

BOOK REVIEW

Ozyurek, Esra. *Being German Becoming Muslim*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 63.

Esra Ozyurek, the author of this book, is an Associate Professor at the European Institute of the London School of Economics.

In the first chapter, the author begins by discussing the phenomenon of conversion to Islam in German society. She skillfully analyzes the experiences of both the converted German Muslims and the immigrant Muslims. Both encounter difficulties in fulfilling their Islamic obligations in German society. The converted German Muslims have to face a dramatic loss of status in society; however those born as Muslims already know the limits German society has set for them.

In order to retain their status in the German body politic and the social system, the German converts to Islam are learning to defend Islam by presenting it as culturally compatible with Germanness. They are compelled to play a dual role, first in getting Islam accepted in mainstream German society and second in encouraging the Muslim immigrant community to adopt a more moderate path. For this, they strive to become model Muslims and exemplary human beings. In short, the new converts try to project a better face of Islam in German society. Moreover, the German converts urge the immigrant Muslims to abandon unIslamic traditions. The new converts aspire to promote a 'purified' version of Islam, which according to them is best suited to the enlightened German mind.

The second chapter informs the readers that in contemporary Germany, just like in other countries of Europe, Muslims face marginalization and, the Muslim converts too are faced with many challenges. The converted German women are considered as oppressed females, lacking intelligence and initiative, in short they are treated like Turkish woman. Confronted with such unpleasant treatment, the German Muslim converts prefer to disassociate themselves from the larger Muslim community. There is also a hint of racial prejudice in their attitude towards the Muslim community.

The third chapter discusses the unification of Germany, which gave the East Germans a second-class status. Since both the Muslim community and the East Germans feel equally marginalized in German society and are confronted with similar challenges, they have developed close contact.

In contrast to the West Germans, the East Germans generally feel inferior in material terms and social status. Unlike the West Germans, the Muslim community warmly welcomed and supported the East Germans and even helped them to settle down. Eventually, the East Germans were also invited to convert to Islam.

In the fourth chapter, the author tells us about an Islamic youth organization, Muslimische Jugend Deutschland (MJD) or Muslim Youth of Germany which was established by a German convert to Islam, Muhammad Siddiq Borgfeldt. While promoting Muslim thought and culture, it also strongly upholds the notion of German identity for young Muslims.

The concluding chapter of this book discusses 'Salafism' (a radical version of Islam) which is now fast spreading in contemporary German society. In the Salafist perception, only their version of Islam is suitable for Germany and the rest of Europe. The followers of Salafism believe that their faith can bring people of diverse backgrounds on a single platform. They strive to imitate the historical example of early Islam, when the people of Mecca and Medina, though belonging to different tribes came together to form the first Muslim Ummah.

Conclusion

This book contains five chapters which are placed in such sequence that the facts can be easily connected and understood. The author has relied on the real life experiences and interviews of the newly converted Muslims. The flow of the contents helps to engage the interest of the reader till the end. Furthermore the details are neither confusing nor repetitive; rather these have made the book more interesting.

It is altogether a unique piece of work, very different from academic literature. It is neither theoretical nor analytical rather it falls in the narrative category.

To sum up, this book is a must read for research students whose area of interest is Islam in Germany, for it provides solid facts about the new converts. The interviews can be used as a primary source to enrich the work of other researchers. However, a weakness in this book is that it contains only five chapters which do not quench the thirst of the reader for more information. Overall though, it is a good piece of work and therefore it is strongly recommended to students, researchers, scholars and ordinary readers.

Jaweria Tahir