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Introduction

What is and where is the Islamic World in 2019? If we understand the Islamic World as all Muslim-majority countries, according to the Pew Research Center (2015) we would find 50 such countries with a total population of over 1.8 billion. The highest percentage (91%) of the total population in a region considering themselves Muslim, can be found in the Middle East-North Africa (MENA). The starting point of Muslim history would be the prophet Muhammad's revelation in the 7th century, followed by the Islamic Golden Age (8th–14th centuries), when Muslims were ahead of the rest of the world in the arts, science, philosophy, and technology. This period is still remembered and cherished with pride by both Sunni and Shia Muslims, the two biggest denominations within Islam, which – despite common misconceptions in the West – is not a monolith but splits into different religious schools and branches. The modern era has been marked by the more or less direct colonial domination of European powers which left its legacy in many states belonging now to the Islamic world. Much of today's turmoil in the MENA region has its roots in the colonial times and the fault lines drawn by the European politicians. However, the blame cannot be wholly assigned to external powers: the list of factors contributing to the Middle East's present complex and often difficult situation is long and includes many internal issues.

In 2019, a kaleidoscope of old and new conflicts in the Middle East appeared. Despite the defeat of the Syrian opposition and the retaking of large swaths of land by pro-regime forces in 2018, the war in Syria is far from over. A final settlement of the conflict in Yemen is still a distant possibility. Similarly, despite extensive Kuwaiti mediation, there are no indications that the Gulf crisis will end in the near future. Israel is working with the US in order to erase the Palestinian question (the US has already recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel)[1]. Washington's re-imposing of sanctions on Iran made analysts and politcial scientists wonder if the Iran crisis is a prelude to a new war desired by at least a part of the Trump administration or just a "circus"[2].

[1] M. Kabalan, *What will the Middle East look like in 2019?*, Al Jazeera, 1 January 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/middle-east-2019-181231152428686.html, retrieved 23.07.2019.

[2] D. Walsh, *Iran Crisis or 'Circus'? A Weary Middle East Wonders*, "The New York Times", 16 May 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/16/world/middleeast/iran-war-fears.html, retrieved 23.07.2019.

During the Cold War, the situation was simple – basically, the Middle East was divided between the Soviet and US camps. Presently, the divisions are greater and deeper. One may identify three camps: the so-called "resistance" axis of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Hezbollah, supported to a certain extent by Russia and China; the counter-revolution axis made up of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt and Jordan and backed by Israel; and the pro-change axis of Qatar and Turkey[3]. The outcome of their struggles is unpredictable, yet under today's circumstances the future of the region does not seem to be bright. Most significantly, the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of the Arab uprisings is bringing little hope that there will be peace and stability in the Middle East.

However, Muslims do not only inhabit the Middle East. They constitute 89% of the total population in Central Asia, 40% in Southeast Asia, 31% in South Asia, 30% in Sub-Saharan Africa, and around 6% in Europe. Their problems vary depending on the time and location. This volume deals with a wide range of issues relating to the history and politics of Muslims. 19 chapters have been divided into four parts: 8 chapters in English, 7 chapters in Polish, 3 chapters in Russian and one chapter in Arabic, thereby giving voice to authors from different corners of the world and from different academic backgrounds.

The English part begins with a chapter by M. Yonous Jami and İsmail Gökdeniz who touch upon the very general, yet important, subject of the relation between religion and politics in Islam. Despite the emergent consensus on the right to freedom of conscience and on the need for some sort of separation between church and state, Islam has traditionally held that all people owe obedience to Allah's will. M. Yonous Jami and İsmail Gökdeniz stress the difference between two groups of Islamic scholars – these who, inspired by Western thought, recommend a complete separation of religion and politics and those who perceive religion and politics as strongly overlapping. M. Yonous Jami and İsmail Gökdeniz enumerate the most important arguments used by adversaries and conclude that, in the Quran, one may find confirmation of both standpoints.

Issues of religion and politics are present in subsequent chapters. In the second paper, Wail Ismail and Muhammad Hijab Al-Huqbani scrutinise the methods used in the Saudi Arabian high schools to teach the Quran and other Islamic subjects. They notice that, despite the Quran stressing the importance of persuasion, dialogue and discussion, traditional methods of teaching Islamic knowledge lack interactivity which makes the whole process of learning monotonous and inefficient. The reason for the absence of interactivity is the inability of the traditional methods to cope with the challenges of the modern world – most teachers of religion are not ready to answer tough questions. The authors argue that in-school debates raise the level of students' motivation and interest in the subject, and thus strongly recommend such teaching techniques.

