

Undercover Muslim – A Journey into Yemen

by Theo Padnos.

Bodley Head, 2011.

Undercover Muslim is an enthralling account of the author's experiences as a Muslim convert in Yemen in 2006 and 2007.

Padnos travelled to Yemen from Syria to follow up the story of Muslims from Western countries, or converts to Islam, who had travelled to the madrassas of some of the most fundamentalist Muslim countries, where they had been radicalised.

Theo Padnos makes for an unlikely Muslim, and must have stood out in Yemen to a degree that could have threatened his personal safety; yet his sincerity, his fascination and his sense of humour saw him through most situations and he clearly made some good friends.

This book is part travelogue, part assessment of the ways and means of jihadist radicalisation, part reflection on the way the West is perceived by Muslims, part journey of self-discovery. It begins with Anwar Awlaki, the extremist preacher and American citizen known to have inspired at least two terrorist plots, who was killed in his Yemeni hideout in a drone attack in 2011; he intrigued Padnos, who felt he had trodden a similar path to some degree but had come to very different conclusions, and as a result he decided to immerse himself in that journey and the people who make it.

Although in some ways this book has echoes of Ed Hussain's memoir, *The Islamist*, the conclusions to which Padnos comes are somewhat different, for it is clearly his desire to continue leading a good but ordinary Muslim life and to encourage others to do the same.

Undercover Muslim helps readers to understand the way Islam is taught in some of the most influential madrassas, and is a potent reminder of the implacable hatred which the imams and many of their students have for us and the values by which we choose to live.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh