islamic law as the primary source of legislative jurisdiction and executive decision-making.

Such a state is founded on Islamic identity. Political Islam places a strong emphasis on the preservation of Islamic identity and its promotion wherever this is possible. It seeks to create societies that adhere to customs, traditions, and values, as they are represented by Political Islam, often advocating for the application of these religious practices in public and private life. Therefore, Political Islam encourages its members and all Muslims to actively engage in political life and participate in the societies and state systems they live in, in order to promote its objectives. This includes the participation in elections, the task of forming political parties, non-governmental organisations and lobby groups. Their purpose is advocating for policies aligned with Islamic principles in the respective states. Many proponents of Political Islam

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aspire for cooperation among Muslim countries and support a strong opposition to perceived Western hegemony, namely the USA. Political Islam opposes secularism, liberal political systems and democracy, considering these incompatible with Islamic values.

More than any other ideological movement, Political Islam has caused violence, destruction and destabilisation on a global scale in recent decades. Unlike a religion, Political Islam is a religious fundamentalism of a totalitarian nature. It propagates an all-encompassing claim to the validity of Islamic law in a totalitarian interpretation for all areas of state, law and society, and seeks to impose a social and state order legitimised solely by religion by any means necessary, including ultimately by force.

Political Islam has evolved significantly since its inception. It replaced the previously dominant ideas of Arab nationalism as a progressive model (Khairullin 2022). As an ideological system, Political Islam emerged in the late 1960s, as Richard Mitchell pointed out in his study "The Society of the Muslim Brothers" (Mitchell 1993). Analysts of the situation have noted the spread of the Muslim Brotherhood in North Africa and Europe, as well as Salafism as the reference ideology of this political extremism.

The globalisation of the twentieth century brought increased awareness of Political Islam to the wider world. Islamist movements spread beyond the Middle East, with groups emerging in Southeast Asia, North Africa, Central Asia (Rashid 2002) and Europe (Leiken 2012). In the 1990s, more liberal approaches attempted to combine Islamic and democratic principles. The long wars in Afghanistan, first against the Soviet Union and later against the USA and NATO, have brought together different militant groups. "In Afghanistan was assembled the first truly global army of Islamic warriors – the Afghan Arabs. Never before in modern times had so many Muslims from so many different lands speaking so many tongues journeyed to a Muslim country to fight against a common enemy" (Gerges 2006, p. 111). The events of the Arab Spring then led to a degree of liberalisation and politicisation of the dominant Salafi doctrine (Lynch 2012). They opened the door to elections for a variety of Islamist parties. They participated in elections and governments in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco. Yet, there have been divides over ideology, strategy and leadership.

Some Islamist groups, such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS), have adopted violent tactics to achieve their goals. The use of violence is highly controversial and has led to a split within the Islamist movement between those who advocate peaceful means and those who believe that violence is necessary. The emergence of al-Qaeda, with its brutal terrorist attacks, has acted as a catalyst for research into the relationship between Islamist fundamentalism as an ideology and terrorism (Hasche 2015, p. 19).

In the wake of numerous high-profile terrorist attacks, in particular the security threats posed by Islamist groups have often been at the centre of public attention. These attacks have included bombings, shootings and vehicle attacks, and have targeted a range of targets, including government institutions, military facilities and civilians. Individual European governments have declared war on Islamism. At the forefront of this movement has been France, which has been particularly hard hit. Former French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin spoke of France being "at war

with Islamism, both internally and externally" (Wesel 2020). Could such a development drive Europe's future? President Macron declared a "war on political Islam" (Monath 2020).

However, terror is not the only, and especially not the only dangerous attack vector of Political Islam in its European campaigns. It has also sought to gain political influence in Europe through various means, including the establishment of political parties, lobbying of European governments and the use of financial resources to influence politicians and policy decisions. Immigration and demographic changes have been instrumental in gaining influence in Europe. This has included encouraging Muslim immigration to Europe, promoting the growth of Muslim communities in Europe and using these communities to influence political and social norms.

Political Islam has also been known to use various methods to radicalise individuals in Europe, including the dissemination of extremist propaganda, recruitment through social media and the establishment of extremist networks. It has used cyberattacks to advance its agenda. These attacks range from hacking and stealing sensitive information to disrupting critical infrastructure.

Legalist Islamism must be seen as an integral part of the asymmetric approach to liberal democracies. Legalist Islamism refers to the method by which anti-democratic and illiberal norms are enforced. This is intended to draw attention to an approach that is superficially legal but anti-democratic and illiberal in its aims. In contrast to the violent approach of the jihadists, associations and organisations choose the path through the institutions to achieve the same goals. It does not use violence from the outside, but from within, using existing institutions for its own political ends.

At first glance, this is no different from other organisations, since parties and NGOs seek to realise their ideas through the institutions of the democratic state. The difference is that legalist Islamism is concerned with the dissolution of the democratic order, with a double abolition taking place in the Islamists' self-understanding: the abolition of democracy and the establishment of a higher order. The second goal, according to their own understanding, provides the legitimacy for the first.

While these attack vectors are not exclusive to Political Islam and may be used by other groups or entities, it is important to note that the vast majority of Muslims in Europe do not support terrorism or violence, and that Political Islam should not be equated with Islam or the Muslim population as a whole. They do not support Political Islam but seek a moderate and peaceful interpretation of Islam.

2 Polarisation and Radicalisation

Muslims have long been an integral part of European societies. According to a PEW survey from 2016, the Muslim population in Europe accounted for almost 5% of the total population, with a strongly asymmetrical distribution across the individual states. In the Eastern European states and Portugal, the share was less than 1%. In Bulgaria, the Muslim population was 11.1%, in France 8.8%, in Sweden 8.1%, followed by the UK with 6.3% and Germany with 6.1% (Pew Research Center 2017,

p. 4). Due to migration and fertility, this proportion is expected to increase and is estimated in this study to be over 12% in France and almost 9% in Germany in 2050 (Pew Research Center 2017, p. 8; pp. 34–35). Moreover, the median age of the Muslim population is significantly younger than that of the non-Muslim population (Pew Research Center 2017, p. 12; pp. 36–37).

For Germany, a high-migration scenario even predicts a share of up to 20% by 2050 (Pew Research Center 2017, p. 30). This means that they make up a significant share of the population in some EU states, while in others they are only represented to a very small extent. This asymmetry can have consequences in terms of urgency and priority-setting in the field of European policy. And it can, if integration fails, produce interested third parties of varying strength.

For the increase in the Muslim population in some EU states can lead to a situation in which, if the relative proportion of Muslims inclined towards Islamist world views remains the same, their absolute number increases significantly. This can create closed echo chambers, especially in urban neighbourhoods inhabited primarily by Muslims, as is also known from other population groups. The digital, media and local echo chambers reinforce each other and reproduce a closed social situation aimed at gaining identity through self-exclusion. The political consequences are increasing polarisation and thus a renewed reinforcement of the self-image of this group. They are then easier to reach from the outside as addressees of targeted media campaigns. Differentiations in identity politics, which have become more pretentious in recent years, could also support such a development.

A brief look at the USA is significant for this assessment because, firstly, it shows that such a development is possible, secondly, it establishes that this development, if the motivation, circumstances and capabilities fit, can encompass all political actors—and thus also Political Islam—and, thirdly, it shows indications of how such a development can be prevented. For in the USA, the segregation of the two political camps is so mentally and spatially entrenched that they meet in everyday life, but not in exchange with each other. This polarisation drives the political representatives into ever more extreme positions in order to be able to represent their own followers. This process is flanked by their own media, which disseminate opinion news, and corresponding digital offerings. Only because of this polarisation was it possible to exert an effective influence on the American elections from the outside, because the respective attitude of anger could be incited. In the meantime, both sides justify the use of violence: some because they want to defend "their country"—the USA as a pioneer of freedom and self-determination—while others want to politically reposition "their country"—the USA as a continuum of genocide, slave exploitation and war. This social formation is called a "cold civil war" (Lütjen 2020). Such situations of cold civil war could also develop in European states. Ethnic and religious echo chambers can thus be used for identity politics, triggering processes of radicalisation and solidarisation in parallel.

3 The Competition for Narratives

In such social constellations of socially disintegrated polarisation, political narratives about the respective countries and people take on special significance. In France, this is experienced by Muslims justifying the use of violence with the earlier violence in French colonial politics. In Germany, the experience of recent years teaches that anti-Semitism is also on the rise because of the immigrant population (Steinke 2020, pp. 83–97). The experience of coming to terms with the past, which was a central feature of Germany's political culture for decades, is also challenged in this way. Political and religious motives can equally promote and stabilise certain extremist attitudes. An overview of Islamism in Germany and the various groups can be found in the Verfassungsschutzbericht 2020, which monitors eighteen groups and links to them, including the Muslim Brotherhood, the Iranian Centre Hamburg and the Milli Görüs movement (Bundesministerium des Innern 2020, pp. 188–255). Connections to religious motives and world views can also play a role in other extremist groups, such as right-wing extremist and nationalist groups from Islamic-influenced states, as the example of the Grey Wolves shows (Rammerstorfer 2018).

The larger the groups that use victimhood or superiority narratives alone to describe their relationship to the democratic order and European states, the greater the number of people who can be mobilised for the concerns of Political Islam and, secondly, the greater the social sounding board for the deeds of the vanguard. Here, politicised religion is used as a function of power-political strategy, as could be observed in the rise of the so-called Islamic State, which, as "faith-free engineers of power [...] used fanaticism as a method of mobilisation" (Reuter 2015, p. 15). The proponents of Political Islam cannot be understood without religion, because they legitimise their claim to power from it, but they have left the field of religious debate and are waging a power-political struggle for dominance. As long as the Islamist groups are inferior, this is aimed at asymmetrical actions, of which the terrorist attacks are the loudest and most terrifying: democratic society is to be frightened, democratic governments are to be provoked into repression, and their own followers mobilised in this way.

The interested third party, i.e. those who are to be reminded of their "real" identities, world views and interests by the violent acts of the self-proclaimed avant-garde, in the eyes of the proponents of Political Islam the Muslim population in the addressed country and beyond, then becomes the actual sounding board of the terrorist acts. If they resonate there, the path from violence to political power has been taken. The so-called Islamic State did not succeed in the end, because the resonance was not sufficient, even though many people, especially in Europe, were mobilised to take up the fight through the acts of violence that were widely disseminated by the media. But this does not have to remain the case; under other circumstances—economic crisis, pandemic, state failure in the field of security and war—other effects can be triggered. The result would be a resonant population prepared for the moment of uprising. A moment triggered by attacks, actually proxy attacks, on how one sees oneself. The excessive violence in Britain in 2011 or France in 2005 and 2023 as well as the

attacks on the French police in 2020 are only examples of the outbreak of political-social unrest. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the proponents as the principals of Political Islam, to recognise the agents of Political Islam as the perpetrators of the deed and to politically address the population that has ideological affinity with Political Islam. These are the three starting points where countermeasures promise success.

4 The Near and the Far Enemy

Political Islam must be analysed simultaneously as a transnational and local political force that refers to Islam as a social order and makes claims for the shaping of the rules of the political order. The fact that Islam, as the last religion, has been little affected by the general secularisation tendencies of modernity was chosen by Ernest Gellner (1992) as the starting point of his analysis. He took into account the problems landing in European societies with the migration movements as well as the revolutionary power of Islam, since the Iranian revolution overshadowed everything when he wrote his analysis.[1] Since then, migration to Europe has increased, the proportion of the Muslim population has risen, transnational networks have become more tightly woven through progressive digitalisation, and hatred of the West (Davis 2003) has been fuelled by the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

The Arab Spring and the ensuing restoration have deepened the political fault lines in the region. The contestation for supremacy in the region between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey has drawn Islam very close to state politics in various ways, not only drawing on a religious basis of state legitimacy, but also politicising religion along the way (Özev 2020). For years, the territorial gains of the so-called Islamic State emanating from the Iraqi civil war attracted foreign fighters to the area between Iraq and Syria, where they fought for the establishment of a caliphate (Said 2014). Thus, after a little more than a decade, what was laid out with the attacks of September 11, 2001, seemed to come true: to defeat the far enemy (the USA) in order to defeat the near enemy (the "un-Islamic" governments in the Middle East and beyond) to establish their own political order (Steinberg 2005).

To Political Islam the European governments are not the great distant enemy, they are not the near enemy either, but more distant and more accessible at the same time. More distant because they cannot intervene much in what is happening in the Middle East and North Africa due to their lack of capabilities; more accessible because in some EU states the Muslim share of the population is growing strongly. In the USA, the proportion of Muslims remained constant and relatively low at 0.7% of the total population between 2007 and 2019 (Statista 2021a). In Germany, a total of 5.5 million Muslims lived there in 2020, one million more than in 2015 (Statista 2021b), out of a population of 83.2 million, or almost 7%. In France, the situation is more difficult to survey because in the secular state, religious affiliation may not be

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[1] The English original *Muslim Society* dates from 1981 (Gellner, 1981).

asked. The range of Muslims living in France is given as between 4 and 10 million, i.e. between almost 6 and 15% (Belz 2020). An IPOS study cited their estimates of the number of radicalised Muslims in France at 5% of their total number.

5   Proponents of Political Islam on the Rise

Flight, migration and the destabilisation of states, accompanied by a bleak economic and social future in the countries of origin, are interrelated. That is why internal development—what is happening locally?—has an external dimension. The question for European states is: how can processes of state weakness that lead to states no longer being able to guarantee security on their own territory be stopped and reversed? In particular, the experiences from Afghanistan, Syria and Mali need to be reviewed for this purpose, because no effective strategies of stabilisation could be implemented there.

For demographic and economic reasons, the number of weak states in Europe's neighbourhood is expected to increase. In North Africa and the Sahel, the proportion of the Muslim population is over 90%, in some states over 99%. Nigeria, where Muslims make up half the population, has seen its population rise from 73 million in 1980 to 200 million at present. According to several estimates, this development will continue and could rise to over 900 million in 2100.

Demographic pressure in North Africa is increasing, economic opportunities continue to fall, and political instability may result. In such a situation, security threats are emerging. The analysis of development in the Muslim states so far has revealed that: "The lack of prospects for political participation, whether for Islamists or other opposition activists, and the suppression of oppositional aspirations almost inevitably led to resistance taking on militant forms of expression. The militants were no longer only concerned with participation, but with unrestricted power" (Steinberg 2005, p. 237). Since this observation, the transnational networks of Political Islam have become denser and tighter.

Political actors use such developments to push through their own interests. This applies to governments, companies and also those who seek a reorganisation of political conditions. It would be naïve not to think about the opportunities that the proponents of Political Islam see in these developments. But who are these proponents?

Today, the Muslim Brotherhood has turned into a transnational Islamic organisation with a significant presence in Europe. It seeks to promote Islamic values and principles through non-violent means and has established numerous organisations and entities throughout Europe to advance its agenda. In particular Salafist groups, often associated with Political Islam, have a significant presence in Europe. They seek to establish an Islamic state based on their interpretation of Islamic law, and often promote a strict and literalist interpretation of the Quran. Bernard Rougier published his case studies in 2020, tracing how Islamists had taken over entire neighbourhoods in France (Rougier 2020).

The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists are joined by a couple of others. Hizb ut-Tahrir, a global Islamic political organisation, seeks to establish a caliphate, or Islamic state, in Muslim-majority countries. It has a significant presence in Europe and has been accused of promoting extremist views. Tablighi Jamaat is a transnational Islamic missionary movement that seeks to promote Islamic values and practices with a significant presence in Europe. It has been accused of promoting conservative and traditionalist views. Islamic Relief is a global charity that provides humanitarian aid and development assistance to vulnerable communities. While it is not a political organisation, it has been accused of supporting Political Islam and promoting conservative views.

Governments are obviously also relevant actors. Yet, the relationship between government and Political Islam can vary depending on the country and the specific actors involved. In some cases, governments may be actively supporting or promoting Political Islam, while in other cases they may be opposing or suppressing it. One example of a government that has been accused of supporting Political Islam is Turkey. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is often associated with Political Islam and has been accused of promoting an Islamist agenda in Turkey. The AKP has also been accused of supporting various Islamist groups in the Middle East, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.

Another example is Iran, which is an Islamic republic that is governed by Islamic law. The Iranian government is based on the principle of velayat-e faqih, which gives ultimate authority to the Supreme Leader, who is a religious figure. While Iran is not typically considered part of the Political Islam movement in Europe, it is an example of a government that is based on Islamic principles.

It is also worth noting that some European governments have been accused of supporting Islamist groups in the past, either for strategic reasons or as part of efforts to engage with Muslim communities.

6   Hybrid Context

Until the occupation/annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in spring 2014 by Russian soldiers in green camouflage without insignia, hybrid threats were not taken particularly seriously by the international community. The Russian attack was prepared by hybrid means, including disinformation, cyber-attacks, covert operations, the use of proxies to advance its interests, and political subversion. Some of the most significant attacks in Russian hybrid warfare have been:

- Cyber-attack against state institutions, banks and media in Estonia lasting several weeks in 2007;
- Invasion of Crimea, when in February 2014, Russian military forces annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine;
- Assassination and sabotage, including the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in the UK in 2018 and the sabotage of Ukrainian power grids in 2015;

- Cyber-attacks, i.e. the launch of a variety of cyber-attacks against Western countries and organisations, including the United States Democratic National Committee (DNC) hack in 2016 and the SolarWinds hack in 2020;
- Propaganda and disinformation, i.e. using state-controlled media outlets and social media to spread disinformation and propaganda to influence public opinion and sow discord in Western countries;
- Support for separatist movements, including providing military and financial support to separatist movements in Ukraine and Georgia.

The COVID-19 pandemic monopolised public attention overnight in 2020. This changed in one fell swoop with Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. Again prepared and accompanied by a hybrid campaign, Russian troops have since attempted to take control of parts of the country, using cyber and information means, tanks and heavy artillery, electromagnetic warfare and air strikes, targeting not only Ukrainian forces and military installations, but also its people and critical infrastructure in the entire region and beyond.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought security and defence back to the centre of European politics. The return of interstate war in Europe has led to a greater focus on deterrence and territorial defence, and a revival, even—through the accession of Finland and in the future Sweden—a growth of NATO. But Russian aggression against Ukraine is only the most obvious geographical concern. Indeed, the European Union faces an unprecedented geopolitical challenge as the Russian hybrid aggression not only addresses the entire West but also aims for support from the global South that wants, with great economic and political force, to reshape the world and redistribute power and wealth.

States such as India, Brazil, South Africa, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and many others are siding with Russia and China, some with greater distance than others. Turkey is still manoeuvring between the possible new blocs, seeking at least regional dominance on its own if possible. Iran is now playing a direct role on all continents, whether it is supporting Russia with drones, projects in South America or balancing with its arch-enemy Saudi Arabia. The states south of the conflict zone are positioning themselves according to their interests. They do not want to get involved in the major conflict in the north, which they see as a war of choice. Instead, they are trying to benefit from it.

As far as the reorganisation of the world is concerned, military capabilities as an instrument of policy are once again finding much more scope for development than seemed possible after the end of the Cold War. However, these military capabilities are now embedded in a hybrid construct designed to destabilise entire societies.

7   Gold Standard

In the current global environment, China and Russia see themselves as victims of a Western hybrid campaign, and, in an unprecedented agreement, China and the USA, Russia and the Pope see hybrid warfare as the new gold standard in global rivalry and competition. Hybrid warfare (Thiele 2021) is a form of conflict that combines conventional and unconventional tactics, using both military and non-military means. It involves blurring the lines between military and non-military means of warfare. The use of propaganda, cyber-attacks and other non-traditional tactics appears to be becoming even more important than the traditional use of military force.

Hybrid threats are often characterised by asymmetry, where one side has a significant advantage over the other in terms of military power, technology or resources. They often involve the use of deniable tactics, where it is difficult to attribute the action to a specific actor or state. They can take the form of covert and overt operations, including assassinations, sabotage and targeted killings. They may also involve the use of irregular forces such as militias, mercenaries and other non-state actors. There is often an emphasis on psychological operations, including propaganda and disinformation, to influence public opinion and create confusion.

From the Chinese perspective, for example, Western crisis management in the war against Ukraine has placed Moscow and Beijing at the centre of a campaign of hybrid warfare, based in particular on economic sanctions, technology restrictions, information operations and cyber-attacks. Gao Yun, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, is quoted in the New York Times as saying: "As well as fierce clashes of blood and fire on the battlefields, the combat in the realm of information and perceptions is equally intense" (Buckley 2023). Vladimir Putin has pointed out that the West was now using Ukraine as a "testing range" for its plans to destroy Russia. His depiction of a Western-provoked war threatening Russia's very existence has resonated particularly in the Global South, where some countries see the USA engaged in what they consider serial interventions around the world, and consequently have declined to take sides. Whether Ukraine has become a "proxy" war between great powers has itself become an intellectual and political battlefield (DeYoung 2023).

Glenn S. Gerstell, former General Counsel of the National Security Agency, has added further perspectives to the scope of hybrid campaigns, when he pointed to hybrid warfare with its amazing potential for aggressors, highlighting an unprecedented scale and pace of technological change underlying constant and pervasive conflict against nation-states, corporations and individuals. A flood of data about human and machine activity would soon place economic and political power beyond the purview of government into the hands of criminals and terrorists as well as the private sector, creating a pernicious effect on the very legitimacy and thus stability of our governmental and societal structures (Gerstell 2019).

While Russia, has been carrying out its hybrid campaigns in the Baltics, Ukraine, south-eastern Europe and parts of Africa for more than a decade, the Pope has observed with great concern over the same period that the international and especially

the US strategic debate has long since moved away from questions of crisis prevention and conflict resolution and instead turned to the possibilities of hybrid warfare.

Pope Francis told ambassadors accredited to the Vatican in January 2023: "Today the third world war is taking place in a globalized world where conflicts involve only certain areas of the planet directly, but in fact involve them all" (Pope Francis 2023). He goes on to speak of a "present third world war fought piecemeal" (Pope Francis 2023). The Pope has warned against such developments several times in the past decade. But his warning has not been heeded. As the conflagration of the present does not correspond to the great conflicts of the past, global hybrid warfare does not match the personal experiences of political leaders and experts. The international public has so far ignored or suppressed the fact that today's great and middle-sized powers, NGOs and even some individuals have modified their potential for violence.

While—from a European perspective—it is necessary, to focus on the hybrid activities of China and Russia, this is not sufficient. Of course, Europe must not lose sight of Political Islam as a hybrid actor of global stature that aims to combat the Western way of life as an enemy and wants to undermine the liberal-democratic legal order of European Union governments with its own Islamist order (Tibi 2023).

Indeed, Political Islam has employed hybrid (warfare) means in its strategies to achieve its political goals, including:

- Use of Propaganda and Disinformation: Political Islam uses propaganda and disinformation to shape public opinion and sway political discourse in its favour. This can be done through various channels, including social media, traditional media and other communication channels.
- Use of Non-State Actors: Political Islam often uses non-state actors such as militias, terrorist groups and other paramilitary organisations to advance its political agenda. These groups often operate in a covert manner and are difficult to attribute to a specific state or actor.
- Employment of Cyber Attacks: Political Islam has also been known to use cyber-attacks as a means of hybrid warfare. These attacks can range from hacking and stealing sensitive information to disrupting critical infrastructure.
- Use of Political and Economic Leverage: Political Islam often uses political and economic leverage to advance its interests. This can include manipulating trade and economic policies or influencing political alliances to gain support for its agenda.
- Employing Proxy Wars: Political Islam also employs proxy wars as a means of hybrid warfare. This involves supporting or funding armed groups in other countries to achieve its strategic goals.

Political Islam not only acts independently in the emerging global hybrid campaigns for money, power and influence, but also offers itself as a projection surface for hybrid proxy wars and is used unabashedly. Political Islam and hybrid strategies of the twenty-first century go hand in hand. They use ambiguity, not only through traditional media but increasingly through social media, to avoid direct confrontation. In the context of globalisation and the evolving dynamics of innovation, not only is the range of hybrid actors growing, but also the impact and reach

of their activities. They target people, assets, critical infrastructure and, not least, the self-image and cohesion of our societies without risking attribution or immediate retaliation. Those best able to anticipate and exploit these developments will have a clear advantage.

8 Debate Needed

Obviously, it is time for a differentiated, critical and also self-critical debate. The separation of religion and state is one of the important achievements of European history. They are fundamentally different from each other. Those who want to overcome this fundamental separation are fighting European core values. It is likely to require a much greater intellectual and resource-backed commitment from European governments than has been the case to date if the European understanding of values, law—including human rights—and the liberal order is to survive in a future world order.

For the analysis of the challenges posed by Political Islam, a broad field has to be dealt with, ranging from local actors and structures to the regional and national levels and trans- and international interconnections. Political Islam is a multi-level phenomenon that requires observation at all levels in order to be aware of expected developments. It can choose different methods to enforce its claims to rule, ranging from terrorist attacks to social unrest to legal action. A democracy that is able to defend itself against these claims to power must be able to effectively counter illiberal and undemocratic thinking and action. To this end, the dangers must be recognised and named.

Yet, the discussion on Political Islam has proven to be not easy for political parties and social organisations in many European countries. It is often prevented at the outset. Terms such as Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism are often used as fighting terms of a totalitarian, anti-democratic Political Islam in order to discredit analysts and office holders who are inclined towards democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Even before that, parts of enlightened modern societies in Europe had adopted a defensive stance, to say the least, when, in view of the Muhammad cartoons that were later to cost Samuel Paty his life, it was admonished that not everything that was permitted had to be implemented. Restraint was urged. Criticism of Islam should be stopped (Bielefeld 2011). Another striking example is the fate of Salman Rushdie, whom Ayatollah Khomeini imposed a death sentence on by fatwa in 1989. An almost successful assassination attempt on 12 August 2022 in Chautauqua in the American state of New York cost him his eyesight and paralysed one of his hands.

The coming together of different cultures, religions and ways of life has repercussions for everyone involved—including the Muslim world. It is a matter of understanding freedom and diversity as an opportunity. A liberal, pluralistic society will only remain stable if it provides a sufficient degree of belonging and familiarity—for both the long-established and the immigrants. This is the task that the European states have in common under the conditions of globalisation. With regard to Islam,

this means: how do we make it possible for Muslims to integrate their religious identity into the political framework of the diversity of European states so that they feel they belong to our free, open society as a matter of course?

9   Comprehensive Picture

This volume has gathered insights from respected academics working on Political Islam in Europe. It provides a comprehensive overview of the status quo in Europe. Clearly, the fight against Political Islam has a European political dimension that goes beyond the illumination of national symbols in the colours of states that have just been the victims of a terrorist attack. In addition to national preparations for dealing with these threats, EU-wide preventive measures must be taken, because no state alone is capable of screening and stabilising the geographical environment that is significant for Political Islam.

Taking this as a starting point, the publication shall constitute an initial step towards the formulation of concrete guidelines and recommendations for decision-makers. Approaching the issue of Political Islam from this perspective can contribute to a methodologically and conceptually sound situational analysis that captures the complexity of the issue and its many dimensions.

For that purpose, it is useful to understand the conceptual model of hybrid threats which underlies this publication. The ever-increasing geopolitical complexity of the world has led to increased confrontations among both state and non-state actors below the threshold of direct military conflict. The Hybrid Center of Excellence in Helsinki (HCoE) thus has defined a hybrid threat as "an action conducted by state or non-state actors, whose goal is to undermine or harm a target by combining overt and covert military and non-military means".

We understand Political Islam as an ideology that aims to change the democratic political orders in such a way that they are reorganised according to undemocratic and anti-liberal principles. It is thus an ideology of rule with an unconditional claim to power. Political Islam is characterised by an extremist attitude that is directed against liberal-democratic states and includes a willingness to use violence. The violent actors of Political Islam are jihadists, but also violent Salafists. The principals of these perpetrators act in the background or in a legalistic manner. We distinguish Political Islam from Civil Islam, which we can use to describe the representation of Islam's interests within the framework of the existing democratic political order.

This clarification of terms is important because the term Political Islam has provoked criticism, having been argued that it denotes the representation of the interests of religious communities. Therefore, it seems to make sense to us to describe the representation of Islamic interests within democratic structures as cosmopolitan, modern, Civil Islam and to define the attempts to replace the liberal-democratic order with an extremist Islamist order of rule as Political Islam.

It is important to note that there is no uniform international designation for the form of Islam analysed in this book. Very often the term Political Islam is used

to describe the political movement aimed at overcoming liberal, democratic and modern societies. As shown, it is distinguished from Civil Islam, which is intended to express the representation of the interests of the members of this religion in the respective societies. However, especially in German-speaking countries, the term Political Islam has been heavily criticised because it would express discrimination against the representation of Islamic interests. As a result, the term Political Islamism has frequently been used instead of Political Islam. Analogously, Political Islam sometimes refers to what is otherwise called Civil Islam.

That the designations are inconsistent is not surprising, firstly because this can be observed in many fields of political action and secondly because the discussion guiding action is only now arriving in the middle of the political-strategic debate. It is likely that there will be further developments in the definition of the term in the future. In this volume, Political Islamism and Political Islam are used on the one hand, and Political Islam and Civil Islam on the other. This is a bit confusing, but scholarly debates about terms are not always user-friendly. From our perspective, this is evident in the respective analyses.

