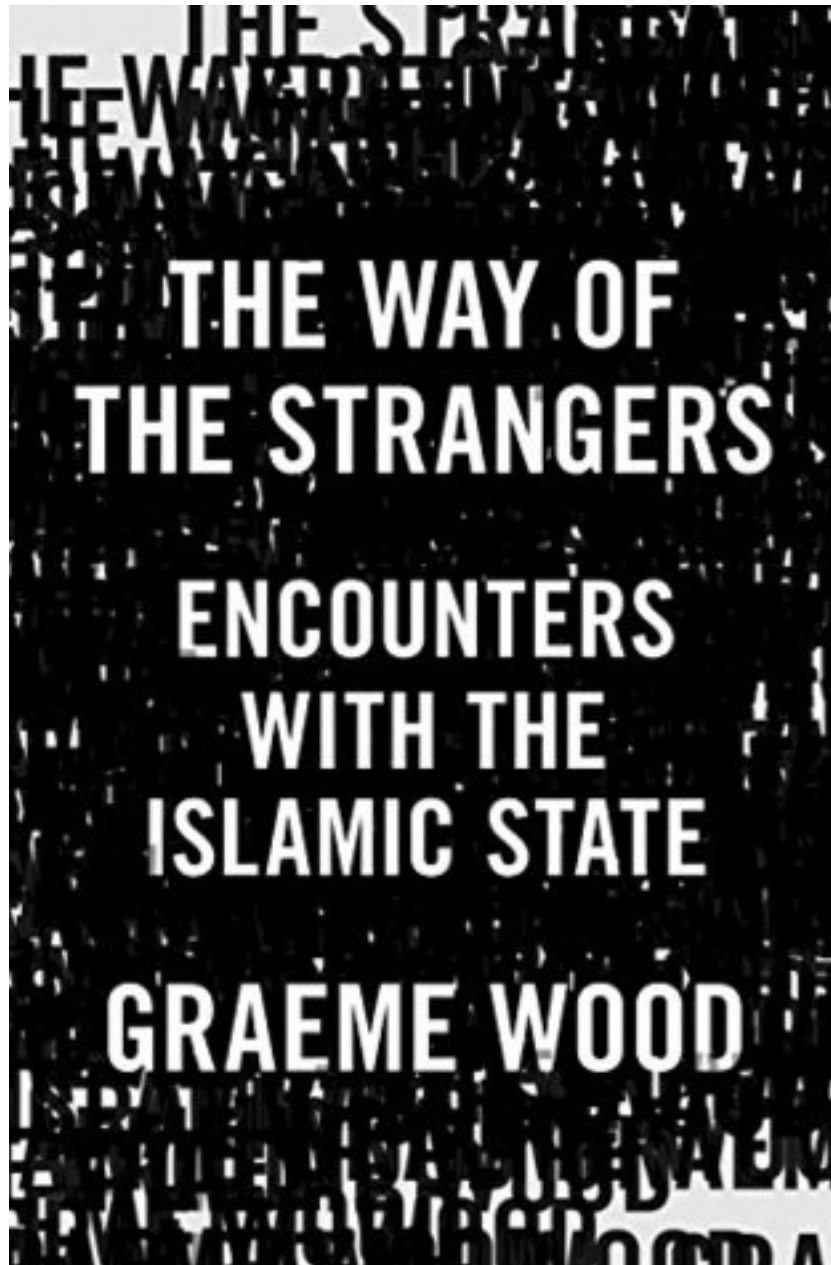


The Way of the Strangers: Encounters with the Islamic State Book PDF Download



By:
Graeme Wood

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What people Say:

Hadrian

Series of interviews and encounters with scholars, sympathizers and former members of the so-called Islamic State, leading to a focus on its theological and moral underpinnings, and traces a long history through the margins of Islamic philosophical thought - from Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) and Ibn 'Abd al Wahhab (1703-1792) to contemporary figures such as Turki bin' Ali and the so-called caliph Al-Baghdadi, he finds moral absolutism and vast totalizing claims to return and purify a system of belief

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As it turns out, Wood does not go to Syria or Iraq, and so he interviews people on the margins of this belief, either in Egypt or the United Kingdom - and he finds a few oddballs, misfits, and 'dullards' who feel outcast. But is that the same for the executioner or the torturer on the front lines? Harder to say.

Peter Mcloughlin

A good analogy for ISIS and whether it is Islamic is Mel Gibson he doesn't think the pope is Catholic enough. Mel Gibson is crazy and extreme but nobody would deny that Gibson is a crazy Catholic. ISIS is a minority position of Salafist Islam (being a minority of true believers in their own eyes is a badge of pride for them) it is a disgusting ideology and it's not accepted by the majority of Muslims but it is an Islamic movement in the way Gibson is Catholic even though a lot of Catholics might

A good analogy for ISIS and whether it is Islamic is Mel Gibson he doesn't think the pope is Catholic enough. Mel Gibson is crazy and extreme but nobody would deny that Gibson is a crazy Catholic. ISIS is a minority position of Salafist Islam (being a minority of true believers in their own eyes is a badge of pride for them) it is a disgusting ideology and it's not accepted by the majority of Muslims but it is an Islamic movement in the way Gibson is Catholic even though a lot of Catholics might not be thrilled to have him in their fold. Anyway, the author interviews Isis supporters and people related to ISIS fighters and asks them (suspending combative questions) and lets them express their beliefs as matter of factly as possible. It is chilling but an illuminating picture of binary totalizing nihilistic ideology committed to the worst authoritarian and totalitarian elements of any the ugly 20th-century abominations (Maoism, Khmer Rouge, Nazism, Stalinism) and that is saying something.

Ali

In poker, one of the biggest mistakes you can make is to underestimate your adversary. The Islamic State (IS) is one adversary that both Westerners and Muslims have underestimated *and* misunderstood.

“Cause let’s face it “ who really gets IS anyway? Even to an educated audience, they seem like a jumble of names (ISIS? ISIL? Daesh? different from Al Qaeda?), leaders, factions and philosophies falling somewhere between incoherence and chaos. How did they come about? Are these guys even Muslim? Wh

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“Cause let’s face it “ who really gets IS anyway? Even to an educated audience, they seem like a jumble of names (ISIS? ISIL? Daesh? different from Al Qaeda?), leaders, factions and philosophies falling somewhere between incoherence and chaos. How did they come about? Are these guys even Muslim? What’s up with the beheadings, amputations, and sex slavery? What compels so many seemingly nice young men to leave everything behind and join them in Syria? And why are they so damn mean? “The Way of the Strangers” places IS in an historical, religious, geographic and ideological context so by the end of it we can all say, “Aahh, *now* I get it.”

First of all, IS is definitely Muslim, even though most Muslim scholars and laymen hate to admit it. Wood shows how IS goes out of its way to justify its odious behavior with Muslim scripture. Its interpretations may be capricious and biased towards bloodthirsty nihilism, but they’re not coming out of thin air.

I particularly appreciated Wood’s taxonomy of the various interrelated Islamist movements. He does a great job of tracing the IS ideology back to its sources, showing the fault lines that cause communion and clash amongst the extremist factions. The descriptions are precise; never again will you conflate Wahhabis, Salafis and Dhahiris at a cocktail party.

Where the book really shines is in Wood’s encounters with flesh-and-blood IS devotees, many of them converts. Musa (born Robert) Cerantonio the Australian; Hesham Elashry, the Egyptian tailor; Hassan Ko Nakata, the mild-mannered Japanese academic; “The Avenger” (really); and the family of the gnomish Yahya Abu Hassan, who grew up a mere 20min away from Wood’s own childhood Dallas home.

Through these characters “ mentally nimble but ideologically pigheaded, hospitable in manner but advocating brutish violence “ you come to appreciate the internal logic of IS, and how a token bookish, socially awkward young man could get drawn into its certainties. You also apprehend the incredible darkness of it all.

Even as they try to invest IS with a patina of their own Utopian desires, Wood shows the underlying ambivalence and disappointment of the IS adherents he interviews. Unfortunately, “the tragedy is that even those inverted visionaries who live to realize their error will never be able to undo the misery they have inflicted on so many others.”

What’s most remarkable about the book is that it exists at all. Wood is apparently fluent in Arabic

and conversant in a fistful of other languages, as he goes to Cairo, Tokyo, Oslo, Mindanao (Philippines), Alexandria, London, Dallas and lord knows where else to meet these characters. He's knowledgeable enough about Islamic history and scripture as to debate, gain the grudging respect and even *befriend* many of these people of odious creed. They pay for his meals and invite him in their homes without even poisoning him once. Maybe they all gave him a pass in hopes of the big prize for converting an atheist. Nevertheless, he probably ended up endangering his life several times to write this book.

Ray

I've been struggling to understand the militant Islamist mindset since 9/11, when supporters of Osama Bin Laden destroyed the World Trade Center and attacked the Pentagon. In time, I learned something about Bin Laden's hatred of America because what he saw as (1) U.S. one-sided support for Israel at the expense of Palestinian concerns; (2) our support of authoritarian regimes in Mid-Eastern countries at the expense of their oppressed Muslim citizens; and (3) our military presence in Saudi Arabia

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More recently, with the rise of ISIS, I had to work even harder to begin trying to understand the appeal of the Islamic State. Graeme Wood's book "

", helped a lot. It may be that "

" would have been the only book I needed to gain an understanding of ISIS, but it's also probable that previous readings helped provide additional background which helped make Wood's book so insightful. These previous books, such as

, by Nicolas Henin;

, by Joby Warrick; and

, by Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger. certainly helped by providing key information and background.

In this book, Graeme Wood shares his understanding of ISIS as obtained by his detailed studies of

their statements, as well as insights he gained by his travels through Muslim Countries, and finally through his interviews with a variety of Muslim scholars and leaders. He really did his homework, and instead of simply observing or reading about the reports from the Islamic State, he met with and discussed the workings of ISIS with knowledgeable Muslim leaders. Thus, he was able to provide new insights into ISIS ideology, and the intentions of the new Caliphate. He manages to tell us how ISIS justifies their horrific violence against non-believers, whether Westerners, Christians, or even some Muslim sects as well. Their beliefs are justifiable (to them), and are based on original teachings of Muhammad, as they understand them, reflecting a medieval era of jihad when Islam was being spread by the sword.

ISIS leaders and fighters are throwbacks to early Islam, following past practices such as slavery and beheadings, as found in the original teachings of Islam from periods of war over a thousand years earlier. Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, preaches the importance of establishing the Caliphate, and how it's the duty of all Muslims to swear allegiance to the Caliphate, become members, and follow the examples of Muhammad. Those who do join the Caliphate, and strictly follow the teachings of ISIS, may find a social welfare system in place which works for them. Those who fail to follow the rules may find themselves subject to medieval style punishments such as amputations, beatings, stoning, crucifixion, or beheadings.

Jill

Deducting a star for organization and the occasional feeling of being dropped in different place with little context. (Book jumps around the globe and from macro to micro level randomly) Otherwise a chilling and comprehensive primer on the subject that assumes a certain base knowledge, but also is really informative without being overwhelming.