[3] M. Kabalan, *op. cit.*

Giorgia Perletta's paper presents the Iranian hardliners, the group that took power with the presidential election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad in 2005 but that since 2013 has played an opposition role. Thanks to Perletta's in-depth analysis, the reader gains insight into Iranian internal politics and learns about the changes in sources of legitimacy of this movement as well as changes in symbols and narratives that helped hardliners to gain and maintain power. At first, hardliners have been depicted as "neoconservative", due to the excessive use of Islamic discourse of social justice and economic equity in addition to revolutionary themes which attracted poor strata of the population, but later on, during Ahmadinejad's second mandate, the group has been labelled a "deviant current", as they allegedly deviated from the founding principles of the Islamic republic. Presently, they are renewing their narrative, calling themselves the "government of spring", and intending to return to power after their marginalisation in 2013.

That same year was a turning point in Iran-Azerbaijan relations – after the advent of Hassan Rouhani, they have significantly improved. Elnara Garibova's article looks back at 100 years of Azerbaijan's history – the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) declared its independence from the Russian Empire on May 28th, 1918. The ADR was the third democratic republic in the Turkic world and Muslim world, after the Crimean People's Republic and Idel-Ural Republic. Although it only operated until 1920, it has left important marks on the history of the region. Under the ADR, a secular and democratic government system was developed which brought profound changes in various areas – i.e. health care, public education and women's rights – Azerbaijan was one of the first countries in the world, and the very first majority-Muslim nation, to grant women equal political rights with men. In 1991, Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence for the second time.

From Azerbaijan, readers then move to Serbia. Patryk Bukowski's paper presents Muslims in the Republic of Serbia who – according to official statistics – constitute a small minority of 3.10% of the total population, the majority of whom are Orthodox Christians. Despite being small in number, Serbian Muslims are not a homogeneous community as they follow different paths – Hanafi, Sufi, Wahhabi – and are represented by two religious organisations – the Islamic Community in Serbia and the Islamic Community of Serbia. The constitutional and statutory solutions defining the functioning of the Muslim minority in Serbia are generally beneficial for Muslims, yet, after 2006 some tensions were not avoided, although mainly caused by ethnic factors. As the Muslims living in Serbia are mostly of Bosniac or Albanian origin it influences the Serbian relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and with Kosovo, the latter being a convenient base for Muslim fundamentalists. Moreover,

Muslim countries and organisations interfere in Serbian-Bosnian and Serbian-Albanian relations because they are interested in securing the rights of Muslims in Serbia. Thus, a minority religion may serve as a pretext to interfere in the internal affairs of a country.

The transnational Sufi communities investigated by Oleg Yarosh are also small minorities, yet they still enrich the Western religious landscape. Yarosh offers a typology of Sufi movements in the West, describing their history and development with special emphasis on Naqshbandiyya-Haqqaniyya, Burkhaniyya and Haydariyya-Shadhiliyya. The author shows how these movements, which were founded in Muslim-majority countries, spread and flourished in the world thanks to migration, missionary activity and conversions. Yarosh notices a remarkable feature of Western Sufism, namely the commune model. The self-sustaining communes, like "Haus Schnede" Sufi commune in Germany, were usually located in the rural areas and brought together people of diverse beliefs and attitudes, generally following different spiritual trends. It is a paradox that the religious individualism of Western Sufis on the one hand undermines inherited religious traditions, and, on the other, facilitates reinventing local identities built around "redemptive sociality" and the charisma of a Sufi Sheikh who is treated by his followers as a living saint able to transmit "supernatural powers" to the community.

The seventh chapter, by Dorit Gottesfeld and Ronen Yitzhak, brings the reader back to the Middle East in the mid-20th century to present an unknown aspect of Israeli-Jordanian relations – the historically important checkpoint located on the main road between Jerusalem and Ramallah called the Mandelbaum Gate. It was the only open crossing between Israel and Jordan and operated effectively in the years between 1948 and 1967. This quiet, peaceful haven in the midst of a turbulent region was an expression of normalisation between Israel and Jordan and a central meeting point for Palestinian families who otherwise would not have been able to meet. Gottesfeld and Yitzhak approach the Mandelbaum Gate from both historical and literary viewpoints. They perceive this well-known checkpoint as the proof of a different face of Israeli-Jordanian relations during the period under discussion as well as the source of inspiration for such prominent Palestinian writers as Emile Habibi.

