

Book Reviews

ISIS: Inside the army of terror. By Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan. Regan Arts. New York, 2015. Pp. 270. ISBN: 978-1-941393-57-4.

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With brutal force and horrific beheadings of hostages, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has shocked the world. They have conquered massive territories in both countries – equal to the size of the United Kingdom – and promise to create a new Muslim caliphate under the strict dictates of Sharia law.

In *ISIS: inside the Army of terror*, American journalist Michael Weiss and Syrian analyst Hassan Hassan explain how these violent extremists evolved from a nearly defeated Iraqi insurgent group into a jihadi army of international volunteers who, with sickly produced murder ideas, are spreading violence and mayhem across the Middle East. Beginning with the early days of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of ISIS's first incarnation as "al-Qaeda in Iraq", Weiss and Hassan explain who the key players are – from their elusive leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to the former Saddam Baathists in their ranks – where they come from, how they have attracted both local and global support, and how they operate – from their social media strategy to illicit oil revenues.

Political and military maneuvering by the United States, Iraq, Iran, and Syria have fueled ISIS's astonishing and explosive expansion. Drawing on original interviews with former US military officials and current ISIS fighters, the authors also reveal the intensive struggles within the movement itself, as well as ISIS's bloody hatred of Shiite Muslims, which is generating another sectarian War in the region just like the one the US thought it had stopped in 2011 in Iraq. A new generation of terror has dawned in the world and to understand how to stop it, we must understand who they are. This book is a handy tool to achieve that end.

One of the most informative part of the book deals with the profiles of ISIS recruits. The authors conducted interviews with dozens of ISIS associates who generate inside Syria and Iraq in a range of sectors, including religious clerics,

fighters, provincial emirs, security officials and sympathizers. The result of the authors' survey was startling: what draws people to ISIS could easily bring them together to any number of cults or totalitarian movements, even those ideologically contradictory to Salafist Jihadism. Far from homogenous, the organization spans an array of backgrounds and belief systems, from godless opportunists to war profiteers to pragmatic tribesmen to committed takfiris (Pp.153-169).

ISIS has married its authoritarian governance with a remarkably successful war economy, a phenomenon the authors call "takfirinomics". The group controlled oil fields in eastern Syria, for example, did dedicate some of its revenue to run schools and supply electricity, telecommunications, water, food, and other services. Some villages and towns saw a decline in such services because ISIS distributed oil revenues to other towns under its control in Syria and Iraq, establishing its own pan-territorial patronage system. As a result, in oil-rich areas, warLordism – a side effect of strictly localized rebel governance – dropped steadily (Pp. 232-233).

Regulations and price control are another area in which ISIS's governance proved successful. It banned fishermen from using dynamite and electricity to catch fish. It also prohibited residents from using the chaos of war to stake new land claims. ISIS also limited the profit margins on oil by-products, ice, flour, and other essential commodities. Oil was a major revenue generator for ISIS until the coalition air strikes began; before that, ISIS earned millions of dollars a month from oil in Syria and Iraq. Food was plenty and most of it came from Turkey or Iraq. Borders were open. More significantly, *ghanima* (war spoils, which is ISIS's definition encompasses robbery and theft) is one of the group's largest and most valuable source of income. ISIS seized millions of dollars' worth of American and foreign military equipment. Artifacts are also lucrative for ISIS, including golden statues and coins being smuggled into Turkey.

More than one decade after the US invaded Iraq, a deadly insurgency adept at multiple forms of warfare has proved resilient, adaptable, and resolved to carry on fighting. ISIS has promised both death and a return to the ancient glories of Islam. Thousands have lined up to join it, and even more have already fallen victim to it. This is perhaps the first book to fully explain what ISIS is seeking and why they are such a threat to the world.

Islam and gender: Bangladesh perspective. By Shah Abdul Hannan. Translated by Mohammad Shawkat Ali and edited by Md. Mahmudul Hasan and Raudah Mohd. Yunus. Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT), March 2016, Pp.132. ISBN: 978-084-8471-43-2.

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Shah Abdul Hannan, ex-Secretary of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, social worker, Islamic thinker and a writer of a good number of books on Islam-related issues. Though graduated from the western education system, he made strenuous efforts at understanding Islam from authentic sources, reflecting and searching for intellectually satisfying answers for modern challenges and queries. He has written several treaties on the interstices between Islam and gender. Committed to Islam both at the emotional and intellectual levels, Shah Abdul Hannan is a man very much in tune with contemporary realities. He uses *naql* (scripture), *a'ql* (intellect) and the shari'ah in dealing with contemporary challenges and issues. He has produced some intuitively inspired and inspirational discourses of which the book under review, *Islam and Gender*, is a shining example.

The book under review is a collection of different essays published over more than two decades. It contains about Introduced and followed by two essays written by the two editors, the book tries to deal with legal, social and cultural aspects of women's position in Islam. The essays can be categorized both as theoretical and practical. Some of the essays are about issues which have been bones of contention between feminists and Muslim traditionalists, like the issue of grandson's right to the grandfather's property.

