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Religion as Securitization in Central and Eastern Europe. Edited by András Máté-Tóth and Kinga Povedák.

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The present volume, edited by András Máté-Tóth and Kinga Povedák, sets out to explore the intersection of collective victimization and religion. The authors primarily focus on the Central and Eastern European context. The volume's central theme explores the relationship between religion and society within the context of the security complex. The authors have built on Máté-Tóth's theoretical framework in their studies. The authors adopt the Copenhagen School's approach to security policy as a point of reference, arguing that securitization is a discursive process in which a problem is conceptualized as an existential threat to a valued 'referential object' (e.g., nation, culture, religion). The acceptance of this threat by the audience, according to the authors, justifies the implementation of extraordinary measures to avert the alleged (or real) threat.

The team of András Máté-Tóth situates religion and religious communities within this theoretical framework. However, it is evident from the individual studies that most authors are not security policy experts, which results in the criticisms of the various schools, particularly the Copenhagen School mentioned above, being less prominent. Contributions from specialists in security policy or the inclusion of its broader context would have improved the quality of the individual studies. Notwithstanding this, the work is valuable, particularly concerning the foundational studies. Key concepts are presented, such as the speech act (based on Austin's theory) and the objective and constructed aspects of the security threat with religion. The legitimacy of the security actor, or even the question of manipulation, is linked to religion. The authors' decision to reveal the use of religion by political and religious actors to advance their agendas is commendable. The notion of collective victimization, a concept of paramount importance to the region, is also anchored in this paradigm. The concept is characterized by a sense of shared belonging to

a group (whether national, ethnic, or religious) that is firmly entrenched in the region's historical memory. This sense of belonging is deeply rooted in the collective trauma and narratives transmitted across generations. The authors further explore other pivotal concepts, including collective memory, historical narratives, and group identity, drawing upon the principles of narrative psychology. However, the authors from diverse academic backgrounds appear to interpret these key concepts differently.

The volume would have benefited from greater transdisciplinarity, with research findings being more intertwined. This would have required a specific methodology. Notwithstanding this, the work presents significant findings and definitions. The volume addresses the functions of victimization, both in its inclusive and exclusive forms. It also explores hostile attitudes towards external groups. While these concepts have been explored in other works, this volume is noteworthy for its focus on an Eastern European regional context. Furthermore, the text explores the relationship between securitization and collective victimization. The authors employ a range of historical analogies, contextualizing them within contemporary events. They conclude from both historical examples and current experience that fear of re-victimization can lead groups to support preventive violence or aggressive policies. Religion is central to the volume and individual studies, as they observe how religion is instrumentalized. The analysis examines how political actors utilize religious concepts, symbols, and narratives. These include the 'sectarian threat,' the 'Islamic threat,' the 'LGBTQ+ threat,' and 'imported holidays'. Furthermore, certain political actors invoke religion as a basis for legitimacy, claiming to defend security and tradition. In some cases, however, religious leaders come close to identifying threats to broader society, often in collaboration with political actors. In this context, religious and political actors present themselves as defenders.

A notable strength of the book lies in its integration of the concepts employed in international literature on security within the context of Hungary, Central and Eastern Europe. András Máté-Tóth's observation that the region is characterized by a strong sense of historical trauma, fear of foreign influence, and exclusive victimization runs through the volume. This dynamic engenders a favourable environment for the appropriation of security. Examples less familiar to the international reader, such as Hungarian Trianon trauma, anti-communist sentiments, the refugee crisis, the 'Soros' and 'EU-sceptic' campaigns, and the new pagan movements, are also examined through the lens of religion and security. Subsequent analysis will demonstrate, through the utilization of case studies, the pervasiveness of this collective belief of victimization within Central and Eastern Europe and its capacity to render societies more susceptible to manipulation. It will be demonstrated that political and religious actors can exploit this vulnerability by framing different issues

as existential threats, often drawing on historical narratives and traumas. Religion itself is ensnared in this security paradigm.

Kinga Povedák's observations, drawn from the context of communist Hungary, underscore this point. Departing from the conventional discourse on state repression of religion, the study delves into the experiences and responses of the Hungarian populace to the regime's endeavours to regulate religion. The communist state, despite its outward appearance of control, harboured a deep-seated paranoia regarding religious movements that were organized from the grassroots. Concurrently, the official church hierarchy collaborated with the state to ensure its survival, whilst concurrently suppressing internal renewal movements.

