Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies

A Review of: "Family and Jihadism: A Socio-Anthropological Approach to the French Experience" edited by Jerôme Ferret and Farhad Khoroskhovar[1]

Nina Käsehage[2]

The edited volume *Family and Jihadism. A Socio-Anthropological Approach to the French Experience* by Ferret and Khosrokhovar deals with an important topic: the impact of the family and family ties in terms of Jihadist radicalization. Based on the French experiences with the Merah-clan, a union that has transnational connections that reminds the observer of a larger family structure, the book expands the classical concept of a family in terms of extremist brother- and sisterhoods and its meaning in the eyes of Daesh, where the so-called Caliph Ibrahim aka Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi functioned as the "Super-father" and the caliphate or the neo-Ummah symbolized the "Super-mother". Daesh replaced the original family and became the 'new' family for its adherents. It also illustrates the links between France and Spain in terms of terrorist networks that are useful for the reader's understanding of the influence of multinational terror cells. It is astonishing that a lot of actors seek to fill a gap of parental (or in particular fatherly) love and devotion by their participation in extremist organizations that was, for instance, also observed by Alexander (2019, Family terror networks).

The first chapter by Jerôme Ferret, Farhad Khosrokhavar, and Bruno Domingo is called *French jihadism and the family* and introduces the volume that deals with jihadism in France and Southern Europe and highlights the idea that the 'real' family is in crisis and therefore replaced by the neo-family, the neo-Ummah (p. 1). It describes the focus of the book through various case studies such as the Merah attacks in Toulouse in 2012, the charismatic jihadist preachers and communities, the Cannes-Torcy and Ripoll cells where jihadism increased and terrorist attacks have been planned and carried out (pp. 2-7).

The second chapter by Bruno Domingo details the attacks in Toulouse and Montauban in March 2012 by the terrorist Mohamed Merah and is called *The 'Merah clan': family trajectories and transformation of the economy of violence*. Besides the attacks themselves, the multifaceted meaning of the word 'clan' is discussed, for instance, in view of its anthropological sense related to the idea of filiation and the connection to a common ancestor, and in terms of family-based organized crime (p. 12). Domingo describes the emergence of the Merah clan as a result of patriarchal violence and regulation (pp. 14-16).

[1] Jerôme Ferret and Farhad Khoroskhovar (eds) Family and Jihadism. A Socio-Anthropological Approach to the French Experience. Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group: London; New York, 2022. ISBN: 9781032077345

[2] Post-Doc in the field of Theology and Religious Research (RuTh); kaesehage1@gmail.com.

Most of the future terrorists have been raised in a one-parent family with an absent father and a lack of social organization (pp. 16-25). As a consequence of these familial environments, the vulnerable young men turned to crime or violence, having lost or quit family ties and united in a neo-family that consists of other jihadists (pp. 25-33). In a fourth step, the author reconstructed the different familial reactions of Merah in the aftermath of the attacks, that include, for instance, the question of the burial of Mohamed Merah in France or Algeria and the individual positions of the concerned jihadists and family members towards the attacks and the victims in view of the process both in front of the Criminal Court and in public. The author comes to the conclusion that radicalization is formed in an ecosystem of relationships between the transnational actors that are tied together by their interest and reconfigurations of violence (p. 13). Mohamed Merah junior has become the head of the neo-family (the Merah-clan), in which violence is based on extremist violence "with a political and religious content" (p. 44).

The third chapter by Farhad Khosrokhavar *Artigat or the imaginary neo-Ummah* discusses the case of Artigat, a rural place in France that became famous because of one of its habitants: Olivier Corel, better known as the 'White Emir' and his religious influence on various French jihadist who travelled abroad or have carried out terrorist attacks within France (pp. 50-51). Khosrokhavar describes Corel's role as a substitute father for many (future) jihadists who lacked a real father. He functioned as a jihadist *pater familias* with a silent charisma who combined it with the religious extremist socialisation (p. 52). In Artigat's patriarchy, Corel symbolized the guide or father of this small neo-family and the neo-Ummah functioned as the mother for the young, often stigmatised young people with an origin from North Africa who have been widely excluded by French society (pp. 55-60). In that sense, Artigat could be seen as a cypher for the future neo-family embodied by the Islamic State (IS).

The fourth chapter by Abderrahim El-Janati *Charisma of action, mystical charisma, neo-Ummah source of European Jihadism. The example of Toulouse and its region* is based on a sociological analysis related to the charisma of an Islamic preacher and his impact on the creation of a jihadist family, according to the understanding of Max Weber and Farhad Khosrokhavar (p. 64). El-Janati visualizes the impact of two different preachers of jihadism, Mamadou Daffé and Olivier Corel and their impact on the jihadist development in Toulouse with particular interest towards the Mirail mosque. While Daffé was polymorphic and functions as a protector of the Islamic community, (p. 71) Corel was the spiritual master of this neo-family who used the concept of Ghuraba' (the strangers) in order to impart its adherents the feeling to be part of a Muslim elite in the 'infidel' French environment (p. 69). Due to the fact that several young Muslims where in search for a religious meaning and community and have turned their backs on their 'acculturated' parents, both preachers filled these gaps with their charisma in the sense of Turner: "to satisfy needs and meet expectations that seemed impossible" (Turner 1993, p. 425 cited by El-Janati 2022, p. 65). By isolating himself, Corel is seen as a saint or rather prophet who voluntary obtains the burden of societal stigmatization by protecting his faith and religious community from the 'outsiders' (p. 73).

Artigat functions as his emirate where he made his silence sacred and impressed various jihadists through his religious knowledge. For El-Janati both the Mirail mosque and Artigat functioned as places for young Muslims to replace their anxieties through belief and a feeling of belonging, emotions that have also been symbolized by the IS which some of these adherents followed later on (pp. 75-79).

The fifth chapter by Jerôme Ferret *New fraternal scenes and jihadist violence, Ripoll (Catalonia, northern Spain)* illustrates the impact of the *jihadophile family* in terms of radicalization and extremist milieus with the help of the example of Salafist perpetrators originating from Ripoll in Catalonia. "The perpetrators of the attacks could [be assigned to] five sets of siblings" (p. 95). For Ferret, the family could be observed as both: a "material, cognitive or affective resource […] to support the various members involved, to serve as a forum for recruitment or financing" (p. 86) and a place where jihadist actors are divided from those family members who refuse to join this movement (Ibid). Besides the importance of belonging and identity forming (pp. 90-91), that seemed to be responsible for the othering of Ripoll's youth with Moroccan origin that is comparable with the French way of exclusion of the same group by placing them into suburban 'ghettoes' (les banlieues), the lack of collaboration between the national and local safety authorities and their incapability of dealing with religious fundamentalism could be seen responsible for the development of this Catalan jihadist milieu (p. 88). The author arrives at the conclusion that several aspects such as the trans-historical memory and everyday humiliation (pp. 100-102) as well as the family crisis and the impact of charismatic figures led to a close relationship between the concerned young actors and the terrorist group that consists of a counter-religious model of self-sacrifice of its members based on its affirmation of death and its anchoring in the beyond (pp. 105-106).

Chapter six *The rise and fall of a jihadist neo-family – The Cannes-Torcy cell* by Bartolomeo Conti describes the development of the 'most dangerous group that come to light in France since 1996' (p. 111). Based on an ethnography of a trial in the Assize Court, Conti unveils the terrorist actor's heritages as (co-)responsible for their radicalization. The absence of a family structure, often accompanied by defined roles, competing siblings and absent fathers, led the concerned terrorists to an individual crisis (pp. 120-126). They tried to find a belonging among the French army but "had difficulty in conforming to authority" (p. 128), leading to an Islamic religiosity that is both opposite to their father's faith and a way to identify personally with and to follow an order that seem to 'structure' their lives (pp. 126-131, 138-143). The author draws a picture of a male-dominated group whose members seem to repeat their own familial experiences in terms of their own family and where women tried to find their way by identifying as mothers of jihad or a wife of a fighter (pp. 143-145). The role of the 'original' family and their possibilities to fix former family bonds or even to destroy them further have become visible during the trial.

Chapter seven by David Vavassori and Sonia Harrati is called *the jihadist commitment as a solution to the impasses of family transmissions* and deals with the psychological dimension

of extremist radicalization in terms of familial grievance. This feeling can become so strong that it is (co-)responsible for jihadist radicalization of vulnerable youth. Based on their experiences with juvenile terrorists among juvenile prisons as well as the result of their supervisory work with the prison administration, both psychologists reflect on adolescence and puberty as a source for radical behaviour (p. 152). For the authors, the jihadist radicalization results from both a social and an individual malaise (p. 155) and can also be an impression of "self-generated fantasy and group illusions" (p. 157). Beside the crisis related to the families of the concerned imprisoned actors, "jihadist ideology [functions] as a defensive solution" for some juveniles (p. 162). Vavassori and Harrati also identify cultural humiliation of the concerned juveniles and "jihadophile siblings" (p. 167) as co-responsible for their extremist radicalization. The belonging to a movement that is based on destruction illustrates for both authors the structuring function of hatred for the young adults: "Becoming a jihadist would then represent the opportunity to invest a heroic identity at the service of a feeling of omnipotence, in response to the impasses of family ideological transmissions." (p. 170).

Chapter eight *Jihadism and the family – A heuristic model questioned, energised and augmented* by Jerôme Ferret, Farhad Khosrokhavar and Bruno Domingo summarize the elements of the entire discussion by highlighting the meaning of the interaction and bonding of the individual, their families and the neo-Ummah consisting of neo-patriarchy and instability of family representatives (s. pp. 174-178). The authors discuss the diversification of the family pattern by the examples of jihadist fraternities and sororities that reflect the crisis of the original families of the jihadists (s. pp. 178-181). In addition to the social and political exclusion of the juveniles that caused subjective injuries, failed familial roles have been instrumentalized by charismatic preachers and male role models to recruit vulnerable young adults into scripted martyrdom (s. pp. 182-190).

Overall, this volume is a valuable contribution for the terrorism research community, not only in France, Spain, or Europe but also in terms of a universal approach to the field of (de)-radicalization and prevention of violent extremism (PVE). The social, economic, and political exclusion of the first generation of immigrants originating mainly from north Africa such as Morocco, Tunisia, or Algeria led the younger generation of these immigrant families to turn to a substitute family which was found in the jihadist milieu. This development underlines how the search of young adults for belonging and a family is exploited by extremists who might have been themselves victims of broken families and lost dreams. The research results of this anthology could therefore be useful for (non-)governmental organizations to support vulnerable youth in terms of finding meaningful fields of activity, e.g. in the community or at work, in order to empower them and to enable them to break free from this vicious circle of ongoing physical and psychological abuse by jihadist recruiters.