



Infidel

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

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One of today's most admired and controversial political figures, Ayaan Hirsi Ali burst into international headlines following the murder of Theo van Gogh by an Islamist who threatened that she would be next. She made headlines again when she was stripped of her citizenship and resigned from the Dutch Parliament.

Infidel shows the coming of age of this distinguished political superstar and champion of free speech as well as the development of her beliefs, iron will, and extraordinary determination to fight injustice. Raised in a strict Muslim family, Hirsi Ali survived civil war, female mutilation, brutal beatings, adolescence as a devout believer during the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, and life in four troubled, unstable countries ruled largely by despots. She escaped from a forced marriage and sought asylum in the Netherlands, where she earned a college degree in political science, tried to help her tragically depressed sister adjust to the West, and fought for the rights of Muslim women and the reform of Islam as a member of Parliament. Under constant threat, demonized by reactionary Islamists and politicians, disowned by her father, and expelled from family and clan, she refuses to be silenced.

Ultimately a celebration of triumph over adversity, Hirsi Ali's story tells how a bright little girl evolves out of dutiful obedience to become an outspoken, pioneering freedom fighter. As Western governments struggle to balance democratic ideals with religious pressures, no other book could be more timely or more significant.

Infidel Details

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From Reader Review Infidel for online ebook

Patricia says

I found that her view of Islam was extremely negative and she sounded more bitter than she exclaimed. The situations that she faced in a closed society where women's rights are pretty much non-existent I felt somewhat tainted. Her opinions and descriptions about Islam..... They were quite biased and one-sided and at most times I felt more resentment than honesty which is quite sad, she brought through some very good points about mutilation and the rights of women in such societies. But got distracted with blaming the religion and not the people and their backward tribalistic traditions which are the cause for most of the suffering and violations of women's rights in these countries.

andreas says

"Infidel" is the personal story of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali woman who, after a loveless childhood (to put it very mildly), came to Holland at the age of 20 claiming refugee status to escape an arranged and forced marriage, and to assert her independence. She was accepted, found her way around, studied political science, became a citizen, fell away from Islam, and became a member of Parliament. In 2004 she and Theo van Gogh made the short film "Submission Part 1", which resulted in Theo's getting killed and Holland's being thrown into near chaos. For her security, she was hidden for two months and a half. A bit more than a year later, when the book was almost finished, her citizenship was revoked but later reinstated, she resigned from Parliament, and left for the US to work at the American Enterprise Institute. Surely stuff for a book, but that's not even the main story.

The main story is the oppression of Muslim women, back where Hirsi Ali grew up but also in Holland, where African Muslim immigrants often seem to live the way they used to – outside Western society and in disregard of Western values. The descriptions are stark. Husbands who are almost universally evil, mean, and violent. They are completely unaware of the fact that their wife is a person, an individual, a partner. A man would be a good husband if he doesn't beat his wife, this is what the author's girlfriends hoped for growing up. A sad world where a decent man is a precious commodity.

Where Hirsi Ali grew up, violence was everywhere, in the streets but also in the home. The unifying theme of her childhood was brainless brutality, one group against another, and men against women. People are organized in clans, and diversions and differences between them are the defining principles of identity. Violence, utterly pointless and to no one's benefit, is always present.

In the smaller scheme of things, I was born on the wrong side of the fence. But I have not suffered much hardship from it, and the fence came down when I was only 14, opening a world of opportunity. In the larger scheme of things, thankfully, I was born safely on the right side of the fence. The fence that separates Africa from the rest of the world, and madness from reason, poverty from wealth, life from death. This is what the book doesn't tire of pointing out. Sadly, the fence isn't coming down and opportunity will continue to elude most Africans.

For all the horrors of Hirsi Ali's childhood, of civil war, of fleeing violence and the most wretched conditions, the most shocking paragraphs of the book describe the author's and her sister's genital mutilation, a process whose enormity the more neutral terms excision and infibulation are utterly inadequate to describe. The author has suffered a violation so atrocious, brutal, and painful, painful even to read, that it is almost beyond my imagination. I am strangely thankful for the graphic description because up to now I no clear idea

what the procedure entailed. But more so I am speechless that anyone would consider this wise or necessary. It surely takes a sick, brain-washed mind empty of independent thought and a heart empty of compassion and tenderness to advocate or perform such an operation.

