



Wandering Souls

Tobie Nathan, Stephen Muecke (Translator)

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DESCRIPTION

‘The problem of radical Islamic youth,’ writes Tobie Nathan, ‘has not only invaded the media but it has anaesthetised our brains, invaded our waking hours and trashed our ideals. Right now might be a good time to reassess how much we need to change our thinking, our theories and our modes of action.’

In September 2014 the French government entrusted Tobie Nathan with the task of counselling radicalized young people who had been drawn to jihadism. Having left his native Cairo at the age of eight and migrated to France, Nathan had personal experience of some of the challenges faced today by young people from migrant backgrounds. In this book he recounts his experiences of some of the young people he met and counselled. He describes what he heard, felt, perceived and conceived in his encounters with them and with their loved ones as he tried to understand the forces running through them and tried to grasp what their fate held in store for them. He wanted to understand how, over a period of a few weeks or months, a hash-smoking delinquent from an estate became a Hadith philosopher, how a stylish young girl from a nice neighbourhood became a warrior in a burqa looking for a husband with a Kalashnikov, and how a young high-school nerd turned into a jihadist determined to fight in the killing fields of Syria. In so doing he shows that the history of radicalizations is not the history of ‘natures’ but of metamorphoses – an unpredictable journey with moments of immobility punctuated by sudden intoxication at the thought of other futures. It is a history of wandering souls who find themselves unable to form a narrative of origin and in thrall to harmful forces but who may find a way home one day.

This deeply humane and engaging book will be of great interest to everyone concerned with the issue of radicalization and with the deep and growing challenges our societies face in accommodating difference.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tobie Nathan is professor emeritus of psychology at the University Paris-VIII. He is a leading proponent of ethnopsychiatry – a blend of anthropology and clinical psychology – and he established the first ethnopsychiatric clinic in France in 1979.

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