

CHRISTCHURCH MOSQUE TERROR ATTACK; THE BALKAN LINKS

Riad Domazeti



INSAMER
İHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

To cite this article: Domazeti, Riad, "Christchurch Mosque Terror Attack; the Balkan Links", INSAMER, 04.04.2019.

 Analysis

Fifty people were killed in Christchurch mosque, New Zealand on 15 March in a single terror attack perpetrated by a white supremacist-far right terrorist. The attack happened in two separate mosques during Friday prayers; as the result Muslim men, women and children died, news were rampant on how a three-year-old Mucad Ibrahim and a 71 year-old Haji-Dawud Nabi who became known for his famous 'Hello Brother' greeting were savagely murdered. Stories also buzzed about Rashid Naem and his 21 year-old son Talha Naem who were both killed during the terror attack. These people were those who migrated from different countries in search of a hope and a better life in New Zealand. All of them considered New Zealand as their new home, yet sadly it quickly turned into their graveyards.

Looking at the attack from a macro point of view, we can conclude that far-right extremism has posed as a real threat not just for Muslim societies, but also for modern European countries and the world. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's swift and beautiful response on the attack showed a very important stance and should be appreciated. However, the rising anti-immigrant hatred and Islamophobia in the west shouldn't be taken lightly. Turning a blind eye on Islamophobia and anti-migrants ideology would never benefit neither the Muslim nor the West societies. Should the West downsize the threat of any racist or Islamophobic thought, one day it will hit them real hard just like a boomerang.

Therefore it is necessary to talk about the terrorist's background ideology. It was



INSAMER
İHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

clear that terrorist was influenced by the ideology of the Crusaders and modern barbaric history of the Balkans, promoted by Serbian nationalistic-chauvinistic anti-Muslim ideology.

Christchurch mosque terrorist has in fact visited the Balkans countries. Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria were among the countries that he visited, and perhaps inspired by. During the attack the terrorist was listening to Serbian nationalist songs. The far-right Chetnik song praising war criminal Radovan Karadzic who led Serbs to conduct ethnic cleansing against Bosnian Muslims could be heard in his video recording. In Serbian mythology, Bosnians are described as Turks who must be killed. The song is popular in the Balkans area, particularly during the Balkans war. The song used to be played to motivate the Serbian soldiers who were fighting against Bosnian Muslims and Croats in 1992-1995. The period is notoriously linked to the genocide of approximately 100,000 Bosnians by Serbians for the sake of preserving its rule over Bosnia. Did

*All of them
considered
New Zealand
as their
new home,
yet sadly
it quickly
turned
into their
graveyards.*

the terrorist had to look hard for his heinous inspiration? Or was it provided for him and for whoever is interested?

Serbian Nationalism and Radicalization

The manifesto published by the terrorist and inscriptions on his guns clearly show that he was inspired by the Balkans' anti-Muslim hatred. The terrorist wrote names of nationalist figures in the Serbian mythology such as Tsar Lazar, Stefan Lazarević and

Milos Obilic, the murderer of the Ottoman Empire ruler Murad I.

Serbian nationalist roots are deeply planted by anti-Muslim rhetoric. The 1389 Kosovo war has served as the platform of a modern Serb nationalist-Orthodox ideology. Every year Serbia commemorates this battle as a glorious historical event in the fight against Muslims.

Nowadays, Serbian radical leaders are still voicing out their hatred and the supremacy of the Serb nation. One of them is Vojislav Seselj. Seselj was tried in the International Criminal Court (ICC) and sentenced for 10 years for the war crimes he committed in the Balkans wars in the 1990's. Since Seselj had already spent 11,5 years in custody in The Hague, the court decided that his sentence had already been served. Today Seselj continues with his nationalist rallies and he is also quoted for saying that he was proud of all his war crimes.¹

Serbian Orthodox church is another authoritarian domination power that is free from the control of the Serbian government. The church is calling for the rule of Serbians in the region. The church also sabotages peace talks among Balkans countries. In 2015 the church was vocal against taking Muslim refugees and claiming it as 'invasion'.²

Christchurch mosque terror attack shows that radicalization in the Balkans is seen by some as a key inspiration and justification for extremisms. Serbian radical Orthodox-Slav nationalism in particular has been formed using the anti-Islam and anti-Ottoman thesis. In one inscription on the rifle, the terrorist wrote the historical word "Turkofagos", literary meaning "Eater of Turks". What is scary about this is that the term "Turkofagos" has been brought back to life by far-right and nationalist groups in honoring Muslims killer.³

Islamophobia Problem

Anti-migration and anti-Muslim rhetoric in Europe and the Balkans media is an undeniable fact. Hatespeech and anti-Muslim propaganda on mainstream media is a huge problem because it consistently radicalizes the countries' societies. At the present, print media, social media, TV programs, and foreign foundations that were established in name of liberty and democracy actually promoted Islamophobia on daily basis. The President of the Sandak Committee for Human Rights even clearly stressed that the media spreads Islamophobia.⁴ The impact then would be obvious. We have witnessed how many Islamophobic-related incidents that have happened in recent years.

Islamophobia in the Balkans is promoted firstly in schools by the use of nationalist myths and hatred discourse. Historiography is its biggest tool in promoting its anti-Muslims and anti-Turkish discourse. Many intellectuals also contribute in this dark atmosphere of hate. History teachings in the Balkans inspire hate, division and growing disputes in the young generations. Balkans national identities promoted banal nationalistic hatred. This is occasionally supported and assisted by some European countries and radical actors in Europe.

Christchurch mosque terror attack should alarm the international public in regards to the Balkans dangerous nationalist discourse. This is particularly in terms of the Serbian ultra-radical view of its history and nationalist interpretation. The international community should assist the Balkan countries to moderate its historiography and discourse. The Balkans needs much more harmonization, eradication of hate and tolerance with their fellow Muslims.

If the Christchurch mosque terror attack is not spoken and studied about as much as the 9/11 attack, and if the perpetrator is not sentenced as gravely according to the crimes that he committed, world peace will be left in the hands of two extremisms. Both of them are inspired and supported by one another. Combating Islamophobia on national and international levels must be the priority of the world. Otherwise, humanity may witness too many other terror attacks in the future. How many more lives should be lost before hatred is eradicated?

How many more lives should be lost before hatred is eradicated?



Endnotes

- ¹ Mersiha Gadzo, Serbian ‘radical’ Vojislav Seselj convicted of war crimes, *Al Jazeera*, April 11, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2018/04/serbian-radical-vojislav-seselj-convicted-war-crimes-180411124256468.html>
- ² “Don’t let Muslim refugees in, says Bulgaria’s Orthodox Church”, *Middle East Eye*, September 26, 2019. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/dont-let-muslim-refugees-says-bulgarias-orthodox-church>
- ³ Yiannis Baboulias, The Balkans Are the World Capital of Islamophobia, *Foreign Policy*, April 1, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/01/the-balkans-are-the-world-capital-of-islamophobia/>
- ⁴ Bojan Perovic, Islamophobia and Media Representation of Refugees in Serbia, *Marmara İletişim Dergisi*, Sayı 25, 2016. DOI: 10.17829/midr.20162520715