The last chapter in English, by Md Sazedul Islam, discusses another Muslim group which could be perceived as unprivileged, namely the Muslim minority in India. Compared with other minorities, the socio-economic level of Muslims is even lower than Dalits (that is, backward castes), though they constitute 14.2% of the total population. Indian Muslims feel marginalised and often insecure. Hindutva ("Hinduness"), the predominant form of Hindu nationalism in India, promotes i.a. cow protection as cows are sacred animals in Hinduism.

There have been numerous cases of Muslims being attacked and even killed by Hindu nationalists for slaughtering cows and eating beef. Cow slaughter in India remains a perpetual source of tensions between Hindu and Muslim and Dalit communities, and – according to Md Sazedul Islam – also a reason behind Muslim emigration and Muslim terrorism on the Indian Subcontinent.

The Polish part of the volume starts with a paper by Agnieszka Kuczkiewicz-Fraś which is very close thematically to the previous one as it explains the historical, political and social reasons behind the persecution of the Muslim minority inhabiting Sri Lanka. The major groups that make up Sri Lanka's almost 2 million Muslims (10% of the total population) are Sri Lankan Moors, Indian Moors and the Malays. Muslims are divided between mainly agriculturists living in the east, and traders who are dispersed across the island. Kuczkiewicz-Fraś describes in detail these subgroups who have suffered attacks from Buddhist Sinhalese nationalists. There are proofs that at least some of these attacks – motivated by fear of strong Muslim identity, high fertility rate as well as economic and ideological links to Saudi Arabia – were planned rather than spontaneous. If the situation does not change, Kuczkiewicz-Fraś foresees the radicalisation (Wahhabisation) of Sri Lankan Muslims.

The most important ideological adversary of Sunni Wahhabi Saudi Arabia is Shiite Iran whose political system is the subject of Jakub Gajda's text. These two countries view themselves as Islamic theocracies, however, contrary to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran wants to be called an 'Islamic democracy' – a kind of compromise between the state following sharia law and Western liberal democracy. Certainly, the Islamic Republic of Iran does not imitate any Western political model but chooses its own way. The role of religion, formally having the upper hand, is not as obvious as one may suspect. It is rather the specificity of the political culture of Iran which decides about the functioning of the country. To reinforce his argumentation, Gajda compares political systems of Iran and neighbouring Afghanistan.

From Asia readers then move to Africa, as Marcin Krawczuk analyses Amharic Ethiopian manuscripts written in Arabic script (ağäm). These manuscripts are much less researched than analogous writtings in Hausa or Swahili due to the fact that the culture of Ethiopian Muslims is a relatively new area of study. Krawczuk presents basic information on the context in which these manuscripts were created and transmitted, problems with adjusting Arabic script to Amharic language, and the types of the written texts. Moreover, Krawczuk stresses tha fact that ağäm manuscripts encapsulate the culture of Ethiopian Islam. The latter has been influenced by religious brotherhoods and cult of saints as well as difficult relations with Orthodox Christians who were a majority religion till the end of the 20th century. The latest challenge (after 1991) is

linked to the strong pressure from the Salafist reformers who want to change the face of traditional Ethiopian Islam.

Slovenia, although a smaller and far more homogenous country than Russia, must also work out its policy towards minorities, i.a. the 2.4% Muslim minority. The Muslims in Slovenia are ethnically mostly Bosniacs and other Slavic Muslims. Aleksandra Grąbkowska studies the image of Islam in the week after 9/11 in two Slovenian dailies – 'Delo' and 'Dnevnik'. This cultural studies analysis encompasses issues related to such concepts as 'Us' vs. 'Others', 'Orientalism', 'Clash of civilisations' as well as 'Framing'.

Similar notions of 'Us' vs. 'Others' are explored by Aleksandra M. Różalska. In her text she analyses the dominant narratives and visual depictions of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in contemporary Polish weekly magazines (2015–2018) with a special focus on their front pages. She examines the selected press titles representing different socio-political worldviews and aiming at various audiences, such as 'Do rzeczy', 'W sieci', 'Gazeta Polska' and 'Niedziela'. The conclusion is that the Polish society and mass media yield to the dominant discourse defining a refugee as the 'Other', enemy, terrorist, or invader.

Similar approach, namely press analysis, is employed by Andrzej Stopczyński. The aim of his chapter is to outline the debate in the Polish press in 1994–1996 regarding Chechnya. Two leading weeklies are analysed – 'Polityka' and 'Wprost'. The author singles out such common themes as the outbreak of the Chechen War, military operation in Grozny, the course of war (Budyonnovsk), Chechen leaders and the consequences of the Chechen war.