Instead of going into legal or theoretical hairsplitting, Shah Abdul Hannan has tried to explain things from a commonsensical point of view, which will appeal to the common educated and not so highly educated readers, including non-resident Bangladeshis. The book contains write-up on some 30 topics excluding the introduction and conclusion. Some of the write-ups are of one-paragraph in length while others are somewhat larger in size. Some of the essays like the one titled "The Islamic Dress Code" deals with the issue in a cogent manner implicitly responding to the criticisms made of Islam by feminists and believers in alien ideologies. The essay on the right to maintenance of divorced

women is also noteworthy. The argument advanced to the effect that a divorced woman be maintained by her former husband as being undignified for the woman, is very cogent. The essays on finding solutions to social problems like prostitution, the proliferation of pornography, the need of keeping a balance between family life and the demands of a professional carrier for women, are also thought provoking. All these are treated within the framework of Islam and its laws, values and norms. There is no doubt that the book will be of immense value to people engaged in Islamic Da'wah in Bangladesh and in the world around.

It should be noted that the essays published in this book were originally written in Bengali language over a period of some twenty years, since the late 1980s. These essays were printed in the form of articles and commentaries. These essays, therefore, are not based upon research even though they are not contrary to Islamic teachings. It is therefore necessary to give these articles an academic shape.

These well-written articles should definitely be improved. It would be useful to have a chapter explaining Islam as religion, law, worldview, and a comprehensive civilization. There are few other things that can be added. One thing that can perhaps be added in the next edition is more references from the world and Islamic history. Secondly, there should be a glossary of the different terms used in the book and their definitions. Thirdly, a short reading list should be provided for those who would want to go deeper into the issues. Fourthly, the translation should be upgraded and the many typos need to be corrected. These additions would give the book an academic look. The reviewer has also noted repetitions in the source texts which need to be pruned.

There is no doubt that the present book is one of the best, if not the best book, on the issue of Bangladeshi women and Islam published in Bangladesh. The *Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought* (BIIT) and its parent organization the *International Institute of Islamic Thought* (IIIT) deserves to be congratulated for publishing such a book. The editor and the translators deserve our appreciation for a job well-done. The two articles at the beginning and the end of the book also of a very high standard and clarify many issues. The author, Shah Abdul Hannan, while being grounded in and committed to Islam, uses his reasoning powers, taking into account the empirical reality as well as academic and ideological debates centering around the topic, in a very lucid manner.

It is hoped that with the translation into English of the essays of the author, the wider world will become acquainted with Bangladeshi Islamic literature. Bangladeshi Muslims, belonging to different schools of Islamic thought (*maslak / mazhab/maktab e fikr*), should read the book as it will make them aware of the intellectual debates between the propatogonists and antagonist of Islam in Bangladesh and other countries of the world. It may even enlighten some of the madrasah educated clerics (*Ulama*).

Muslim women promoting peace. By Zaleha Kamaruddin and Abdul Rashid Moten. International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) Press, 2016. Pp. XXVI+184. ISBN: 978-967-418-448-3 (pbk).

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Islam is a universal religion followed by over 1.5 billion people in the world. Though Islam is essentially a religion of peace, non-Muslims' views of Islam, barring a few neutral or mildly positive stances, have been negative. Most non-Muslims consider Muslim headscarves, mosques, and minarets as archaic, traditional, anti-democratic and, hence, a threat to the West. The fact that Islam emphasizes the principle of unity and equality of mankind to promote peace has been neglected. The Qur'anic call for harmony, amity and cooperation among people in all societies for the success and stability of all has been belittled.

The problem is compounded by the total neglect of women in promoting peace. Muslim women are thought about in various unflattering ways. The most common idea of a Muslim woman, for example, is that of the oppressed victim of Islam. Muslim women are portrayed as a veiled, silent woman imprisoned by her religion and policed by Muslim men. This is far from the truth. Yet few books have been dedicated to Muslim women who aspire to change the world through organizations and mobilization in the pursuit of peace. The book under review does a good job of explaining how Muslim women have contributed and are contributing in the field of promoting peace from an Islamic perspective.

The book entitled *Muslim Women Promoting Peace* by Prof. Dato'Sri Dr. Zaleha Kamarudin, a leading authority on comparative family laws and the first woman to be appointed to head an Islamic university in the Muslim world, and Prof. Dr. Abdul Rashid Moten, a renowned political scientist, is an impressive

performance of erudition and insight into the main debates regarding the often-misunderstood relationship between Islam and peace, the status of women in Islam and the pathways to peace from an Islamic perspective. The authors conceive of peace in a positive sense and analyze the role played by Muslim women in peace-building. For each of the female peace builders, the study analyzes their religiosity, philanthropy and their efforts at creating conditions conducive to peace.

This book has successfully included the activities of notable Muslim women who contributed significantly to build peace at their home and abroad and personalities have been chosen in a historical and contemporary context. In his foreword, His Excellency, Tan Sri Iyad bin Amin Madani, Secretary General, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), appreciates the uniqueness of the book in questioning the existing Western popular narratives and juxtaposing them with Islamic perspective and practices and thus offer a grounded understanding of peace in Islam and the role of Muslim women in promoting peace. To him, peaceful coexistence is incredibly important to ensure productive lives and sustainable societies and peace is only ensured if education, fairness, justice inclusiveness, and human rights are promoted in a befitting manner. According to Tan Sri Dr. Mohd. Kamal Hassan, Distinguished Professor and former Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), this book is an informative, concise yet clear and accessible account of Muslim women who work tirelessly in perilous conditions to build bridges to secure peace through justice.

The book contains seven chapters and an introduction spanning 170 pages, including two appendices to connect readers with selected verses of the Qur'an on Values promoting peace (in appendix 1) and the constitution of Madinah (in appendix 2), a glossary of 4 pages and a four-page index. Furthermore, an extensive ten-page list of bibliography consisting of more than 200 sources listed under the themes of Islam, women in Islam, Islam and peace, and Muslim women and peace should be a feast for eyes and mind of a potential researcher. Each chapter addresses one of these big questions and is extremely rich in detail and scholarly references, bringing also the authors' own insights into the subject matter.

In the introductory chapter, authors have raised several questions that are addressed in the book (page no. xvii) and a framework for analysis, including positive vs. negative peace, peacemaking, peace keeping and peace building, is

developed. Chapter one initiates the discussion by conceptualizing peace from various perspectives. Islam's call for peace is shown in this chapter through a discussion of values derived from the Qur'an and the hadith, the sayings of the Prophet (SAW). Chapter two discusses the role played by Muslim women in promoting peace. This chapter, according to authors, is historical in nature and provides a picture of women who took an active role during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) towards promoting peace. The selected women are: Khadijah Kubra, Aishah Siddiqah and Zubaidah bint Ja'far. Chapter three discusses the contributions of Muslim women in contemporary times. This chapter highlights the success attained by Muslim women with different and even diverging perspectives and priorities in promoting peace through social, economic, and educational reforms. The selected women are: Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Aisha Bridget Lemu and Muna AbuSulayman. These case studies are exceptionally thorough and revealing, in the process debunking numerous myths about Islam and peace, and how Muslim women promoted peace.

Chapter four shifts the focus on women from the international to the national level and analyzes the contributions of Muslim women in the largest Muslim country, Indonesia. This chapter discusses especially the role of the first Indonesian Muslim women's organization, 'Aisyiyah, in encouraging education for Muslim women and their participation in public life without neglecting their primary role as wives and mothers in the family. Chapter five examines contributions of Malaysian women to peace. The authors highlight the role of two accomplished Muslim women, Tan Sri Aishah Ghani and Tan Sri Dr. Jemilah Mahmood and show evidence of women taking the lead in healing the wounds of victims of war, providing shelter to the dispossessed, educating the poor, counseling those who lost faith in humanity and motivating people to lead virtuous and purposeful lives. Chapter six focuses on the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The authors confirm that the University, from its very inception, had the promotion of peace as its motto. This chapter also discloses various activities to promote peace initiated by the rectors including Zaleha Kamaruddin.

Chapter seven provides concluding observation by discussing the theory and practice of women's role in the promotion of peace. The authors urge to undo the prevailing unremitting and uninformed prejudices against Islam and Muslim women's contributions to peace. However, according to authors, this work is not a

comprehensive book dealing with the contributions of Muslim women peace builders rather it includes substantives areas and themes and the activities of notable Muslim women concerned with peace at home and abroad. They underscore the need for further researche in the area.

So what message is this book conveying to the Muslims and the non-Muslims alike? One basic lesson is that Muslim women are important players in their communities. Women like Aisha Lemu, Sakhawat, and Abu Sulayman didn't just happen. Rather, they reflect a tradition of women's participation in their communities and outside. The book portrays clearly that women are active leaders: as mothers, teachers, scholars, and counselors. With such dynamic points of access to Muslim communities, ignoring women in the pursuit for peace would be a grave mistake. Another point that can be discerned from the book is that women often choose the path of peace. They see the need to struggle for peace in definitively nonviolent terms. They understand that peace is not the end point of violent conflict; rather, they see that peace is the consequence of a just social order.

To sum up, Zaleha Kamaruddin and Abdul Rasid Moten make an excellent contribution to the literature on Islam, women and peace. The scholarship and the richness of detail evident throughout the book makes it a crucial source for scholars of the welfare state and the governments considering risky reforms. This book should be a recommended reading for all students of peace and conflict studies, women and Islam, and everyone interested in knowing how Islam can help create a just and peaceful world.