The first two thirds of the book are all personal account and analysis, but the last third calls for action. It is a long, angry rant against the excesses of literally read Islam. It is about liberating women, encouraging them not to submit, imploring them to stand up against inequities and for their freedom. Hirsi Ali is passionately outraged, and it is a pleasure to read. She has a reason for her anger and fights for a cause. She wants to abolish sharia and set Muslims women free.

Deena says

This is a great article on why I dislike this book, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. I'm going to just copy and paste some excerpts outlining her biases.

<http://www.thescavenger.net/feminism-...>

"Now, I'm no fan of religion – of any kind. But Hirsi Ali's simultaneous condemnation of Islam and obvious admiration of Christianity was disturbing. As with any religion or ideology, it's how it's practised that impacts on people's lives and on society.

Many of Hirsi Ali's criticisms of Islam could be applied to fundamentalist Christianity: unwavering adherence to the Bible and the control of women's sexuality. Even FGM has a western parallel in the state-sanctioned, legal, non-consensual mutilation of intersex children's genitals to force them to conform to a male/female sex binary – something that rarely warrants an outcry in mainstream media or from feminist activists. If Christian fundamentalists such as Fred Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church had their way, our society would look very different in terms of women's and queer rights, to name just two.

Of course in no way am I saying that we should not pay attention to and speak out against the abuses endured by so many women and girls in the Muslim world. Nor am I saying we should not be critical of radical, fundamentalist Islam – as Mona Siddiqui points out in her review of *Nomad* in the UK's Daily Telegraph, there are many Muslims who fear radical Islam. But vilifying an entire religion or people who follow that religion is not the way to create a harmonious society – as history as shown time and again.

The irony is that while Hirsi Ali is (rightly) applauded for her courage in fighting for and finding personal freedom, she now denies others such rights. In unleashing her wrath on Islamic fundamentalism, she has (perhaps unwittingly) become a fundamentalist herself.

It doesn't help that she has achieved celebrity status, because once a person reaches a certain level of fame for their ideas, they are then invested in sticking with them for their own economic survival. It's a rare academic, writer or thinker who is willing to take the risk of losing their career and/or income by doing an about-turn.

So, perhaps it's down to publishers to champion other writers with as much vigour as they do Hirsi Ali; to publish and promote the hell out of the work of Muslim feminists working on the ground in their local communities to educate and effect change; to bring the female activists such as those featured in Coleman's book to international writers' festivals and posh venues like the Sydney Opera House."

Petra X says

I was watching the BBC's 'Muslim Beauty Pageant and Me' hosted by and starring Dina Torkia, an English Muslim who wears hijab, not the black stuff but pretty fabrics. I thought this is going to be good. Balance. I'm going to see that Ayaan Hirsi Ali is feverishly hysterical and that what she says might apply to the immigrants from Africa and even more so from Arabia, but not to British Muslims.

The girls, who all wore hijab and a lot of makeup looked very pretty. They had to undergo physicals and psychological testing to make sure they would be the best representative of Miss Muslimah and a shining example to Muslim women all over the world. Our girl thought the psychological testing was a bit much with one of the questions being 'would you rather spend time with friends or have sex'? LOL.

The girls liked singing. Dina said that she had been taught that singing, like her body and her hair, were part of her attributes that should be hidden from men and she was really surprised it was acceptable. I was surprised that her language 'Oh my God shit' (and her husband's 'what the fucking hell') was considered acceptable from one so religious but perhaps that is me imposing my ideas on one of another faith.

But all this 21st century modernity went pear-shaped and proved Ayaan right in the end. They went to a village and Dina had to stay the night in a house where there was also an old man. She felt she couldn't do this without a chaperone, her husband, so she phoned him in England and he said NO. So she couldn't. And as she said she couldn't do anything that her husband didn't want, that wouldn't be Islamic. She was submissive to him in every way.

Most of the girls were from Indonesia, but Miss Tunisia, who was in every way quite ordinary, was named the winner in a contest that looked totally fixed to Dina and to me. She immediately spoke in Arabic on Palestine, Gaza, Iraq, Syria. (view spoiler) The organiser of the contest who had continually said that all the tests of amusing orphans, visiting a Christian OAP home, psychological tests and the rest were so that the right person would be chosen was terribly pleased with Miss Tunisia and her speech. Yet another opportunity for propagandising hatred.

Our girl, back in England let loose a lot of bad language and sounded, just as she thought she was, terribly English. But she wasn't really, she was one of the women who Ayaan Hirsi Ali seeks to liberate. But she will never see that herself. She is proud of her submission and rejoices in the freedom of the UK. But if her husband didn't allow her that much freedom she would be in exactly the same position as the women from Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Kenya and ... Holland.

Ayaan is right. Faith schools have to go, all faith schools. That would help. All schooling should be for boys and girls equally and should promote our values of freedom. Religion can be taught outside of school. That is part of our freedom.

One of the things Ayaan did was to get the Dutch government to count up the number of honour killings (ie. fathers, brothers, uncles and husbands murdering their female kin) in just two out of twenty-five districts. There were 11 murders. That equates to 165 girls a year killed for stepping out of line by having boyfriends, being rape victims and other 'crimes' against the male idea of honour.

Much respect to Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Despite living under death threats for speaking the truth about the position of women. And of speaking the truth that terrorism of the West is not just some small bunch of fundamentalists but is absolutely justified by the Koran, supported by enormous numbers of Muslims worldwide and bankrolled by Islamic countries.

Don't be fooled she says by political correctness, don't be thinking that tolerance is such a great virtue, act on

what you know to stop this eroding of our Western values. Help the women and children immigrants to integrate and assimilate by showing them they don't have to be frightened of eternal hell if they don't show complete submission to men.

She says that a re-interpretation of the Koran should be allowed in this modern era, rather than Saudi Arabia being look to as living by the purest interpretation of Islam. She can't see it happening though. I'm more optimistic. I know quite a few Arab Muslims. I count them as friends. At least they will stop and chat for half an hour at a time. All except a few are quite modern - the wives wear shorts and sandals and come to my shop. There are only a few black-robed women on the island and from only a few of them have I experienced unmistakable anti-semitism. I think most of the ones I count as friends would very much be in favour of an interpretation that allowed them to keep their faith in a way congruent with the 21st century's idea of freedom. We will see.

I so respect Ayaan Hirsi Ali. 5 golden, gleaming, diamond stars for this author, her work and her book.

5. (view spoiler)

4. (view spoiler)

3. (view spoiler)

2. (view spoiler)

1. (view spoiler)

Debbie "DJ" says

This book opened my eyes to the Muslim world and completely changed my views. It is remarkable what one woman can do to affect change. I cannot recommend highly enough, especially for women.

Peggy says

oh gosh.. only 30 pages into this book and I'm not sure I can read it..

Female castration/ mutilation - this isn't in the dark ages.. this happens in mid 1970 and still happens today!!

This is an incredible biography of a girl who was born in a country torn apart by war, in a continent mostly known for what goes wrong rather than right. Measured by the standards of Somalia and Africa she states she is privileged to be alive and thriving.

She states; "Where I grew up, death is a constant visitor. A virus, bacteria, a parasite; droughts and famine; soldiers, and torturers; could bring it to anyone, any time. Death comes riding on raindrops that turned to floods. It catches the imagination of men in positions of authority who order their subordinates to hunt, torture and kill people they imagine to be enemies. Death lures many others to take their own lives in order to escape a dismal reality. For many women, because of perceptions of lost honor, death comes at the hands of a father, brother, or husband.

Death comes to young woman giving birth to new life, leaving the newborn orphaned in the hands of strangers

For those who live in anarchy and civil war, as in the country of Somalia, death is everywhere".

When she was born, her mother initially thought she had died. When she later got malaria and pneumonia she recovered.

When her genitals were cut, the wound healed. When a bandit held a knife to her throat, he decided not to slit it.. when her Quran teacher fractured her skull, the doctor who treated her kept death at bay.

In the second half of the book she flees to Amsterdam when she is married to a man her father has chosen who she does not want to marry

She takes the chance at freedom, a life in which she would be free from bondage to someone she had not chosen, and in which her mind, too, could be free.

She states she first encountered the full strength of Islam as a young child in Saudi Arabia. It was very different from the diluted religion of her grandmother, which was mixed with magical practices and pre-Islamic beliefs. Saudi Arabia is the source of Islam and its quintessence. It is the place where the Muslim religion is practiced in its purest form, and it is the origin of much of the fundamentalist vision that has, in our lifetime, spread far beyond its borders. "In Saudi Arabia, every breath, every step we took, was infused with concepts of purity or sinning, and with fear.. Wishful thinking about the peaceful tolerance of Islam cannot interpret away this reality; hands are still cut off, women still stoned and enslaved, just as the Prophet Muhammad decided centuries ago.."

The kind of thinking she saw in Saudi Arabia, and among the Muslim Brotherhood in Kenya and Somalia, is incompatible with human rights and liberal values. It preserves a feudal mind-set based on tribal concepts of honor and shame. It rests on self-deception, hypocrisy, and double standards. It relies on the technological advances of the West, while pretending to ignore their origin in Western thinking. This mind-set makes the

transition to modernity very painful for all who practice Islam.

It is always difficult to make the transition to a modern world. It was difficult for her and all her relatives from the miye. It was difficult when she moved from the world of faith to the world of reason - from the world of excision and forced marriage to the world of sexual emancipation. Having made that journey, she knows that one of those worlds is simply better than the other. Not because of its flashy gadgets, but fundamentally, because of its values.

The message of this book, is that we in the West would be wrong to prolong the pain of that transition unnecessarily, by elevating cultures full of bigotry and hatred toward women to the stature of respectable alternative ways of life.

People accuse her of having internalized a feeling of racial inferiority, so that she attacks her own culture out of self-hatred because she wants to be white.. This is a tiresome argument. She asks, "Is freedom then only for white people? Is it self-love to adhere to my ancestors' tradition and mutilate my daughters? to agree to be humiliated and powerless? To watch passively as my countrymen abuse women and slaughter each other in pointless disputes?"

When she comes to a new culture, where she saw for the first time that human relations could be different, would it have been self-love to see that as a foreign cult, which Muslims are forbidden to practice?

Her decision to write the book, exposing so many private memories, was made to allow the world to know... how many girls are still excised and married off in the modern Muslim world. The fact is that hundreds of millions of women around the world live in forced marriages, and six thousand small girls are excised every day!!!

Her excision in no way damaged her mental capacities. As was proven when she got her degree in political science in Holland and was elected to Parliament. Where once again, she is threatened with death, by speaking out for freedom and change. She lives under guard as much a prisoner as she was before.. For a short chaotic time ~

Ayaan Hirse Ali gives a strong voice to when all her dissonant thoughts snapped open and she found herself thinking that the Quran is not a holy document, it is a historical record, written by humans. It is one version of events, as perceived by the man who wrote it 150 years after the Prophet Muhammad died. It is a tribal and Arab version of events. It spreads a culture that is brutal, bigoted, fixated on controlling women, and harsh in war.

For her to think this way of course she had to make the leap to believing the Quran was relative - not absolute, not literal syllables pronounced by God, but just another book.

She made the 10 minute art movie, 'Submission' to give a message - that men, and even women, may look up and speak to Allah; It is possible for believers to have a dialogue with God and look closely at him .. The rigid interpretation of the Quran in Islam today causes intolerable misery for women... and finally, that she may no longer submit.. It is possible to free oneself - to adapt one's faith , to examine it critically, and to think about the degree to which that faith is itself at the foot of oppression.

A powerful, thought provoking biography. A book I will probably never forget!

Peggy Sue says

This book is a must read for all people trying to understand the Muslim attitude and outlook. Hirsi Asaan Ali is a courageous woman who has given us a peek into her mind on what a Muslim thinks. I quote so you can see how powerful she is.

"We Muslims had been taught to define life on earth as a passage, a test that precedes real life in the Hereafter. In that test, everyone should ideally live in a manner resembling, as closely as possible, the followers of the Prophet. Didn't this inhibit investment in improving daily life? Was innovation therefore forbidden to Muslims? Were human rights, progress, women's rights all foreign to Islam?"

By declaring our Prophet infallible and not permitting ourselves to question him, we Muslims had set up a static tyranny. The Prophet Muhammad attempted to legislate every aspect of life. By adhering to his rules of what is permitted and what is forbidden, we Muslims suppressed the freedom to think for ourselves and to act as we choose. We froze the moral outlook of billions of people into the mind-set of the Arab desert in the seventh century. We were not just servants of Allah, we were slaves.

"Saudi Arabia is the source of Islam and its quintessence. It is the place where the Muslim religion is practiced in its purest form, and it is the origin of much of the fundamentalist vision that has, in my lifetime, spread far beyond its borders. In Saudi Arabia, every breath, every step we took was infused with concepts of purity or sinning and with fear. Wishful thinking about the peaceful tolerance of Islam cannot interpret away this reality: hands are still cut off, women still stoned and enslaved, just as the Prophet Muhammad decided centuries ago.

The kind of thinking I saw in Saudi Arabia, and among the Muslim Brotherhood in Kenya and Somalia, is incompatible with human rights and liberal values. It preserves the feudal mind-set based on tribal concepts of honor and shame. It rests on self-deception, hypocrisy, and double standards. It relies on the technological advances of the West while pretending to ignore their origin in Western thinking. This mind-set makes the transition to modernity very painful for all who practice Islam.

We need to educate ourselves about the Muslim faith which is the faith of over half of the world's religious. This book woke me up. I highly recommend it.

Milan/zzz says

If I ever decide to make a list of the most important books I've read "Infidel" by Ayaan Hirsi Ali would surely find its place on it.

First time I've heard about Miss Hirsi Ali it was after murder of Theo Van Gogh because of his film "Submission-part one" which he made in collaboration with Hirsi Ali. Theo has been shoot and slaughtered in the middle of the day and the letter for Hirsi Ali (in which assassin is promising the same to her) was staked with knife in Theo's chest. It was really a huge shock with big impact across the Europe. Later "Submission-part one" was in the program of the Free Zone Film Festival here in Belgrade and among the guests was Belgrade's Imam and the conversation after projection was very interesting. Sadly I would have much more and much better question now after reading this book.

Anyhow Infidel was one of the most wanted books on my wish list and you can't imagine my thrill-ness when I saw in Belgrade's bookstores that it has been translated in Serbian. I've read book in one swallow and then reread it slowly but it raised the same emotional reaction.

It starts with the life of her grandmother and later mother in Somalia with such a vivid description of very strict life in Muslim community. Her grandmother was an incredibly strong woman capable to accept the destiny and justify it as an Allah's wish. You might think that her actions might be quite brutal with her granddaughters (and also comparing with the treatment with her grandson) but she was following tradition and was believe that she's doing right.

There in first part we are introduced how important is to know who your ancestors are. It is actually fundamental to be familiar with entire family tree hundreds of years ago because in Somalia first question when you meet someone will be "Who are you?" and then they are starting to recite all ancestors until they find a mutual one. That can save your life (it saved Ayaan's) because the whole population of Somalia is divided in several clans and everything there is based precisely on that. Any kind of help: health care, shelter, financial helps ... etc. It's horribly tight bond between them (and horribly huge risk if you disgrace your clan).

Later we see first "rebellion" in the actions of Ayaan's mother but still she was women who followed the rule and also was able to accept her destiny because that was Allah's will. Ayaan's family was a kind of nomadic ones because due to her father's political activism they had to hide and run away from one place to another. Therefore she lived during her childhood in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kenya.

While reading those pages it was as if I'm reading some fictional story from another dimension. Of course accent was on the women in Islam. Obligation to be covered, obligation to not leave the house without a man, obligation to accept (everything), obligation to not argue, obligation to bear, obligation to be sexually available to her husband whenever he wants to "plough his field", obligation to be obedient, obligation to submit. Because word "Islam" means "submission". Moreover she was unfortunate enough to belong to the Muslim community where girls must be circumcised. So indeed that part was like something from another world.

We can see how she was growing up physically and religiously. How she wanted so badly to be a good Muslim woman who follows all the rules but in the same time she has had many questions in spite the fact that questions are forbidden. It is one breathtaking image of immense mental struggle between her believes, what she has been taught it's the only truth and the life facts which were quite opposite. It was literally painful to read, emotion was quite similar to claustrophobia.

