

Valery Perry (ed.). 2019. *Extremism and Violent Extremism in Serbia: 21st-Century Manifestations of an Historical Challenge*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2019. ISBN 978-3-8382-1260-9. 374 pp. €34.90 (Paperback).

While the pairing of 'extremism' and 'violent extremism' as separate analytical terms is a phenomenon of the policy landscape of the 2010s, the movements and ideologies surveyed in Valery Perry's new volume are largely the latest incarnations of developments that scholars of Serbian nationalism have observed for some time. The discourses of historical revisionism, Islamophobia and demographic panic mobilised by the public figures and anonymous internet users analysed in this volume have been resilient enough to hold an ongoing space in the Serbian public sphere ever since the nationalist intellectual turn of the mid-1980s, incorporating the 1990s wars into their narratives, adapting to new social transformations such as the rise of LGBTQ activism, and finding symbiotic mutual interests with the Serbian state. What has changed, however, is the context in which these discourses circulate: firstly, how much of it now takes place in digital spaces (though incidents such as the recent attacks on human rights activists, Belgrade's Pride Info Centre and journalists reporting on rumours of a non-existent Pride parade in Leskovac should remind us that these digital communications are means to an end of harassing minorities and political opponents out of the physical domain); and secondly how the policy landscape of European security has framed the radical right as a threat to be monitored and countered alongside Islamist terrorism, giving rise to the paradigm of '(violent) extremism' to which the collection responds.

This succinct book, researched in the course of 2017–18, explicitly responds to geopolitical developments in the mid-2010s including the global refugee crisis's expansion into south-east Europe and the apparent stepping-up of Russian efforts to support the region's far right: Perry's introduction mentions incidents such as the Russian Night Wolves' visit to Banja Luka, the entity government of Republika Srpska hosting Srpska čast, and the Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić attending the opening of a Nacionalna avangarda conference in autumn 2018. Such events, perhaps especially the spectre of Russian-sponsored destabilisation, have placed non-violent and violent extremism on policymakers' agendas as a necessary subject of knowledge, about which governments and international institutions will have been pressing their Serbian branches to learn more (and indeed the volume has been published with support from the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the UK embassy in Belgrade).

The seven case studies in this volume combine updates to well-known aspects of radical nationalism in Serbia, such as the use of narratives of historic intercommunal violence to legitimise extremism in the present (the subject of Niké Wentholt's chapter), with analyses of novel aspects of the present situation, such as assessing what impact Serbia's reception of refugees prevented from onward travel might have on the potential for extremist radicalisation in communities along the 'Balkan' route (Tijana Rečević's chapter, based on interviews with representatives of local agencies plus members of prominent right-wing groups). Since 'violent extremism' as a policy formulation is designed to cover far-right and Islamist extremism equally, two chapters also deal in part with Islamism among ethnic and religious minorities (Davor Marko's on online opinion leaders and Kristina Ivanović's on young people's reactions to online extremist narratives), though the activities of the extreme right are quite clearly and rightly shown to be on a different scale. The dynamic of 'reciprocal radicalization' (p. 21), as named by Julia Ebner in her study of the mutually reinforcing effects of Islamist and far-right extremism, is nevertheless at work when different radical groups react to each other, giving Perry's introduction its overarching theme: this apparently new concept where the field of Countering Violent Extremism is concerned has long been recognisable to anthropologists, sociologists and media scholars in the escalation of ethnonational antagonisms before the Yugoslav wars.

Though a late addition to the project, the chapter offering most insights into what is new about extreme nationalism in contemporary Serbia is perhaps Boris Milanović's study of discourses among

Serbian users of 4chan's /pol/ board, which has sadly become even more internationally relevant than when the volume was conceived. The accounts of Serbian history and politics that Serbian 4chan users gave, expressed through the site's 4Chan's distinctive textual and visual language and casting the Serb people as heroic warriors in a centuries-old struggle against Islam (the historical narrative with which the wartime leaders of Republika Srpska justified the Bosnian Genocide), seem very likely to have been part of the conduit through which far-right internet users elsewhere acquired their knowledge of Serb nationalism (among them Anders Behring Breivik, whose manifesto frequently lauded the genocidal project of Radovan Karadžić's Republika Srpska as examples for his imaginary crusade). One wartime front-line song honouring Karadžić has even entered the transnational meme culture of the English-language 'alt-right' under an offensive name alluding to the elimination of Muslims; it was this song that the perpetrator of the Christchurch massacre chose to livestream while driving to commit his attacks in March 2019. White nationalist talking points from the US and elsewhere have similarly become part of Serbian far-right sympathisers' everyday digital worlds through the interactions Milanović is able to record. The transnational context in which contemporary Serbian far-right activities and discourses take shape emerges even more strongly from Ana Dević's chapter on Russian academic and political circles' support for the 'new Serbian extreme right' (p. 109) of the last fifteen years, detailing the networks through which Russian intellectual and practical models have reached Serbia but also less well-known cases in which Serbian models have been taken up in Russia (including the founding of a Russian offshoot of the group Obraz). Dević's pessimistic conclusion that liberal civil society has been left on its own in Serbia to defend a democratic political culture against illiberalism and extremism will be solemn reading for the policy audience at whom this book seems particularly aimed. Though its policy orientation means that advancing theory is not its primary concern (and has probably accounted for the apparent tautology of its somewhat ungainly title), future academic studies of extreme nationalism and digital media will also be well served by its snapshot of the Serbian extreme right in 2017–18.

Catherine Baker
University of Hull