Book Reviews

George Joffé, ed. *Islamist Radicalisation in Europe and the Middle East: Reassessing the Causes of Terrorism*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013. Pp. x+354. Hardbound. ISBN 978–1–84885–480–2. Price: Not listed.

A year or so back when I received this book for review, the public optimism in the Middle East about the Arab Spring was intact and the 'revolt' against tyranny was too young to be dismissed as mere utopianism. To my own disadvantage and that of this book, I took too long to review it and now it seems it has lost at least some of its relevance, though I am sure it has acquired a different one which is no less significant. The events in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Iraq and the rest of the Middle East are a reminder that the massive optimism and dreams of the Arab Spring have been turning into a nightmare.

In spite of the vast array of studies on radicalism/radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism before and since September 11, 2001, this book deserves our attention for its attention to details and a non-partisan approach of the writers. Many other studies on the subject tend to discuss these phenomena in broad generalisations, ignoring subtle nuances and specific socio-political conditions of various locations of resistance and revolt. For example, radicalisation and extremism are often used as synonyms; and religion, particularly Islam, is often blamed for contributing to the formation of extremist ideologies. By bringing into focus other forms of resistance and violence, like the Kurdish struggle based in ethnicity, or settlement activities in the occupied Palestine by *Hardal*, the Israeli radical youth organization, this volume complicates the terms of radicalisation and extremism in the Middle East and its spill-over, domino effect in Euro-American societies. The major strength of the book, in my opinion, is a number of country-wise case studies about Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran and Israel. The historical time covered is the decade spanning 9/11, 2001 to the Arab Spring in 2011.

First section consists of five chapters that attempts to assess perceptions about and consequences of radicalisation, sometimes leading to extremism. In the second section, through eight case studies, various forms and trajectories

that radicalisation has taken in the Middle East are discussed. The book mainly focuses this troubled, historically contested region and gives much less space to radicalisation in Europe, as the title claims. Since the book is based on papers of a conference held in 2009, it collects a vast array of opinions on the subject. And this is its main weakness as well since, in spite of a well-argued introduction by the editor, the book lacks cohesion. On a different note, however, that cohesion is after-all not very desirable, keeping in view the charged and divisive nature of the subject; it successfully avoids a totalizing treatment of the subject. The editor's introduction serves as a cementing narrative and clearly articulates the essential difference in radicalisation and extremism, while some writers tend to conflate them. Although their relationship with the state is dialectical, radicals do not share the extremists' view that the state is "inherently illegitimate" (p. 3); they seek to challenge the hegemonic discourse of the extremists/terrorists who outrightly reject democracy as a viable, modern, political system and the nation-state as a universally accepted, legitimate arrangement for mutual coexistence of nations.

The introduction does acknowledge this point, and the editor devotes most of its space to consociate the various themes and arguments of the book without drawing any final conclusions. The upshot of the introduction is this credible thesis that if a conflict is not resolved through political contestation, it may lead to violent confrontation and state oppression. When the Islamists who believe in democratic participation and win elections are thrown out of power, not by the masses in the next elections but by the armed forces, it leads to strengthening of the extremist movements who do not believe in the democratic process in the first place. The only case in point was Algeria until what happened in Egypt in 2013. In Algeria, *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) was barred from assuming power after the December 1991 elections, resulting into a civil war and the emergence of *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA), an extremist organization that has been trying to topple the military regime through large scale terrorist activities. It has even joined hands with al-Qaeda [al-Qāʿidah] in North Africa. Egypt is the latest case in point where events have been turning out on similar lines.

Second chapter "A Biographical Approach to Radicalisation" is an assessment of Ziauddin Sardar's *Desperately Seeking Paradise* and Ed Husain's *The Islamist*. Sardar in his "spiritual" autobiography narrates his quest for a version of Islam that is not frozen in time and should allow free enquiry at least in social and political matters, if not faith. Therefore, he shows his spiritual trajectory via his fascination with Maulānā Mawdūdī to Tablīghī Jamāʿat; from there to classical Islam and its foundational texts to Naqshbandī Sufi order. While on this path, he went to Konya to visit the tomb of Rūmī.

After these experiences, he concluded that even Sufism does not produce a viable and equitable social order (p. 84). Sardar's journey continued in the ideologically turbulent 1970s and 1980s during which he visited and lived in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and for a considerable time in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Pakistan. In his search for "paradise" on earth he studied and experimented with various theological and epistemological systems, ranging from Islamic socialism to Islamisation of knowledge.

There are many similarities between Sardar's spiritual quest and that of Ed Husain. His book *The Islamist* is a narrative that maps out his mental and spiritual development. Even the subtitle of Husain's narrative, "Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw Inside, and Why I Left," is self-explanatory. Husain seems to have taken a more radical path, as he rejected, early on, Mawdūdī's "gradualism," Tablīghī Jamā'at's pacifism and ritualism, and embraced Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr's revolutionary idealism of a world Islamic government or caliphate.

In my view, the intellectual trajectory of these two "seekers" goes through familiar phases; by and large, people who seek solutions of world/worldly problems in religious discourses tread the path of radicalism and revolutionary idealism during their youthful days; they become self-righteous in the middle age; and ultimately disappointment about any change sets in, after mature pondering; some of them embrace Sufism in old age. What saves them from extremism is the existence of multifarious readings of Islam that gives a host of choices to the seekers of faith.

Third and fourth chapters address an almost common problem, that is, the use of technology for radical and extremist causes. "Being Muslim, Being British" is the only of its kind that takes up the issue of radicalisation in Europe, making British Muslims a case study. Actually it is the study of "A Multimedia Educational Resource for the Young Muslims." Chapter four, "Thinking Centrifugal" by Johnny Ryan "straddles policy and theory," and considers the implications of the Internet for the expression of radical ideologies and extremist thoughts. Ryan's in-depth analysis is a rarely discussed area in terrorism studies. The Internet is a free space where all sorts of human expressions find their ways, including the promotion of hate-speech, videos of beheadings of soldiers, and lectures that rally people for radical causes. But Ryan also discusses how it can be used against radicalisation itself, thus debunking myths of radicalisation of this democratic social medium of expression.

Chapter five, "Reluctant Radicals: Hearts and Minds between Securitisation and Radicalisation" by Roxane Farmanfarmaian, reminds us of Mohsin Hamid's famous novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In fact the writer

has contextualised this novel that serves as "a source of illustration" of pride and shame that construct individual and communal identity and links these psychosocial phenomena with the post-9/11 processes of collective securitisation and individual radicalisation. The ambivalence in the title of the novel is carried to the end which lacks closure as the reader remains uncertain about the intentions of both the protagonist, Chengez, and his American listener. It remains unclear "whether Chengez's radicalisation spills over to extremism or whether the [American] visitor is on a securitising mission with Chengez its object" (p. 98) that has to be eliminated. Though Hamid has to stretch his arguments to make links among these four psychosocial processes—securitisation, radicalism, pride, and shame—ultimately he succeeds in building a credible discourse about ongoing battle of hearts and minds since 9/11.

Chapter six, "Egypt: Mainstreaming Radicalism," by Ezzedine Choukri Fishere, is perhaps the most important chapter of the book, mainly because of the significance Egypt has acquired since the removal of President Morsi's government by the army. The main argument in the writer's own words is that "Islamic revivalists as well as nationalists are part of a radicalism born out of Egyptians' encounter with modernity" (p. 124). But this is only partially correct, in my assessment. Nasser's nationalism was the rallying cry against colonialism and neo-colonialism but after him it faded and resulted into acquiescence to American hegemony in the region. Besides, the rise of extremist brand of Islam from Egypt has created a new actor in the Middle Eastern great game. To assess the present situation, it is imperative to understand the workings of political Islam and the rise of radicalism in Egypt. Fishere invokes the arguments of François Burgat in his book *Islamism in the Shadow of al-Qaeda* (2008) where he highlights the differences among various Islamist groups in Egypt and compares their politics and attitudes to modernity. For example, it is important to note that Ayman al-Zawahiri [Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī], the leader of Egyptian Jihād and al-Qaeda, wrote a whole book criticising the Muslim Brotherhood for their constitutional struggle for change. Discrediting the Brotherhood was important for him as it commanded huge political following, thus narrowing the scope of armed struggle. The Brotherhood should have been given a fair chance since it is the only mainstream Islamist party in Egypt that believes in constitutionalism. They formed Justice and Development Party, now disbanded and outlawed. In spite of long persecution and ban on participation in elections, they won seven seats in 1984. In 1987, they entered into a political alliance and won 36 seats; they boycotted the 1990 elections as did most of other opposition parties due to harsh exclusionary laws promulgated by Hosni Mubarak [Ḥusnī Mubārak]. Their electoral record improved in 2000 when in spite of restrictions and

repression they managed to win 17 seats. In 2005 they stunned the ruling junta by securing 88 seats despite heavy rigging by the Mubarak regime.