Eventually she started to talk with criticism about her own religion, she was loud in her statement against position of women (that especially refers in Muslim communities in European countries i.e. Holland) and naturally pile up the anger of Muslim world on herself.

It is a breathtaking story of a woman who (in her own words) was lucky. Once she was a child from the desert with extremely limited possibilities but who became elected member of a Dutch Parliament.

But what has the biggest impact on me is that I "found" myself in the book. Namely I realized that I belong to the huge majority of European Christians who are trying to avoid speaking with criticism about other religions because that might be connected very easily with racism (nationalism, fascism, etc). Since I lived in the country that has fallen apart in undoubtedly religious war (it was civilian war of course but in first place it was religious one) I'm trying to be very tolerant and to understand the point of views of the "opposite" side.

I realized that I do have very Christian look on Islam and religions in general. I honestly believed that all religions (therefore Islam as well) are good, are love, peace, tolerance etc. Right? Wrong!

Ayaan Hirsi Ali in this book is telling us that Islam is love and tolerance (in very limited sense) but ONLY inside the Muslim world. For all others who aren't belonging to that world it is a threat because it gives a strict order to all believers to convert or kill the rest of us who are considered as nonbelievers. Another amazing thing is that many inside the Muslim population are not aware of that because the Holly Koran is

written in Arabic, language they don't understand. What a paradox!

What is written in Koran is not only religious message but an absolute constant that is defying every single aspect in believer's life. It is quite unbelievable that it is expected from nowadays believers to strictly follow the rule (and apply sanctions) of desert tribes of Saudi Arabia in the 7th century! But still if they're not following those rules (or even if they think of their reasons) they're not good believers and deserve to be punished. And those things about unbelievers are written in Koran.

Now I really don't know what to think? That's why I'd love if I could have another opportunity to speak again with Belgrade's Imam who is a very dear man, but I'm wondering if he's not aggressive toward Christians and doesn't call his believers to be aggressive; if he doesn't think that he lives in the country of nonbelievers; if he preaches love, peace and tolerance he must be considered as a bad Muslim from the point of view of the followers of traditional Islam about whom Hirsi Ali is writing because that is not what Koran demands.

This book, her entire life is a monument of freedom of speech. Her criticism has arguments. Europe is also criticized with every right. Remember Danish cartoon scandal? A cancellation of theater plays which has the theme Prophet or even include Prophet together with representatives from other religions etc? That culture of self-censorship will completely ruin European values. That is not our heritage; that is not heritage of modern world! Allowing speech of hatred which is targeting people who are not Muslims (that can be heard in the mosques across the Europe) we here are accepting and justifying it with freedom of speech; When Muslim communities in the Europe are practicing traditional Islam that violates numerous human rights, we here are justifying that with religious freedom! Is female genital mutilation performed on young girls on the kitchen table in the middle of Europe religious freedom?

As I said I'm quite confused (this book is so enormously thought provoking); I'm not paranoid person, on the contrary. Moreover my contact with Islam is not nearly like this. I studied Farsi for several years and have many Iranian friends and I adore their cultural heritage; I know members of Muslim communities here and they aren't nearly fanatics, they are my friends and I can unquestionably rely on them. I guess we [Serbia:] are not rich enough to be interesting for refugees from much more rigid and traditional environments.

Hirsi Ali speaks with arguments and with statistic data of (mainly) women victims of Islamic fanatics inside their own families here in Europe. Many are victims of self combustion with gasoline (because they had sex before marriage) in a front of their fathers and brothers. If she refuse to kill herself they [father or brother:] would kill her. That's not, that can't be religious freedom!

It's high time for us to realize that tolerance of intolerance is cowardice.

Mikey B. says

A Remarkable Transition

What a transition this individual has gone through! This autobiography describes the Somalian author's early life in Mogadishu, Saudi Arabia, and Nairobi, Kenya. Most of it is repressive. She was beaten routinely by her grandmother and mother. She had to do household chores while her older brother went out with his friends. She was also genitally excised (clitoris and labia removed) - the sole purpose being to inhibit sexual enjoyment. It is another way to inhibit a woman's self-development and enjoyment.