This volume approaches the field of Political Islam from a European security perspective. By gathering insights from respected experts, the book provides a comprehensive examination of the status quo in Europe. The contributions identify key actors of Political Islam and expose the activities, means and strategies they pursue and use across the continent. The volume offers approaches to analyse Political Islam and thus strengthen the resilience of liberal-democratic societies, and to protect Muslims from the radical ideology and agenda of Political Islam. As a multi-author volume, it comprises three parts.

In Part I the editors Thomas Jäger and Ralph Thiele introduce the project. They also present conclusions and recommendations for a European response. Ednan Aslan, Bassam Tibi, Mahmoud Jaraba, Behnam Heidenreuter, Mansoor Moaddel, Angelika Neuwirth, Sergio Castaño Riaño and Johann Schmid provide, with their comprehensive analysis and observations as well as conceptual considerations, the roof for Part II and Part III.

Part II deals with the actors of Political Islam and Islamism and their networks as identified in Part III. Sinem Adar, Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, Mohammad Affan, Hira Amin, Anthony Celso, Christian Chesnot, Hüseyin Çiçek, Georges Malbrunot, Zacharias P. Pieri, Paul Stott, Lorenzo Vidino and Jan Vömel present their respective considerations and findings.

Part III gives an insight into the individual European states. The contributions of Sevinç Bermek, Yves Boyer, Carel Brendel, Flavius Caba-Maria, Simeon Evstatiev, José Fernandes, Sergio Altuna Galán, Behnam Heidenreuter, Heiko Heinisch, Emmanuel Karagiannis, Saïda Keller-Messahli, Rainer Lenzen, Magnus Norell, Ecaterina Maţoi, Damon Perry, Nina Scholz, Věra Stojarová, Corinne Torrekens, Tommaso Virgili and Bojana Zorić dive into state- and regional specific analysis and observations. They cover states and regions such as Austria, Belgium, the Balkans, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the UK and the Western Balkans,

in which Political Islam has been observed and has become a subject of scientific investigation.

In order to allow a comparative analysis, the authors have been asked to address a set of questions:

- Who are the main actors (e.g. states, organisations, institutions and most essential persons in the respective countries)?
- What are the primary goals of these actors?
- What are the primary means and practices of these actors?
- What impact does the use of these means and practices have in the respective countries?
- What are the mid- to long-term risks related to these issues?
- How do the various states and societies react?
- What development do the authors expect within the next 5 to 10 years?
- What is the ultimate impact of the activities of these actors on Europe as a whole and social cohesion specifically?
- Which concrete actions should decision-makers take? Which specific policy recommendations do you propose?

Obviously, the political practice is not as clear-cut as the analytical terms. It cannot be ruled out that organisations, under the pretext of representing interests in democratic states, quasi under the guise of modern Islam, pursue more far-reaching goals of changing the foundations of the democratic order. Such difficulties of demarcation could also be observed in other ideological conflicts, for example when democracies were asked to what extent parties and organisations that were ideologically close to socialist dictatorships had to be fought in a defensible democracy. Similarly, there is a zone of overlap between Civil Islam and Political Islam that needs to be analysed more closely. For it is here that both radicalisation processes and deradicalisation find their political expression. In other contexts, the term "intellectual arsonists" is used, i.e. those who plant ideas of exclusion, contempt for humanity and violence in the minds of others so that they mature there. This relationship between the string-pullers, masterminds, instigators and inciters is not focused on the field of Political Islam, but it needs investigation, awareness, thought and a European response (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution 2020; Hildmann and Rückert 2021).

As we must respect cultural and religious differences, we can only ensure peaceful coexistence if we set rules and stick to them. The more diverse and colourful our society, the more important it is that these rules are respected. We have a duty to enforce them through the use of the rule of law. Tolerance is required in the original sense of the word. European law and values provide the framework. Politicians must have the courage to set limits. In case of doubt, they must be defined by legal means, thus strengthening the resilience of liberal-democratic societies, and protecting Muslims from the radical ideology and agenda of Political Islam (Schäuble 2019).

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Hybridizing Islam in the Balkans: The Rise of Salafi-Hanafism in Bulgaria

Simeon Evstatiev

1 Introduction

The revival of Islam in Europe with its large-scale recent Muslim immigration in the West and the revitalized autochthonous Muslim populations in the East are in accord with the increasing religious and sociopolitical relevance of Islamic identity. In the post-9/11 era, this has coincided with a policy trend toward a "securitization of Islam" that is "grounded in subtle changes of mainstream policies or bureaucracies" and "tends to exacerbate the externality of Islam and Muslims within the European and American societies" (Cesari 2012, p. 433). In Southeastern Europe—Bulgaria and the Western Balkans alike—perceptions of a "traditional" as opposed to "alien" Islam "imported" mostly from the Arab world is ubiquitous. Within this dichotomous distinction, "Arab" Islam has been described by a plethora of terms with negative connotations (Lubanska 2015, p. 111) such as Wahhabism, Salafism, Islamism, and radical Islam (Evstatiev 2022, pp. 75–78).

In the post-Ottoman Balkans, religion—not only Islam—remains an essential part even of many non-believers' identity (Evstatiev 2019). From the 1990s, the Yugoslav succession wars added violent connotations, portraying the region as distinct from Europe and affiliating it with the Middle East (Sadriu 2019) through Islam's transnational community—the *umma*. Given the recent Islamist radicalization waves throughout the Balkans, it is important to understand when and why violence occurs and, respectively, does not occur. Who are the main actors of Islamism and how does their ideology contextualize through fluid and volatile goals against the backdrop of local Islam? The answers to such questions as well as the analysis of the expected developments in the near future require a two-fold enterprise:

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addressing, on the one hand, the issue of how state and society react to Islamism and, on the other hand, how their reactions transform Islamism itself.

Revitalized Islamic identity found itself enmeshed today in a plethora of contested concepts. Radicalization, Islamism, and Salafism are such concepts that have been, for years, at the heart of research and measures aimed at preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Violent extremism itself lacks a precise definition, being used synonymously with or as a replacement for radicalization and terrorism. Initially, the term appeared as the US President Barack Obama was reluctant to use the word "Islam" in any form when discussing al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. Washington thus adopted the term "violent extremism" to denote the jihadis, and the policy was, respectively, called "countering violent extremism" (Haykel 2016). In the Balkans, the issue of extremism became particularly pressing after the outbreak of the recent war in Syria, for violence occurred—mostly following the export of foreign fighters to the theatres of Salafi insurgency in the Middle East. Around 1,070 persons from the Western Balkans made their way to Syria and Iraq, joining the ranks of primarily IS and to a lesser extent al-Qaeda affiliates (Azinović 2018, pp. 3–6; Shtuni 2019, p. 18). Currently, the Western Balkans is the region with the highest number of returned foreign fighters in Europe.

What, however, is it that wards off decisive moments from tipping over into violence, and what prevents Islamic/Islamist radicalization? Cragin (2014, p. 337) suggests that it is impossible to understand pathways to radicalization, or design policies to preempt them, without a complementary knowledge of why individuals resist the influence of violent extremism. Overall, the often-cited drivers of violent extremism (socioeconomic deprivation, political grievances, and fundamentalist religious views) should in theory have led to a much higher number of people joining violent groups. Kurzman (2011, p. 11), however, indicates that, despite concerted attempts by violent extremists to recruit more broadly during all recent waves of Islamist terrorism, less than 1 in 100,000 Muslims has joined violent extremist movements since 9/11. Seeking to understand the non-occurrence of violence and resilience to it in the Middle East in the example of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Fahmi (2020, p. 7), in turn, outlines four main factors: legitimacy, social trust, institutional rules, and external pressure. In the Balkans, three major factors of resilience, and respectively non-occurrence, were identified in recent fieldwork-based research: (1) local communities exhibiting social cohesion and civic values; (2) the role of imams and individuals of authority; and (3) preventive measures (Evstatiev and Mishkova 2022, pp. 3–4).

The aim of the present chapter is to involve the context of Bulgaria, revealing cases of non-occurrence of violence through an analysis of local actors belonging to transnational Salafism and perceived by law enforcement, the media, and society at large as radicalized Islamists. In so doing, I first clarify the concepts of Islamism and Salafism vis-à-vis the notion of radicalization. I then tackle two court cases (of 13 and 14 Muslims) accused of "propagating war," foregrounding the radicalization of two Salafi actors—a female Muslim known in the media as "Ms. Jihad" and the until recently imprisoned preacher Ahmed Moussa. His personal pathway is indicative of a new trend—the convergent indigenization of Salafism through a hybridization

with various Islamic trends in a local context dominated by Hanafism[1]—a tendency observed in the Middle East, West Africa, or Southeast Asia, where a convergence even with Sufism seems possible (Blank 2021, pp. 20–23). The high-profile lawsuits against Salafis together with the reactions to the news on global jihad by groups like IS and al-Qaeda brought about the shaping of a parallel media and analytical domain of public discourses on Islamism and radical Islam that also requires elucidation.

I argue that the notion of hybridizing Islam can help us understand how the actors of revivalist Islamic and Islamist currents pursue a contextualization strategy, allowing them to remain relevant to their target audiences by refashioning their legitimacy according to the given cultural and national settings. In particular, as a result of external (securitization) and internal (the Muslim community and its institutions) pressure, Salafis in Bulgaria have adopted a strategy to merge into the locally embedded Hanafi tradition. Sociologically, Salafis are becoming less exclusive, more flexible, and adaptable to the national context. Doctrinally, the outcome is a hybrid combination between a Salafi creed and Hanafi practices—a new phenomenon, which I define here as "Salafi-Hanafism." Hybridized Islamism leaves less room for political Islam, shifting the stress from activism to a more inclusivist approach to religion, society, and communal life.

