

Tackling Exclusion and Radicalization through Islamic Practices and Discourses: Case Study of Muslim Organizations in Switzerland

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Abstract : In Switzerland, as well as in other European countries, specific social issues related to Muslims have recently emerged in public debates. In addition to the question of terrorism and radicalization, Muslim migrant populations are highly affected by social problems such as crime, poverty, marginalization, and overrepresentation in prisons. This situation has drawn the state's attention to the need for implementing new responses to the challenges of religious extremism, crime, and social exclusion particularly involving Muslims. While local authorities have begun to implement trainings and projects to tackle these new social issues, Muslim grassroots associations have developed some initiatives to address the needs of the population, mainly focusing on problems related to Islam and Muslims but also addressing the rest of the population. Finally, some local authorities have acknowledged the need for these alternative initiatives as well as their positive contributions to society. The study is based on a Ph.D. research grounded on a case study of three Islamic networks in Switzerland, including various local organizations tackling social exclusion and religious radicalization through innovative grassroots projects. Using an ethnographic approach, it highlights, on the one hand, the specificities of such organizations by exploring the role of Islamic norms within the social work practices. On the other hand, it focuses on the inclusion of such faith-based projects within the mainstream society, observing the relationships between Islamic organisations and both the state and other civil society organizations. Finally, the research study aims to identify some innovative ways and trends of social work involving the inclusion of community key actors within the process. Results showed similar trends with Islamic social work developed in other European countries such as France and the United Kingdom, but also indicate a range of specificities linked to the Swiss socio-political context, which shapes the involvement of religious actors in different ways. By exploring faith-based commitment to addressing concrete social issues, the study finally contributes to shedding light on the link between Islam, social work and activism within the European context.

Keywords : exclusion, Islam, Muslims, social work, Switzerland

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