The paper by Katarzyna Wasiak seems to be a natural continuation of Grąbkowska, Różalska and Stopczyński's texts as Wasiak brings up the topic of the Chechen refugees who have been living in Poland for almost 30 years. She wonders whether they are perceived as 'Us' or 'Others' by ethnic Poles. Chechens are the second biggest refugee group in Poland after Ukrainians. Main assessment criteria of this group is international situation, especially in the Islamic world, used by the populists who have been using fear to build a wall between the Poles and Chechens. According to Wasiak, the populists managed to strengthen the stereotypes and equated the term 'refugee' with term 'Muslim' – both used pejoratively. The Chechens have been equated with 'Others', most often dangerous 'Others'.

The Russian part of the book starts with the chapter by Arzu Sadykhova who explores the European Islam promoted by Tariq Ramadan – so far the only academic, philosopher, and writer in Europe who was also educated in Al-Azhar, Sunni Islam's oldest and most prestigious university. Despite the fact that Euro-Islam or European Islam has been promoted since the 1990s by various ideologists, Tariq Ramadan remains its chief proponent. He wants to reform Islam in such a way that Muslims living in Europe would feel comfortable

and do not clash with the receiving society or with their own consciousness. However, his ideas meet rejection from the majority of Muslims living in the West and East. Sadykhova believes that this reaction is due to the fact that Ramadan is trying to become the founder of a new Western or European *madhhab* – that is, Islamic school of thought.

Sergey Chirun's paper also deals with Muslims in Europe but compares them with Muslims living in Russia. The author shows the relation between the Islamisation process and the radicalisation of political Islam. Chirun claims that Islamist projects cannot unify Muslims from all over the world as, for Muslims, there are far more important political issues, including such factors as diverse interpretations of the Quran, ethnic and tribal relations as well as different attitudes towards modernisation and secularism. Nevertheless, the radicalisation of political Islam may reveal religious and political contradictions, thus the Islamist factor could play a destabilising role in the context of globalisation. The answer for this dangerous trend should be a coordinated effort of the international community to counter radical Islamism. Chirun advises launching and running PR campaigns stressing the shared values of Islam and Christianity in order to de-radicalise political Islam.

The last text in Russian revolves around Muslim women's issues. Galina Miškinienė's chapter investigates the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars' periodicals published in the interwar period. Lithuanian Tatars, who since the end of the 14th century settled in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, lost their native tongue and ethnic distinctiveness at the beginning of the 17th century due to various political, economic and social factors. Nevertheless, they kept their religion – Islam. Their legal status changed a few times before the 20th century – sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. It was during the interwar period (1918–1939) that Tatar cultural and religious life flourished. Several periodicals were published, including 'Tatar Life', 'Islamic Review', 'Tatar Yearbook'. Galina Miškinienė uses these sources to evaluate how they presented women's issues and the life of Muslim-Tatar women in the interwar period.

The last paper – in Arabic – is kind of practical discussion of some theoretical points from the first chapter, as Moussa Fatahine shows the role of the Sunni, and more precisely Ash'ari doctrine as well as Maliki school of jurisprudence and Sufi thought in the social and political life of contemporary Algeria. Until today, the views of Abu al-Hasan Al-Ash'ari (c. 874–936), the founder of Asharite theology, and his followers, especially Muhammad ibn Ali as-Senussi (1787–1859), constitute the most important references to religious discourse present in Algerian mosques, Quranic schools and Islamic cultural centers. Additionally, the Maliki school, one of the four major *madhhabs* (schools of thought) of Islamic jurisprudence within Sunni Islam, founded by Malik ibn

Anas in the 8th century, has been adopted in almost all North Africa countries, thus also in Algeria. According to Fatahine, there is no separation between the religious authority and national authority in Algeria – the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Supreme Islamic Council are two important institutions to monitor and regulate religious discourse and activity in Algeria. The state tries to counter dangerous external influences by official promotion of religious moderation. The author perceives institutionalised Sunni orthodoxy as the best defense against Islamism and terrorism.

From this short review, one may easily deduce the predominance of political and contemporary perspectives which appear in the majority of the presented chapters. This is supplemented by historical perspectives, which the editors find extremely valuable because 'You have to know the past to understand the present', as Carl Sagan once said. What is also rewarding is combining different geographical and linguistic perspectives – listening to the voices of scholars not only from Western countries but also from the Middle East, Asia and Eastern Europe. Although very different, the collected texts have much in common: there are recurrent topics of migration, marginalisation, and modernisation of Muslim minorities, but likewise radicalisation and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The latter will be important challenges to meet in the rapidly globalising world. It is necessary to prepare in advance and to work out the best solutions together.

On behalf of the editorial team
Izabela Kończak