The reshuffling resembles what some recent studies (Merone et al. 2021) designate as "Salafi-Malikism" in Tunisia where the adaptation to the local Maliki[2] context allows Salafis to preserve their teaching and preaching activities within the securitization wave. Others (Gade and Palani 2022, p. 222) observe hybridized forms of Islamism and nationalism by which Salafis and movements influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood adopt "Islamo-nationalist stances." In Bulgaria, as in other Balkan countries (Kursani 2018), these developments assume a situational "Hanafization" of Salafism. The paradox in this competition for autochthony amidst social and existential uncertainty (Bøås and Dunn 2013, p. 20), from which Salafism provides a way out, is that Salafism seeks to doctrinally assimilate Hanafism, getting in the same time locally legitimized through an adaptive hybridization with Hanafi discourses and practices. The trend entails entangled developments on two levels—doctrinal and political, which requires an analysis not only of the intra-Muslim processes of convergence but the perceptions thereof, often resorting to the concept of Islamism to describe reactions of state actors, the judiciary, key policy analysts, and the media.

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[1] Most of the Muslims in Bulgaria, as well as their co-religionists throughout the Balkans, are Hanafis. They follow the Hanafi legal school (*madhhab*, pl. *madhahib*) in Sunni Islam named after the early Muslim religious scholar Abu Hanifa (d. 767). Usually, Hanafi identity in matters of Islamic law is combined with theological Maturidism—a school of Islamic speculative theology (*kalam*) founded by Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 944). Therefore, the Hanafis are also referred to as Hanafi-Maturidis.

[2] Malikism is one of the four Sunni schools of Islamic law (*madhahib*) widespread in North Africa, particularly in Tunisia. It derives its designation from the name of the early Muslim scholar Malik ibn Anas (d. 795).

2   Coming to Terms: Islamism, Salafism, and Radicalization

The understanding of Islamism and Salafism through the prism of radicalization is often thwarted from the confusions around these concepts. Radicalization, often used as a synonym for an "extremist" as opposed to a "moderate" worldview, is, in turn, a confusing term, used currently in relation to terrorism and violent extremism, as adopted by Neumann (2008), that emphasizes the individual and, partially, the ideology and the group and entails the understating of the wider "root causes." Thus, intelligence agencies and law enforcement have adopted the notion of radicalization as constituting a direct or indirect security threat. However, as Sedgwick (2010, p. 491) writes, it is probably better to abandon the idea of "radical" and "radicalization" as absolute concepts as it is extremely difficult in this continuum to identify the dividing line between "radical" and "moderate." The word "radical" has, in fact, no meaning on its own. Explaining the concept anew, Neumann (2013) stresses that no serious scholar argues that all—and even most—cognitive extremists will go on to embrace violence. He emphasizes that, without the term radicalization, policymakers and researchers can gain more clarity but at the price of neglecting non-violent extremists and their attempts to undermine democracy and social cohesion. If adopted carefully and without absolutization, radicalization can thus still be useful in understanding the non-occurrence of violence in combination with other factors.

To make things even more complicated, the term Islamism is used in at least two overlapping but still different ways—with a narrow and a broad meaning. In its first, narrow meaning, Islamism is understood as distinct from the concept of Islamic fundamentalism which is "the choice to return to the original foundations of Islam" (Cook 2014, pp. xviii–xix). Thus, Islamism denotes "Islam as a modern ideology and a political program" (Kramer 2003, p. 71) and in such a sense is a synonym of "political Islam." In the modern age, Muslim activists seek to raise the political profile of Islam, usually by implementing the *shari'a.* Islamists agree on this overall objective but differ widely in many other matters: some of them would resort to violence but others would not (Bunzel 2017, p. 5). As Wagemakers (2021, p. 12) explains, fundamentalists can perceive the threat posed by modernity as political (Islamism) or as doctrinal (Salafism).

In its second, broader definition, Islamism is more pertinent to the conceptualization of the present study and simply denotes any form of Islamic activism that entails a "systematic religious effort which goes beyond the ritual observance of Islam and which is not organised by the state" (Hegghammer 2007, p. 91). Noting that such a definition encompasses transnational movements inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan-type), as well as Salafi movements, including quietist Salafis, Gade and Bøås (2022, pp. 173–174) also bring to the fore hybridity, stressing that Islamists "adapt their pathways to the political opportunities given by the political field," though their ideology and identity constrain which opportunities and decisions are taken. I argue that the choice of non-violent pathways and the non-occurrence of violence among Islamists in Bulgaria are chosen in the decisive moments, such as

the outbreak of the Syrian war, by hybridizing with the locally mainstream forms of Islam.

Doctrinally, what primarily identifies Salafis is their theology and understanding of *tawhid*—Allah's oneness and unity. Seeking scriptural certainty, Salafis adopt a specific approach to the texts of revelation and definition of the true believers versus the unbelievers by setting thick doctrinal and communal boundaries. In matters of law and jurisprudence, Salafis pursue *la madhhabiyya* ("non-schoolism"), arguing that knowledgeable Muslims should transcend the boundaries of each of the four established Sunni legal schools (*madhhabs*). They emphasize the need to access the foundational sources of revelation directly—through independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) that bypasses the blind emulation (*taqlid*) of the chain of authorities within the schools of law (Evstatiev 2021, pp. 184–188).

3   Muslims in Bulgaria: Toward Hybridizing Islam

Predominantly an Orthodox Christian country, Bulgaria has the largest autochthonous Muslim minority within the European Union, making up around 10% of its population in the early twenty-first century, according to the most recent census (2011).[3] Historically, when untangling from the Ottoman Empire after the establishment of the modern Bulgarian state in 1878, Muslims transformed from Ottoman subjects belonging to the larger imperial society into a minority community within a nation-state. Many Muslims declined to sign up as Bulgarian subjects and wanted to register as "Ottomans" and, on the other hand, trying to achieve national homogeneity, the new Bulgarian state devised policies toward the Muslim population ranging from educational and cultural measures to forced assimilation.[4] Overall, Muslims in the country are ethnically non-homogeneous, encompassing mainly "ethnic Turks," Bulgarian Muslims (known as Pomaks), and Roma.

Today, despite the intra-confessional diversity (0.5% are Alevis), the predominant number of Muslims (9.5% of the entire population) identify themselves as Sunnis, vis-à-vis 76% Orthodox Christians and others.[5] Although the official 2011 census data does not allow for directly judging which identity is central for the different social, ethnic, and religious groups, some tendencies can be discerned from other studies. They indicate a trend of a strengthening Muslim identity and an increased communal convergence around some core Islamic values despite the still prevailing diversity in various other respects. Among the Pomaks, part of whom used to display a Turkish identity (even with no knowledge of Turkish), there is a persistently growing tendency for "ethnically" self-identifying as "just Muslims." The increasingly transnational

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[3] A new census was carried out in 2021, but its detailed results are still being processed at the time of finalizing this chapter.

[4] For further historical detail, see Methodieva (2021, pp. 33–71).

[5] For a more detailed analysis of demographic data and religious groups, see Evstatiev et al. (2015, pp. 3–4).

religious identities among parts of Bulgaria's Muslims bring about the reemergence of an *umma*-consciousness competing with loyalty to the nation-state and even to the local Muslim community (Evstatiev 2019, p. 97). This universalizing appeal notwithstanding, Salafism which, together with Islamism more broadly, is today among the main vehicles of such "globalized" trends, gets "localized" and indigenized to remain relevant. The trend signals a change within the Sunni spectrum of Islam caused by a specific merging of universal religion and local culture within a process of "glocalization" understood as "a hybridization requiring the interplay of both 'global' and 'local' factors" (Roudometof and Dessì 2022, p. 3). Two key factors intertwine to shape how Salafism hybridizes: one is the ongoing intra-communal convergence caused by transnational Islam, and the other is embedded in the post-9/11 securitization.

In Bulgaria, though there have been no Muslim foreign fighters joining IS or al-Qaeda, preachers and activists have more than once attracted the attention of state institutions, the media, and law enforcement as well as the State Agency for National Security (SANS) and the Prosecutor's Office, including in a high-profile court proceeding that started in 2012 on the basis of pre-trial proceedings from 2009 accusing 13 Muslims from various southern regions of Bulgaria. The "thirteen imams" as they were called by the media, though one woman was among the defendants, were accused of "propagating antidemocratic ideology manifested in opposing the principles of democracy, the separation of power, liberalism, statehood and the rule of law, and basic human rights, such as the equality of men and women, through propagating the ideology of the Salafist current in Islam and the imposition of a *sharī'a* state" (Indictment No 9 2009).

Among the predominantly Pomak group within this "trial against the thirteen imams" was the charismatic Salafi Muslim leader and preacher Ahmed Moussa from the Roma-populated Iztok neighborhood[6] in Pazardzhik. In the mid-1990s, Moussa went to work in Vienna where he (re)-discovered Islam and eventually adopted a strictly Salafi doctrinal orientation.[7] In 1999, Ahmed Moussa attended the one-year course of study at the School for Imams (Shkola za imami) in Surnitsa where his teacher was the major Salafi imam Said Mutlu, a graduate from Saudi Arabia. In 2004, he was given a three-year suspended sentence by the Pazardzhik Regional Court for spreading anti-democratic ideology and religious hatred. Moussa then engaged in the Islamist ideology of the Kaplanci movement,[8] where he became widely known as an Islamist, passionately calling for the establishment of a caliphate after earlier

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[6] Also known locally as Tokayto—after Tokei-ihto from the movie "The Sons of the Great Bear" (1966).

[7] Unlike the predominant public perceptions of "radical influencers", they have not necessarily embraced such a form of Islam in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere the Middle East. The major informal leader of the Bosnian Salafi community Bilal (Husein) Bosnić (b. 1972), released from prison in September 2021, was introduced to Salafism in the 1990s not in the Arab world but in Germany (Metodieva 2021, p. 12).

[8] Named after Metin Kaplan (b. 1952), the leader of the radical group Caliphate State (Kalifatsstaat) based in Cologne, Germany. His movement aims at replacing the secular Turkish Republic with an Islamic state.

arrests of which the media wrote that "in the prayer house established by him radical Islamic literature has been found, and he put an Islamic flag on the roof of his house" (24 Chasa 2014).

The Chief Muftiship, the official Muslim institution in Bulgaria, was engaged with the entire process of all these court proceedings. The defendants belonging to the Muftiship structures not only kept their positions but were often promoted. The Salafi imam Muhammed Kamber became a member of the Supreme Muslim Council (Vissh Myusyulmanski Suvet) at the Chief Muftiship, and, from the beginning of 2017, he became a member of the Editorial Board of its official monthly bilingual magazine—in Bulgarian, *Myusyulmani*, in Turkish, *Müslümanlar*. In 2014, another defendant in the Pazardzhik trial, the Imam of Rudozem, Khairi Sherifov, won the prize "Imam of the Year." Until early 2021, Salafi Abdullah Salih remained at his office as Regional Mufti of Pazardzhik District, responsible for the area of Velingrad largely inhabited by Muslims in mixed or entirely Pomak localities (Evstatiev 2022, pp. 100–101). This was a significant stage signaling the institutionally fostered hybridization aimed at domesticating Salafism in Bulgaria, where it began to merge with the local Hanafi tradition.

Only Ahmed Moussa and his Roma following were reluctant to get overarched by the Chief Muftiship's umbrella and continued privileging their distinct Salafi creed (*'aqida*), which they claimed would not allow them to pray after the Chief Mufti as their imam. Among the local Muslims in the Rhodopes, the rumor was spread that "Ahmed Musa, and respectively his followers, accused the Chief Mufti of unbelief, thus applying to him the legally consequential Islamic procedure of *takfir*."[9] The Chief Mufti Mustafa Alish confirmed this evidence though phrasing it differently to explain that "the *jemaat*s following Ahmed Moussa refused to accept the Chief Mufti as their Imam, because he is to them a representative of the unbelieving state and, as such, of the "satanic evil" (*taghut*)."[10] In any case, Ahmed Moussa and his Roma following, unlike their Pomak co-religionists from the "trial against the thirteen imams," were not covered by the Chief Muftiship's institutional support. This is, however, not a real split, because, due to their distinct culture, the Roma have never gained full recognition as equals by mainstream Muslims in the Balkans—a situation dating back to Ottoman times (Evstatiev 2022, p. 103). The Roma communities, to which Moussa's Salafi following from the Iztok (Tokayto) neighborhood in Pazardzhik belong, prefer to self-identify not as Roma, as they are identified by the neighboring populations, but as Turkish-speaking Muslims—a search for certainty and autochthony.

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[9] Personal communication with a Muslim interviewee, Gotse Delchev area, April 2016.

[10] Personal communication with the Chief Mufti Mustafa Alish, Draginovo, Velingrad area, April 2016.

4 The Salafis: From Globalized Belonging to Local Allegiances

On November 25, 2014, SANS, assisted by the gendarmerie, mounted an operation at four Roma neighborhoods across the country's south—in the areas of Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Smolyan, and Haskovo—as part of a pre-trial proceeding instituted in connection with "the dissemination of an anti-democratic ideology and propagandizing war" (Mediapool 2014). The operation, in which 26 Roma Muslims were arrested in the end, was launched by the Pazardzhik District Prosecution Office following an alert about propagandizing ideas of IS. The official charges brought afterward against 14 members of those Roma communities inspired by Ahmed Moussa included incitement of religious hatred via social media by sharing photos and videos of IS fighters, jihad chants, and videos of IS executions (Stoilova 2016). These were the openly displayed signs of Islamist behavior—notwithstanding the doctrinal identity of the arrested activists.

4.1 *"Ms. Jihad" and the Untenable Conceptualization of Islamism by the State*

Among the defendants in that prolonged lawsuit was the indicative case of Alexandrina Angelova, often called in the media "Ms. Jihad" (Nova TV 2015). Taking part in the ongoing activities of Muslim women in Bulgaria aimed at a rediscovery of their religious roots, she was accused of "preaching hatred on religious grounds between November 2013 and November 2014 in Pazardzhik and the village of Startsevo[11] by translating and disseminating the book *Nawaqidu'l-Islam* (*Apostasy*)—*Text and Explanation* (Ibn Abdilwehhab 2014),[12] manifested in religious intolerance. […] By providing and displaying publicly a flag with the logo of the Islamic State (ISIS) in a room belonging to the mosque of the same village, she was propagating war breaching the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of the United Nations" (Okruzhna Prokuratura Pazardzhik 2015). The book is, in fact, a larger explanation of the short, several-page presentation of the *Nullifiers of Islam* (*Nawaqid al-Islam*) by Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), usually presented in various forms of commentary (*sharh*), which makes it a significantly larger volume, or as part of other larger collections, e.g., the one of Ibn Bishr (1928).[13]

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[11] Startsevo is located in the Central-East Rhodopes Mountains in South Bulgaria, Municipality of Zlatograd.

[12] At least until the first half of 2017, the full text in Bulgarian was also available online in Google Books.

[13] Still, the original short text (*matn*) can be found circulating, also online, as *Matn Nawaqid al-Islam* li-Imam al-Da'wa al-Shaykh Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab Ibn Sulayman al-Tamimi (1115–1206 AH/1703–1792), approximately 5 pages.

The work of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab belongs to the Wahhabi classics and is one of its major explanations offered in the commentary of the influential Saudi Sheikh Salih Ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan (b. 1933) published in Riyadh (1425 AH/2004). Al-Fawzan is one of the most eminent and strict Salafi preachers in Saudi Arabia, who contributed to the contemporary emphasis on the doctrine of *al-wala 'wa l-bara'* ("loyalty and disavowal") by insisting that Muslims in non-Muslim countries should emigrate to the Islamic world, Muslims should not adopt the Christian calendar and should hate non-Muslims (Wagemakers 2009, pp. 89–90). Islamic texts such as *Nawaqid al-Islam* are convenient for Salafi Muslims because they usually synthesize in a very concise form long-standing and complex debates within the larger Islamic tradition. In this case, the text deals with the question of *takfir* ("accusations of unbelief"), which is legally consequential in Islamic law by envisioning the death penalty for the offender.[14] The "nullifiers" (*nawaqid*) represent the types of behavior positioning a Muslim outside of Islam turning him/her into an unbeliever (*kafir*).

The sophistication and complexity of *takfir* procedures in Islamic jurisprudence notwithstanding, it is telling for the observed reactions of state institutions and law enforcement exacerbating the externality of "Islamism" (supposed to be a "political ideology") as opposed to "traditional Islam" (supposed to be "a religion") to compare two presentations of these "nullifiers" of Islam. The first is embedded in the ten nullifiers in the *Sharh* of *Nawaqid al-Islam* which provoked the law enforcement agency to arrest Alexandrina Angelova, while the second is the explanation of ten positions nullifying Islam provided by the official institution of Bulgarian Muslims, the Chief Muftiship, as evidenced a decade and a half ago in its official print publication, the bilingual magazine *Musyulmani* (Table 1).

The juxtaposition hardly needs further elucidation, as it reveals in a clear-cut manner the sharing of de facto one and the same religious principles for making judgments on the apostasy of a Muslim and the acts which, if performed, would eventually lead to his or her excommunication. However, when the principles are discussed by Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and commented on by contemporary Salafi scholars from Saudi Arabia, they are perceived as alien and "radical," unlike their slightly re-ordered and edited, though only in terms of phrasing, version published by the Chief Muftiship's official magazine, distributed and accessible in all Bulgarian mosques. Instead of providing any particular explanation of the "nullifiers," the Muftiship's version simply listed them—a Muslim endeavor within the rediscovery of Islamic teachings then unknown to many Muslims in post-Communist Bulgaria. The seized Bulgarian translation of Sheikh Salih Ibn Fawzan's explanation of the "nullifiers," in turn, offers precise explanations, some of which struck state law enforcement agencies and the Prosecutor's Office to be dangerous.

Among this new court investigation's expert witnesses was Alex Alexiev (1941–2019), then Chairman of the Center for Balkan and Black Sea Studies and editor of a geopolitical website,[15] former senior analyst for the Rand Corporation and the conservative Washington DC-based think-tank Center for Security Policy, which he

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[14] For a brief overview of classical Muslim debates on *takfīr*, see Evstatiev (2016, pp. 213–243).

[15] *Bulgaria Analytica*, http://bulgariaanalytica.org/en.

Table 1 Nullifiers of Islam

	"Radical Islam" (2014): Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, *Nawaqid al-Islam*	"Traditional Islam" (1999): Chief Muftiship, *Myusyulmani* Magazine
1	Associating somebody else to Allāh while serving Him, [i.e., *shirk*]	Accepting that Allah has associates (*sudruzhnitsi*), i.e., *mushrikun*, those who perform *shirk*
2	Whoever puts intermediaries [*wasa'it*] between him and Allah; prays or asks for intersession [*al-shafa'a*]	Accepting intermediaries between Allāh and man, asking them for help and calling them with *du'a'*
3	Whoever does not accuse of unbelief [*yukaffir*] the polytheists [or "associationists," al-mushrikin] in unbelief; or doubts their unbelief; or considers what they do is right	Not believing in the perfection of Islam, [that it is] the final revelation
4	Whoever thinks that any other path [*hady*] is better than the path of the Messenger [of Allah] and the laws of Satan [*al-tawaghit*] are preferable than those of the Messenger	Disdaining anything of what Muhammed[16] has brought
5	Even if a person performs the sayings of the Messenger, if he does not like them in his heart and disdains them, he is an unbeliever	Not considering those who associate [others] to Allah [i.e., the polytheists, or the "associationists"] as unbelievers or to accept that they are on the right path
6	Whoever mocks the religion of Muḥammad[17] or the rewards or punishments of Allah the Almighty	Mocking anything of the religion of Allah
7	Witchcraft—whoever does it or agrees with it	Doing witchcraft, practicing witchcraft
8	Whoever provides support to the unbelievers and helps them, to the detriment of Muslims	Solidarizing with those who associate [others] to the [unity of] Allah and helping them against Muslims
9	Some people who think they can distance themselves from the law (*sharia*) of the Messenger as Khidr has distanced himself from the shari'a of Musa	The belief that the boundaries of Islam can be left
10	Whoever rejects the religion of Allah [*dīn Allah*] the Almighty	Rejecting anything of the religion of Allah

Sources Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, *Nawaqid al-Islam*[18] and Chief Muftiship in Bulgaria, *Myusyulmani* Magazine[19]

represented in hearings before the U.S. Senate from the early 2000s onwards. Since then, Alexiev has vindicated with conviction the dichotomy of "radical Islam" versus "traditional Islam." For Alexiev (2003), "radical Islam" underlies "the ideology of

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[16] The Bulgarian Muslims around the Chief Muftiship usually prefer this spelling of the Prophet's name.