While a teenager the author participated in Islamic discussion groups about the proper nature of the head-

scarf - how much or how little to reveal. It would seem that the more of the self that was removed or hidden the happier were the religious extremists. At one point she was beaten by an imman and needed hospitalization. The only pretense to self-fulfillment would be in the afterlife - or perhaps the only gratification allowed was in devotion to God. Her father was absent much of her life; he was unsuccessful in trying to topple the corrupt regime in Somalia.

Fortunately the author learned to read and in that she found another world. Even in "trashy" novels she observed that a Western woman had a role of her own, could be independent and make decisions. She was shocked and titillated that they were assertive in sexual relations.

She decided to act on that growing assertiveness and rebelled when her father made an arranged marriage to a Somali man who lived in Canada. When taking the plane to join this man, she disembarked in Germany and sought refugee status in Holland. It was there that she entered a new world. Women were free; police behaved civilly and even offered protection.

A door to an entirely new mode of behavior was opened. Some refugees chose to retreat into their ethnic bubble - not Ayaan. She embraced the freedoms of her new country. Her goal then became to wake up the Muslim-Islamic community to its own inner repression - and to alert the Dutch and greater Western community to the "backwardness" found within Islam (it was only after 9/11 that people started listening).

Within Europe there are pockets of Muslim communities where wife-beatings and honour killings are acceptable. Children are sent to Quoranic schools where they are NOT taught positive Western/European values - like the equality of women. Instead they are forced to memorize portions of scripture from the Quoran. Women are taught at a young age to be submissive and to dress conservatively. Young girls may be excised genitally. At a young age they may be coerced into an arranged marriage. If they refuse or pursue their own choices (dating) they may be murdered. If they marry and do not obey their husband, they may be beaten. The number of honour killings in Holland proves this.

Ayaan made a short film with Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh. It exposed the rigidity of fundamentalist Islam. For this Theo was violently killed by a Muslim religious fanatic. After this, Ayaan had to go in hiding.

Her goal is still to expose the evil and repressiveness of this fundamentalist cult and to get refugees and immigrants to adjust to democracy and the freedoms of Western & European society.

Chris says

Some of the reviews on GoodReads for Infidel have accused Ayaan Hirsi Ali of using the platform of autobiography to expound her political views and have suggested that any American reading this book may not pick up on a perceived subtlety of doing so (whereas, one suspects, in Holland this is quite obvious). My response to this is: of course she has. Any autobiography worth reading has to be more than a simple cataloging of life's events; otherwise it would simply be a journal. Imagine reading Bill Clinton's My Life and having it be bereft of political opinion. In that way, I think Infidel works splendidly as a political work, particularly in the second half once Ali begins finding her identify. In fact, I believe it is the second part of the book that Ali shines, both as a human and as a writer. In much the same way she was discovering herself as a human in the first half of the book, I too believe that she was discovering herself as a writer. Her pace increases as does the detail to which she describes those life experiences that were shaping her very being. I suppose that as a Westerner, this perception may be biased by an interest in reading more about Western culture rather than Islamic culture, but so be it. Fortunately, Ali's book is a successful melding of the two, brought about by her own transition. Finally, given that I live in a country that's news cycle is driven by

sound bites and the latest murder of a suburban housewife, I appreciate that Ali's book filled in the gaps of a news story I only vaguely remember hearing about (the slaughter of Theo van Gogh in 2004). If nothing else, Infidel reminds me that I should probably be watching the BBC more often.

Amari says

Last week, I heard a colleague ranting about Islam and women's rights. He was reading this book and espousing Hirsi Ali's views. The next day, I lent him my copy of the Quran so that he'd have some background on the basic text of the religion he was trashing. I tend to find that all of the major religious tomes are ridiculous, hopelessly outdated, and that it's not a flaw in religion but a fault of those interpreting fundamental texts in fundamentalist ways when religion becomes less a spiritual undertaking of peace and worthy living and more a set of doctrines used against those who disagree and/or were raised differently. For the record, I think religion is a load of garbage, but I recognize its many compelling characteristics, the difficulty of coolly analyzing the components of one's upbringing, and the charisma of leaders who believe strongly in something.