This latest military intervention in yet another Muslim country has raised many disturbing questions: Does the fault squarely lie with the Islamists in general or merely with President Morsi's policies who failed to dispense the state business in a democratic fashion? Was it just a hasty and condemnable step by the Egyptian army who refused to give the nascent democracy in Egypt any fair chance? Why the western democracies have no tolerance for Islamist parties who come to power democratically? What will be the impact of this overthrow on the politics of moderate Islamists in the Middle East who would now be challenged, with new vigour, by the extremists to shun the democratic path and join them in an armed struggle against foreign-funded totalitarian regimes? And lastly, what will be the impact of this latest military adventure on other Muslim countries where democracy is still trying to grow roots, as for example in Turkey and Pakistan.

Let us take the first question head-on. Has the Islamist experiment failed in politics? Of course, not in any absolute terms. The Islamists would argue that it was the failure of one man and one party who failed to build bridges in a democratic fashion. The Muslim Brotherhood has been existing in political isolation since long because of the persecution it faced. All military-backed Egyptian rulers Gamal Abdel Nasser [Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir], Anwar Sadaat [Muḥammad Anwar al-Sādāt], and Hosni Mubarak, never allowed them fair chance to exist in the political sphere. They organised themselves through social welfare works but had no political reach to work with other democratic forces in the country. Because of this long isolation, they grew reactionary in politics and took a solo flight in the parliament and began to reshape the constitution according to their conservative agenda. The president himself was keen on keeping the shops shut well before midnight so that the people may get up early for morning prayers. The Cairo street life is known for its liberal bohemianism. The cafes remain open almost all night. If democracy is the will of the people, it was not a very wise of him to try to shut down shops and cafes only because the president wanted the residents to be pious Muslim. The Brotherhood is not down and out because it did not avail full time to perform in the political arena. It would claim political victimhood.

Chapter seven, "Between Pragmatism and Radicalism: The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the Ba'ath Regime" is written by Raphael Lefevre. Any debate on radicalisation, sometimes leading to extremism and at times resulting into terrorism, in the Middle East and even beyond, cannot avoid a discussion on the role of al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn—the Muslim Brotherhood. Since it was founded by Hassan al-Banna [Ḥasan al-Bannā] in 1928, it has been

an important player in the politics and society of many Middle Eastern Sheikhdoms, monarchies and dictatorships. Though the Brotherhood never embraced violence as a political strategy, in times of extreme repression and denial of legitimate political rights, some of its breakaway factions/adherents did resort to it. As Lefvre's account shows, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood also went through such internal divisions in choosing between radicalism and political pragmatism, in their conflict with the Ba'ath regime since 1963 when it took control of power. Because of its repression by the regime and its reactionary and radical response, the Brotherhood suffered a massacre of thousands of its workers in 1982. Forced into exile, they tried to be pragmatic by reviving their founding vision. The chapter is an important analysis of Syrian history, with topical relevance, keeping in view the ongoing conflict between the incumbent Ba'athist regime of Bashar al-Assad [Bashshār al-Asad] and the Sunni/Salafist jihadist challenge it is facing.

Chapter eight, "Tripoli in Lebanon: An Islamist Fortress or a Source of Terror?" by Nasser Kalawoun traces the chequered history of this ancient city that has been the centre of various movements and power struggle between the Christians and Sunni and Shia [Shī'ah] Muslims. The chapter is mainly a historical narrative of these conflicts and does not carry much current relevance especially since Syrian withdrawal from the city.

Chapter nine, "Israel's Insurgent Citizens: Contesting the State, Demanding the Land," gives a fine balance to the book as it unravels the state of extremism in Israel, a country whose treatment of the Palestinians is consensually regarded as one of the potent reasons for the Muslim anger and the rise of extremism in the Middle East and elsewhere. This well-informed analysis by Clive Jones also shows that radicalism giving way to extremism is not peculiar to the Muslim societies; that ultra-Orthodox Judaism, as embraced and practiced by a good number of Israelis, is the ideological linchpin of the incumbent government in the Jewish state which is accused of political and racial apartheid by many in the international community. The emergence of "religious nationalism" (p. 202) in Israeli politics led to the resurgence of Likud as the political mainstream, replacing the more secular Labour party that believed in the two-state solution in Palestine. Until recently, the acts of extreme violence like the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Robin had no popular support in the Israeli society. As "religious nationalism" gripped the mainstream, it sharply divided the Israelis on the existential questions of pre-1967 borders, the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to Palestine, two-state solution, etc. This chapter analyses the causes of this transformation of the Israeli society and its polarisation on ideological lines due to the influence of ultra-Orthodox Jewish organizations

like *Hardal* or "hill top youth" (ibid.), an extremist/terrorist organization that uses non-state violence against the Palestinians. As Jones informs, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish settlers, by virtue of their religious faith in the Old Testament, believe that the West Bank (that is, the Judea and Samaria) cannot be separated from what they call the Biblical *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel). Therefore they oppose the two-state solution, and condone the use of violence against Palestinians.