[17] The translation here states "the religion of Muhammad" while the Arabic original of the *matn* speaks of "the religion of Allah" (*dīn Allah*), the phrase that usually circulates in Muslim literature.

[18] Corresponding to the following passages from the seized translation in Bulgarian: Ibn Abdilwehhab (2014, pp. 23, 30, 32, 34–35, 41, 42, 46, 50, 55).

[19] Based on *Myusyulmani* Editorial (1999).

extremism," drawing upon the teachings of "radical clerics" such as Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, whose "extreme doctrines contradicted and stood on their head major tenets of traditional Islam and in a real sense represent an outright falsification of the Muslim faith."[20] In Bulgaria, Alexiev (2012) was one of the analysts who have persistently emphasized "radical Islam" as a threat imported by graduates from the Arab world who rejected "the traditional and moderate Bulgarian Islam of their parents." At a court session, he commented that the Islam of IS "is of the type of the so-called Wahhabi or Salafi Islam which in this form of it does not have anything in common with traditional Islam" (Vichev 2017).

4.2 Ahmed Moussa and the Emerging Salafi-Hanafi Consensus

In a handwritten personal testimony carefully prepared for his own defense at the trial "against the 14 Roma Muslims," Moussa (2016, p. 11) explains that: "If you mean that democracy is *sovereignty of the people* [his emphasis], each Muslim believing in Allah and accepting Islam knows that sovereign power belongs to Allah the Almighty. Even if all people gather at one and the same place, and the evil spirits (*jinn*) together with the good spirits (*melek*)[21] also join to pronounce that interest is permitted,[22] we, the Muslim community, do not accept that and reject it." He then goes on, relating this comparison to the impermissibility of innovation (*bid'a*) and stressing that all human acts must be confined to the religious prescriptions as revealed in the Qur'an and *hadith* (Moussa 2016, p. 12). An example that indicates what Salafism usually defines as man-made laws contradicting *shari'a* is the so-called burqa ban in Bulgaria—once, he emphasizes, the Communist regime banned this type of Muslim women's veiling, and now, in turn, democracy bans it, too, thus putting female Muslims under "home arrest" (Moussa 2016, pp. 14–16).

Even Moussa, who was accused of supporting IS's Jihadi-Salafis, however, resorts to a convergent, less exclusive, and sometimes even inclusive, discourse when speaking of religious practices that Salafis share with local "traditional" Hanafis, thus accentuating the hybridization of Islam within the ongoing Sunni convergence. His preaching against the participation of Muslims in democratic elections, for which he has been defined as an Islamist, may thus even be incorrect as it implies the notion

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[20] In addition, Alexiev (2003, June 26) argues that "radical Islam" is a completely new phenomenon, existing only a few decades since the mid-twentieth century, due to the legacy and activity of Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (1928), the Pakistani Abul A'la al-Mawdudi (1903–1979) and the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966). During the 1970s and the 1980s, he stresses in the same testimony, Islamic terrorist groups appeared in the Middle East and South Asia and "while none of these groups and movements were 100% Wahhabi originally, their ideological differences were insignificant".

[21] The words *jinn* and *melek* (Turkish, from Arabic *malak*—angel) are manually added by Moussa above the words.

[22] Meaning that interest (*riba*) is normatively forbidden in Islam.

of political activism, whereas Moussa has been calling for refraining from enmeshment in what Salafis believe is infidel politics. He thus shares major points of IS' and al-Qaeda's creeds, which both accuse those who support democracy of unbelief,[23] and presents himself as a radicalized Salafi. At the same time, he does not publicly engage in supporting "revolutionary jihad," but rather emphasizes the role of preaching in transforming the social world in which Muslims live.

Moussa quotes one of the witnesses who claims that, after Moussa's preaching, there have been no thefts and drugs were no longer sold in the Roma neighborhood Iztok of Pazardzhik (Moussa 2016, p. 23), and, while emphasizing that killing is forbidden by Allah (Moussa 2016, p. 24), he certainly does not mean to deny the validity of jihad. Most strikingly, Moussa (2016, p. 33) not only mentioned the eponyms of the four Sunni legal schools as Salafis, but stresses that Abu Hanifa, in particular, "can be listed among the first names in the development of the Salafi idea." He further explains to the judge that: "Each Muslim, who has accepted the Islamic religion by conviction, can be Salafi [in creed, i.e., theology] but the [method of] application [of this creed] can well be Hanafi." In the first half of 2022, the Supreme Court of Appeal (2022, April 11) released Ahmed Moussa from jail by revoking the decisions, and respectively his and the other defendants' sentences issued in 2019 by the Pazardzhik District Court and, subsequently, by the Court of Appeal in Plovdiv.[24] The motivation of the Supreme Court draws on the procedural inaccuracies of the lower instances and on the finding that Prosecutor Nedyalka Popova has been biased during the entire court proceedings at the lower instances.[25] The court proceedings have thus returned to the District Court in Pazardzhik, which is supposed to initiate a new investigation.

In a conversation often switching between Arabic and Bulgarian, Muhammed Kamber, one of the most educated Salafis, with a markedly academic profile, and a graduate from Saudi Arabia, in turn, emphasizes the figure of Abu Hanifa, "who is a *salaf.*"[26] Kamber carefully distinguishes a Muslim creedal affiliation from the identity in matters of Islamic law, in which he tolerates a *taqlid* (the blind emulation of the traditional authorities within the legal schools) for the "commoners," though emphasizing that the knowledgeable should "with their reason" (*sic*) derive the best from the four legal schools. Thus, the boundaries of the *madhhab*s should be transcended (as Salafism requires) to achieve the best opinion on a specific case. These shared Salafi doctrines notwithstanding, Kamber openly opines that "a Muslim therefore could be Salafi in creedal matters (*'aqidatan*) but Hanafi in jurisprudential matters (*fiqhan*)."

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[23] See *al-Qaeda's Creed and Path* as translated by Haykel (2009, pp. 51–56). The Arabic original of IS' creed is available online at https://archive.org/details/3akedatona-1/mode/2up?view=theater.

[24] Moussa himself was sentenced to 7 years and 6 months prison plus a fine of approximately €5000.

[25] In a 2018 interview (Ivanova 2018, March 2022), she declared that Muslims are a "threat to national security and the future of the nation." Explaining her views following the court proceedings, she called for measures to reduce the number of Muslims and to limit their civil rights. For further detail, see Shakir (2019, pp. 41–142).

[26] Author's archive of ethnographic notes. Personal conversation with Muhammed Kamber, Marchevo and Ognyanovo (Gotse Delchev region), 2016, February 5.

During the conversation, he mentions many Muslim authorities, including Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), to support his argument. When he explains his approach in preaching, Kamber notes that his emphasis is more directed toward achieving religious and social reform through morality—people shall not steal, lie, etc. At the same time, he is deeply proud that his grandfathers were soldiers serving in the Bulgarian army, but frankly shares his suffering from the disrespect he feels nowadays. Kamber might be a revived Salafi but his somewhat paradoxical nostalgia of the local tradition is obvious. Especially when discussing veiling, he seems deeply touched, displays on his phone various photos of traditionally veiled women from the past, even though their dress code contradicts what is the full-face veiling norm in Salafi circles.

Another Salafi preacher, Ushev (2021, April 19), also a very well-educated graduate from Saudi Arabia, who was among the defendants in the "trial against the 13 imams," in one of his recent video lectures tackled the question of whether women have to fast when having their menstrual period (*hayd*). Tellingly, he refers to the multivolume Encyclopedia of Islamic Jurisprudence (*al-Mawsu'a al-Fiqhiyya*) published in Arabic in Kuwait from 1990 onwards as a point of departure for elaborating his thesis of the necessity to search for a legal consensus (*ijma'*) between the four schools of Islamic law. Even though he first mentions Abu Hanifa, the eponym of the Hanafi school, while Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), whose theology influenced the Salafi creed, is mentioned last. Ushev thus draws on the Hanafi anticipations to develop his argument by theologically overarching it under the Salafi creed without even mentioning the latter explicitly. This "Salafi-Hanafi" approach might eventually turn out situational, but it is a development that fosters the Sunni convergence via a new type of hybridizing Islam.

5   State and Society Reactions to Transnational Islamism

The emerging new "Islamic consensus" embraces the Salafis privileging a hybridized "common Muslimness." Together with the lawsuits against "the 13 imams," followed by the trial against "the 14 Roma Muslims," the recent years have signaled an increasing public attention in Bulgaria to a variety of regional and global issues with a regional impact, such as the impact of IS and Al-Qaeda, the changes in neighboring Turkey, its religio-political influence on the Chief Muftiship and the system of Islamic religious education in Bulgaria. Under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP), the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) gained an unprecedented role in the domestic, regional, and international policies of Turkey. The Diyanet's members have been increasingly active among the Muslim communities in the Balkans, where, along with other Turkish foundations competing with the influence from the Arab world and various Salafī circles, they "can operate in a cultural climate to which they are more accustomed" (Öktem 2012, p. 57). Bulgaria, where Diyanet has funded major Islamic activities and educational centers of the Chief Muftiship, is no exception.