Réka Szilárdi and Gabriella Judit Kengyel further explore the issue of securitization and collective victimization. They explore the dangerous interplay between how societies frame threats (securitization) and how groups construct identities around shared experiences of suffering (collective victimization). Utilizing the theoretical framework of the Copenhagen school of securitization and narrative psychology, the authors contend that a pre-existing sentiment of collective victimization renders societies more vulnerable to perceiving challenges as existential threats, frequently orchestrated by political and religious actors seeking to fortify their hold on power. While the study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) phenomenon, it draws heavily on Hungarian examples. The authors contend that religion functions as both an instrument of securitization and a site for the unfolding of securitization processes.

Srđan M. Jovanović analyses the political currents within the Serbian Orthodox Church, highlighting the Church's influential role in Serbian politics, focusing on the discourse surrounding the deeply contested territory of Kosovo. Utilizing ProfilerPlus software, the author has sought to analyse the official statements of the Orthodox Church. This enables a systematic and quantifiable examination of the political rhetoric of the Church. The result of this analysis is the creation of a dictionary of religious secularization. The discourse surrounding Kosovo has evolved to portray it as a threatened 'sacred space,' with Kosovar Albanians, frequently linked to 'extremist' or 'Islamist' factions, being cast as an existential threat. András Máté-Tóth explores churches as strategic actors in his study. Drawing on the Copenhagen School, he examines the threats identified by the churches and how their rhetoric has shaped their social perception. The study offers a compelling argument for how religious institutions can strategically utilize language and framing to achieve significant political and social power.

Silviu Rogobete and Serghei Pricopiuc explore the potential implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The authors provide a detailed analysis of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, exploring

its transformation into a tool of state power and its role in perpetuating the conflict. This study does not merely examine the political influence of religion; instead, it delves into the process by which an existential threat to the state legitimizes extraordinary action. The authors analyse in detail how the Russian state under Putin has utilized the Russian Orthodox Church, interweaving it into the fabric of national security and even associating it with nuclear strategy. The analysis demonstrates the capacity of religious institutions to be employed as instruments of political influence. Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik's article, "The Orthodox Church and the Russian-Speaking in Latvian Political Security Discourse," examines the complex relationship between the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia, the Latvian Orthodox Church (historically linked to Moscow), and the perception of these groups as potential security threats. The article highlights a dichotomy between legitimate security concerns and the potential utilization of securitization as a mechanism for the exclusion of minorities and the restriction of religious freedom.

Viktor Yelensky also writes about the Russo-Ukrainian war under the title "Symbol of Our Kinship Versus Badge of Our Bondage." In this work, he analyses how Eastern Orthodoxy has become a central battleground in the Russo–Ukrainian conflict. He demonstrates how both nations have utilized the church as a tool for political and military purposes. Egdūnas Račius' analysis focuses on Muslim religious organizations in south-eastern Europe. The author posits the argument that governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, and northern Macedonia are compelling Muslim organizations to emulate Christian churches. Concurrently, these states portray certain forms of Islam as a security threat. Račius employs case studies to demonstrate how these 'national Muslim churches' utilize their position to control religious discourse and stifle dissent, frequently with state support.

The study by Michaela Grančayová, Aliaksei Kazharski, and Clarissa Tabosa offers a comparison of how religious actors in Poland and Slovakia thematize social issues. The authors explore the relationship between religious institutions and political actors in the two countries regarding multiculturalism, sexuality, and gender issues. While political elites frequently depict migrants as a threat to our 'Christian civilization,' Catholic institutions are more accommodating towards migrants. Conversely, concerning issues of gender identity and sexuality, conservative politicians and the Church frequently concur that the LGBTQ+ community poses a threat to the 'traditional' family unit. The present study offers a nuanced depiction of the intricate relationship between religion and politics, emphasizing the multifaceted dynamics of securitization within the Central European context. The authors demonstrate limited sensitivity to the significant transformations that are taking place in the fundamentally conservative Slovak and especially Polish Church in the light of Vatican II. Notwithstanding, the volume under review here

is a commendable initiative for presenting the Eastern European context regarding religion and security. To this end, it is recommended that the work be continued and further research conducted to incorporate additional countries from the region and provide more in-depth insights into security policy.