After going through this chapter, one may draw some parallels between the religiously-inspired violent movements in some Muslim lands (al-Qaeda being one case in point and the Pakistani Taliban [Ṭālibān] an other) and some Israeli extremist organizations.

1. Like some Conservative-literalist Muslim sects thriving on the Golden-age narrative of Islamic renaissance, the Israeli extremist organizations like *Hardal* believe in the coming of a "Mashiach" or Messiah or an Imam-in-waiting for the Second Coming. Both derive their inspiration from their foundational texts.

2. Like the Pakistani Taliban (the TTP) and al-Qaeda, such Jewish organizations also challenge the state's agency and legitimacy. They even reject Zionism, the founding ideology of Israel as apostate and secular, which, in their opinion, has failed to settle the Palestinian question, reminding us of Hitler's "the Jewish Question."

3. The teachings and writings of Rabbi Abraham Kook and his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, like those of Abu Bakr Naji [Abū Bakr Nājī] and Ayman al-Zawahiri for al-Qaeda, have been influential in radicalising Jewish students. They established Yeshivat Mercaz HaRav in Jerusalem to preach their extremist ideology, believing in the beginning of the Messianic era and stressing "a pre-ordained Jewish right to settle the territories captured [by Israel] in 1967 war" (p. 203).

Two perceptions may emerge in the readers' mind after reading this chapter: (a) that radicalism leading to extremism and terrorism is not peculiar to the terrorists who carry out their activities in the name of Islam; (b) it becomes clear why most Israelis do not condemn or even flinch at the massacre of Palestinian children, babies, and women. When such brutalities are carried in the name of God and justifications are sought in religious texts, the collective consciousness of the public is easy to anesthetize. *Hardal*'s ideology is sanctioned by the teachings of Rabbi Meir Kahane whose interpretations of Torah [Tawrāh] justified the "use of violence in order to maintain the integrity of Eretz Yisrael" (p. 208). Jones quotes from an essay published in 1976 by Rabbi Kahane where he maintains that the establishment of Israel was divinely ordained because "God could no longer tolerate the

continued persecution of chosen people by Gentiles" (ibid.). However, one may wonder, for how long the same God would tolerate the massacres of Palestinians.

Chapter ten, "Sowing Dragons' Teeth: Radicalisation in the Iraqi theatre of operations" by James Spencer traces the deployment and development of Islamic radical strategies in Iraq since the US invasion in 2003. Since the writer served as a consultant with the British forces in Iraq, he had the first hand knowledge to contest the standard narrative of how radicalisation progressed and turned into terrorism in Iraq. He focuses on the political and economic motivations for violence and rejects common notions that the Iraqi insurgency was driven either by former Ba'athist elements seeking a return of Saddam [Ṣaddām], or by transnational jihadists attempting to recreate the Caliphate, though the rise of ISIS now has at least partially falsified his analysis. In a direct narrative style, he deconstructs the usage of the term "radical," rendering it a complex process that does not fit into simplistic narratives.

Chapter eleven, "Ethnic Radicalisation: Kurdish Identity as Extremism in the Hegemonic Discourses of Turkey" by Ayla Göl is significant for two reasons: first, it highlights the Kurdish issue which acquired limelight in the Muslim world recently due to wars in Iraq and Syria; second, the chapter theorises issues involving the interrelationship between identity politics, extremism and hegemonic discourses especially with reference to Turkish suppression of the Kurds. It also draws distinct lines between Kurdish nationalism as well as Kurdish terrorism. The paper draws five theoretical principles from an ongoing study "The Role of Muslim Identity Politics in Radicalisation" by Tufyal Choudhury. For example, it is narrated as a principle that "the path to radicalisation often involves a search for identity at a moment of crisis," or that "the discourse of 'European/British-Islam' is emerging as a powerful response to 'radical Islam'" (p. 247). It would be more rewarding if the readers may go through these discourses and counter-discourses and draw their own conclusions.