Increasingly stronger with the support of the Diyanet, the Bulgarian Chief Mufti-ship today seeks to effectively embrace all Muslims under its umbrella and has achieved much of this goal (Evstatiev 2022, p. 102). At the same time, some Bulgarian politicians of Turkish origin have tried to gain political support from the Turkish AKP-led government in order to change the post-Communist status quo where a large part of the Turkish and Muslim population of Bulgaria is represented in national politics after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989 by the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). In 2016, a new political party, DOST,[27] was established by Lyutvi Mestan and other former members of the MRF. Mestan himself, before being ousted from the MRF in December 2015, was its second chair following the well-known secularist politician Ahmed Doğan, who resigned while remaining "honorary chairman." DOST involved some Muslim activists whose individual pathways criss-crossed religious and political agendas, such as the former spokesman of the Chief Muftiship, then the DOST Vice-Chairman, Hussein Hafuzov, perhaps the country's first post-1989 religious activist and politician constantly and openly evoking Islam in his political activity (Evstatiev 2019, p. 87). In so doing, DOST drew on the undisguised ideological animosity of Ahmed Doğan toward Islamism and the lack of AKP support for his party. Although DOST initially gained some support from Turkey, it failed during the next general elections in 2017, and, subsequently, the new leadership of the MRF managed to keep its influence and even diplomatically warm up the relations with the AKP.

Politicians, intellectuals, policy analysts, and the media have put on the table of public discussion different options on how Bulgaria should cope with those new challenges and how the state shall supposedly distinguish between its indigenous Muslim population and those recent transnational developments. The public and policy debate on Islamist radicalization has been evolving as far as to reach the parliament in the form of a proposed law for "criminalizing radical Islam." In 2016, a group of members of the Bulgarian parliament from the Patriotic Front (PF) initiated a series of law proposals and amendments involving—implicitly or explicitly—members of the Muslim community. Thus, a Bulgarian version of the so-called "burqa ban" perceived by local Muslims as "discriminatory law" (Evstatieva 2022, p. 183) was proposed and finally approved by the parliament in September 2016 (Krasimirov 2016). Among other issues, such as gender equality and some security concerns around the possibility of identifying citizens in public spaces, the motivation for that new law was that "radical Islam is an ideology, and not a religion, which has purely political aims, propagates violence against non-Muslims and is the main factor for the self-segregation of the Muslim communities. Imposing in one way or another the manner of constantly wearing burqas and other similar [attire] in a country is directly related to the threat of terrorism on jihadist grounds" (Bill 654-01-58 2016, p. 4).

The various bills invoked vivid public discussions (Petkova 2016b),[28] and, though all of them were interconnected, the proposal to criminalize the "ideology" of "radical

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[27] The abbreviation of Demokrati za Otgovornost, Svoboda i Tolerantnost (Democrats for Responsibility, Freedom and Tolerance) is designed to match the Turkish word *dost* (friend).

[28] See also Petkova (2016a).

Islam" seems the most controversial. The proposal of the Patriotic Front as a bill amendment to the Penal Code (Proposal 654-01-54 2016, pp. 2–3) stated:

> §1. In Article 93,[29] a new Item 31 is created with the following text: "The ideology of 'radical Islam' is propagated by a person when s/he agitates with words, actions or spreading of texts or symbols for one of the following ideas: for the establishment of an Islamic state (Caliphate); for imposing *shari'a* laws over the secular [laws]; for forcibly imposing religious principles and norms of behavior peculiar to Islam or propagating violence in the form of holy war (jihad) against non-Muslims. The same act is present when recruiting followers or fundraising in support of a terrorist organization whose ideology is based on Islam, or when agitating in favor of such an organization".

The motivation section of the proposal indicates that, according to its initiators: "There are two types of Islam—traditional Islam characteristic of Muslims in Bulgaria for centuries, and the new type of radical Islam which is a modern phenomenon dating back from no more than three decades. The first is religion, the latter is a radical ideology based on Islam" (Proposal 654-01-54 2016, p. 4). This attempt to frame the concepts matches some of the basic formulations suggested by Alexiev (2011, p. 13), who draws a dividing line between what he calls "Islamist definitions" and "reformist definitions." The former assumes that *shari'a* is the "sacred Islamic law as revealed by God," while the latter defines *shari'a* as a "man-made, post-Quranic invention designed to serve the political purposes of Islamic rulers after Muhammad." This approach justifiably brings to the fore the role of ideology, but the method of differentiating "traditional" from "radical" Islam is too controversial, as it is irrelevant to the way Muslims themselves understand Islamic law.

The proposers of the bill criminalizing "radical Islam" further stated that international terrorism today is a direct consequence of the spread of "radical Islam," which underlies 66% of the world's terrorist activities. These members of parliament point explicitly to "four major organizations—the Taliban terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the IS, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and al-Qaeda. All of them function through an ideological motivation based on radical Islam" (Proposal 654-01-54 2016, p. 5). Such a view alludes to some debates among politicians and security analysts trying to "prove" that IS is "not Islamic" or at least a manifestation of "deviant Islam",[30] in contradistinction to "traditional Islam." Though understandable as a pursuit to justify some policy options of the day, such approaches are conceptually problematic. It is not the task of a secular, non-Muslim scholar to interfere in intra-Muslim discussions and, instead of analyzing them in a non-biased manner, to pronounce a decision on who among the Muslim adversaries is "right" and who is "wrong." Not surprisingly, the efforts of the bill's proposers to prevent radicalization were not successful, due to the way the initiative was inexpertly framed and the lack of a tenable definition of concepts such as "radical Islam." The idea of the Patriotic Front to criminalize "radical Islam" as an "anti-democratic ideology" under the Penal Code eventually fell into oblivion and has not been resumed since 2016.

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[29] Article 93 "Explanation of Some Words" clarifies the legal meaning of some terms.

[30] One of the typical examples in Bulgaria is Chukov (2014).

6 Conclusion

In Bulgaria, throughout the recent years, Salafis have been the main actors of Islamism in the broader sense of the term, as adopted here. In terms of their ethnic identity, most of them were Pomaks and Roma Muslims. As a rule, the Pomaks embraced the Salafi creed in the Arab world while many Roma were "Salafized" mostly via European channels of communication and the Turkish language. The shared primary goal of those Salafi actors is first and foremost religious. Salafis in Bulgaria have been, in principle, quietist and do not engage in politics in its modern, participatory sense. Moussa has even openly propagated that Muslims have to refrain from participation in general elections, which is a typical Salafi quietist stance. Avoiding this type of political participation, some Salafis in Bulgaria have distinguished themselves as social reformers transforming first and foremost their local community, living according to the *shari'a* and avoiding becoming enmeshed in the affairs of the secular society at large.

Salafis in Bulgaria have used both formal and informal primary means to achieve their religious goals. The formal means have been at the disposal of those among them who belong to the official Muslim institution in Bulgaria, the Muftiship, serving as imams. They thus draw on their position in the mosques to spread Salafi teachings. The informal means include more subtle forms of communication—social media, YouTube videos, and meetings outside of the mosque where the leaders can preach outside of the established form. The dissemination of Salafi literature, including the translation of books and brochures from Arabic, is also a widely practiced activity. Working with and among women is a distinctive feature of the Salafis in Bulgaria and elsewhere, by which the "Salafization" takes the form of a specific "dress code." Informal education in religious circles or Qur'an courses is also a major tool. In the areas where Salafi preachers have been successful, the impact is enormous in that it entails an identity shift—from the local ties that usually bind people, to those who rediscover Islam through Salafism and are usually orientated toward the transnational *umma*. The localities get symbolically transformed in terms of how Muslims behave socially and dress.

In Bulgaria, no major security risks stemming from Islamism have been established so far as there are no foreign fighters who—like their coreligionists from the Western Balkans—have made their way to join Salafi insurgencies in the Middle East. However, there are still some risks, which are primarily social but also entail some political implications. The main long-term social risk stems from what can be described as a "self-ghettoization" that shapes emerging communities whose members would prefer to separate themselves from the larger society. This is therefore an issue related to social integration and cohesion, which assumes also a potential political risk—the disloyalty to the nation-state under certain circumstances and in decisive moments (external pressure, conflicts, and transnational allegiances). Part and parcel of the immediate and mid-term societal problem are the local social conflicts—between generations of Muslims or between "Salafized" and secularized citizens with a shared Muslim identity. The split is thus on two major social levels:

on the one hand, between "Salafized" Muslims and the mainstream society, and, on the other hand, between Salafis and the rest of Muslims.

The non-occurrence of violence among radicalized Muslims in Bulgaria proves that the reasons for that are similar to what shapes resilience both in the Middle East and the Western Balkans. Hybridizing Islam by merging Salafism into the local Hanafi mainstream, which brought about the phenomenon of Salafi-Hanafism, was perhaps an initially unexpected development that strengthened the local legitimacy of the new Salafi actors. They merged—doctrinally and institutionally—with the Hanafi tradition, thus achieving a higher level of social trust. Most of the Salafis already follow the institutional rules of the Muftiship, which are shaped by Hanafis, often under Turkish control and influence. The external pressure, including that of securitization, made Salafis and their teaching increasingly flexible and inclusive. However inappropriate they might have been sometimes, the reactions of the state and society were a pressure that prevented further radicalization.

This is a major shift in Islamist pathways, signaling a new stage of hybridity, convergence, and adaptability. In the years to come, the number of subtle, hybrid actors will most probably increase at the expense of the actors that are easier to categorize in a straightforward manner. Strengthening social integration and cohesion requires decision-makers in Europe to be context-attentive but without forgetting the "big picture" as well as the volatility of Islamism in general and, in particular, Salafism as a transnational movement engaging in a shared *umma*-consciousness. To successfully navigate this subtle intersection between local, national, and transnational levels in the constantly evolving Islamism, governments and European institutions should build on the lessons learned to devise strategies of "soft pressure" and integration that prevent "self-ghettoization" as much as possible.

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