

Review of Anabel Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Women (Paths to Conversion)*, New York: Oxford University Press 2017, 303 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-061167-5

BY SINEM YILMAZ, GHENT UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, GHENT, BELGIUM

The author, Anabel Inge, is a doctor in Theology and Religious Studies. Her acquaintance with Salafi women and occasional attendance of Islamic studies circle aroused her curiosity to understand more of Salafi women's lives, which lead to her doctoral research. In *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Women*, Inge provides an extensive overview of the realities of ordinary Salafi women's lives in the United Kingdom. Long-term fieldwork in women's circles and in-depth interviews with Salafi women enable her to analyse why young women today choose Salafism in particular from among the many other Islamic interpretations in Western societies.

Inge divides the book in six chapters along with an introduction, conclusion, a long list of notes and fieldwork information. She starts with explaining Salafism and Salafi teachings in the introduction. After 9/11, Salafism has increasingly appeared in the Western media and has been associated with jihadism and it has led Western media to use Salafism in connection with the terrorists behind several attacks. The ideology of ISIS, the so called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, has been branded as Salafi and some ISIS women have been photographed as dressed just like Salafi women. As a result, Salafi communities have been regarded as potential security threats in the West. The author states that when she uses the term 'Salafi', she refers only to the 'dominant non-violent tendency' and her principal subjects are ordinary women in Salafi community.

In the following chapters, Inge analyses the historical origins of Salafism and its rise in Britain. Additionally, she gives a detailed account of her research methods – a combination of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and textual analysis – and the challenges she experienced in gaining access to women's circles. She explains her interviewees' journeys into Salafism and how this process is subjective and nonlinear. She introduces the concept of 'delayed conversion' to refer to women's prolonged period of resistance, experimentation and reflection before involvement with the Salafi community. Although

Salafism directed attention of these women from the very beginning of their religious seeking, the process of becoming a Salafi was not straightforward and included experiments with other Muslim groups. Inge explains this delay in conversion to Salafism with 'the image problem' of Salafi community. This finding also allows her to make a contribution to the literature on conversion which she finds not flexible and inclusive enough to cover these varied patterns.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to women's commitments to build a Salafi identity and how teachers in circles of knowledge (re)produce boundaries between Salafis and other Muslim groups by creating a 'sisterhood' discourse with a shared language and dress. However, these boundaries do not seem to be enough to avoid in-group tensions and disappointments due to the lack of idealised Salafism they have learned in circles where women gather around a teacher in a semicircle for religious learning. In the last two chapters, Inge mentions the continuing effects of conversion in their families, universities, workplaces and partner choices. Women face challenges when their Salafi lifestyle contradicts their educational and career goals and their family relations. Here, they try to devise imaginative solutions to make Salafi ideals feasible. Sometimes they make major sacrifices from their lives or they stretch the rules in Salafi teachings. However, they always believe that Salafi ideals are superior to any alternative.

The main contribution of this book is its focus on female adherents of Salafism and their ordinary lives and daily experiences. Although limited in general, existing Salafi research has mostly focused on men, security issues, internal politics and doctrine. Media portrayals of Salafism has been dominated by the issues of niqab-wearing (face veil) and radicalisation. The difficulties of access might be one of the reasons for the lack of in-depth studies of Salafi women. Therefore, Inge's in-depth analysis about women's ideas and experiences is a strength of the book. Another area her work contributes to is the examination of Salafism's ethnic dimensions. Inge argues that some academic studies and journalists tend to ignore Muslims' ethnic diversity and homogenise Muslims as a global community. The author, however, points out that Salafi lifestyle in Britain has been affected by ethnic differences based on her fieldwork analysis. However, how Salafi women from different ethnic groups organise their lives differently has gone somehow lost within general discussions. Apart from Chapter 6 where she discusses match-making practices of Salafi women and how they prefer a partner from their own ethnic group, the influence of ethnic differences could have received more attention when discussing the process of conversion to Salafism and implementation of Salafi teachings in women's daily lives. By this way, the reader could have seen how ethnic differences might affect each stage of women's journey into Salafism.

In the concluding chapter, Inge summarizes her findings and emphasizes the contribution of this book to the field. In order to avoid generalisations, she states that participants in this research are not representative of all Salafi women due to sample size and qualitative methodology. Even within this small group of women, there are variations in conversion processes, hence, it is not possible to give certain generalized explanations. Her data show a rather dynamic and complex picture as opposed to essentialist representations of media and Salafi preachers and texts. Inge concludes her book by referring to the future of Salafism in Britain. She touches on potential internal and external challenges Salafi communities might deal with. One of the questions she raises is

the applicability of inflexible and conservative Salafi teachings to people when they grow older and lose their initial enthusiasm and to next generations who might find Salafi community rigid and isolated. Generally, the book's timely publication advances debates around Salafism and contributes to the field with its focus on the voices of ordinary Salafi women.