Chapter twelve, "What is Radicalism? Power and Resistance in Iran," by Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, is steeped in social theory. True to the promise of the title, the writer traces the interrelationships and ideological links between the coordinates of two sets of equations:

RADICALISM ↔ revolt ↔ agonism ↔ riotous violence ↔ temporal trajectory (transformative); REVOLUTION ↔ mass movement ↔ antagonism ↔ structural violence ↔ temporal break (utopian). (p. 271)

The writings of social theorists like Marx, Lenin, Giddens, Gramsci, Fred Halliday, and Michel Foucault are quoted extensively. The history of

radicalism and revolution in Iran, since the nineteenth century, culminated in the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the "first metaphysical revolution in the history of humankind" (p. 290). Towards the end of his historicist analysis of revolution in Iran, the writer makes a compelling observation that total change is impossible because "power and resistance, once reversed, remain power and resistance" (ibid.), because only the players change, not the play, as is evident from the state repression of public opinion in Iran. The weak link of the chapter is its irrelevance to the debates of socio-political change in the rest of the Gulf region. It seems the chapter is not written for the present book. Iran is in the throes of social change and is also a big player in the great game of international politics in the Middle East but no links are traced between Iran's ideological role and material support for the Shia resistance groups working in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. In that sense, the chapter is quite irrelevant to the major concerns of the book. However, it provides deep insight into the mechanics of Iranian polity and politics.

The lacuna in chapter twelve is sufficiently covered in chapter thirteen, "Political Islam in the Gulf Region." Abdullah Baabood has discussed the reasons for the rise of political Islam in the Gulf states. He mentions the make-up and organisation of diverse Islamic groups, both Sunni and Shia—the Ikhwān (the Muslim Brotherhood), and the Salafi movement functioning under different ideological/sectarian banners. It is this final chapter of the book that reveals the contours of the Salafi movement which is not a monolithic establishment as the writer discusses its various strands, Wahabbism, al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya [*al-Ṣaḥwah al-Islāmiyyah*] or the Salafi Reformers, the Salafi Rejectionists, Salafi Jihadists, and the Committee for the Defense of the Legitimate Rights (CDLR), a "loosely-knit political reform group." Founded in 1993, in the wake of Gulf War CDLR challenges the Saudi regime politically. Without conforming to the internationally accepted human rights standards, it functions within the confines of Sharī'ah Law. This chapter is important for making significant distinction between various Islamist groups, especially the mist surrounding global Salafist movement is cleared as its various groups and their respective ideologies and political functioning are explained in order to dispel the impression that Salafism is an extremist movement since most of the al-Qaeda leadership is Salafi. The writer's distinction between the reformist, rejectionist and jihadist Salfis is not merely polemical but based on factual accounts. Since most of the Gulf States have sizeable Shia population, the Shia Islamists are also active, though their political role is relatively more recent than Sunni Islamists like the Ikhwān.

In the history of the region, secularists have mostly failed at the ballot box because of their lack of support among the masses; as a result, they rely on

the repressive might of the military. Islamists do well at the ballot box but they win on emotional appeal, not real competence. Ultimately, the secularists monopolise power by excluding and repressing the Islamists. The invariable and predictable result is that this leads to the radicalisation of the Islamists who lose trust in constitutionalism, democracy, and human rights. Political Islam which made the soft and hard revolutions possible in a number of Arab monarchies in the Middle East, collectively referred to as the Arab Spring, seems to have failed itself, or failing, because of the undemocratic interventions and designs of some international players as well as domestic partisan politics. The Middle East is too important to be left to the whims of the Islamists alone, these powers seem to believe. Therefore, political Islam is being pushed out of the political arena and many experts have expressed their apprehensions that the disillusioned adherents of Islamist parties may join the ranks of extremist brands of Islam.

Most analyses of radicalism-extremism phenomena since 9/11 that link radicalisation of Europe's Muslim communities with the rise of Islamism in the Middle East tend to assume that the adherents of Islam are inherently extremists, by virtue of the teachings of Islam's foundational texts. But in this book the writers overturn such established monocausal accounts, examining the specific contexts and conditions of radicalism. It complicates a phenomenon that has come to define today's international relations, global politico-economic alignments, multiculturalism and terrorism studies. It is an essential reading for general readers, students and researchers who will find many new insights and engaging discussions about a difficult cross-cutting subject.

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