In any case, the day after my friend grudgingly accepted my Quran, saying he was just sick of the whole thing, he handed me this book. Anyone on this site can see that I have a lot to read, and my list is carefully weeded. Having already read *_Desert Flower_* some years ago, I was actually slightly annoyed to be put in the position of either a) reading 350 pages, probably a rehash, that I didn't have time for or b) not reading it and therefore admitting, in essence, that I am one of those people who likes to tell others what to read but feels insulted by the impertinence of anyone who might suggest I look into something I've not already considered reading and determined unworthy of my precious (and currently very limited) reading time.

So the five stars I've given the book, along with the fact that I read it in less than 24 hours, probably obviate the need for me to continue with what I am saying, so I will stop here. I don't know that I agree with all of Hirsi Ali's actions or arguments. That's not the point, for me. I applaud her courage and her articulate, thoughtful, hard-headed nature.

Amanda R says

I feel like my imagination isn't big enough to even begin to comprehend what life is like growing up in Somalia, Kenya, and Saudi Arabia - as a female Muslim with an absent father and an abusive mother. Even though Ayaan does a good job covering her youth and describing her life to those who have no frame of reference for that kind of life, it still is hard to imagine. It goes without saying that those of us born and raised in the United States have been so amply blessed; its almost beyond comprehension. So, the most interesting part of the book, in addition to getting an insider's view and perspective on Islam, is when Ayaan makes a run for it and becomes a refugee in Holland. This happens about two-thirds through the book, so by the time she makes her escape, I was almost numb to the brutality of her existance as a female Muslim. Watching her discover democracy and a country where people don't routinely kill one another is most amazing. It gave me a fresh perspective on our way of life, and how great it truly is, despite its faults. Ayaan, after realizing that this non-Muslim country was a great place, even though her up-bringing told her that all non-Muslim places would be awful, she begins some serious soul-searching about her faith. Again, very interesting to watch her question and reason with her faith and the Western lifestyle. I won't give away the ending, but she concludes with a controversial thought: why is abuse and intolerance allowed to be masked in the name of religion?

If you don't know who Ayaan is, she made a short film with Theo Van Gough about the submission of women in Islam. Theo was shot and stabbed to death in broad daylight, in front of 50 witnesses. His throat was slit, and a letter was stabbed to his chest. The letter was addressed to Ayaan. The murderer was Muslim and says he killed Theo because he spoke out negatively about Islam.

Tanja Berg says

This would have been a four star rating, but I'm upping it to five because this book has significantly altered my world view. I've been one of those western liberals, thinking that Islam is mostly about peace and that the violence of it stems only from the fanatics. I'm revising that stance now and am wondering how I could ever have been so blind.

Here in Norway, where I live, everyone is ever so willing to adapt to immigrants. We change our school traditions so that we do not offend people who have chosen to come here. It's ridiculous. It would never happen the other way around. This book confirms my view and is concerned at how (some) asylum seekers form enclaves and refuse to adapt to western society. I saw this particularly during the years I lived in Germany, with the Muslim women who could not speak a word of German. I too was an immigrant, but I learned German enough to get by in six months.

I am straying. Anyhow. This book is about the life of Ayaan. She is Somali and grew up in several countries. Already in the 1980's Somalia was being torn apart in internal fighting between clans. Her story is quite horrid. The subjugation of women in the name of Islam was everywhere, starting with the female gender mutilation of children. Women's sexuality must be repressed at any cost, otherwise society would fall apart, Ayaan was told. When her father finally, after many years of absence, decide to marry her off to a man she had never met, she balked and ran away to Holland. The second part of the book is about Ayaan's emancipation from clan and religion.

This is a powerful book about a woman with more strength and courage than I thought imaginable. The content has shaken me to my core. Highly recommended.

Lyn says

Any woman born as a Muslim who has the courage to write a book openly critical of Islam has my respect.

A woman who has the brass to title that same book Infidel has my rapt attention.

Infidel by Ayann Hasli Ali is shocking, brutally honest, and captivating. This woman's courage and resilience are a testimony to the human spirit. The letters and phone calls between her and her father are painfully real and troubling, especially when read in the context of the harshness and violence of the culture from which she came.

Most endearing, though, is her indefatigable sense of hope and optimism, despite all that she had seen and been through. She is not blindly accepting of western culture, she calls it like she sees it, the good, the bad, and the ugly, but she draws a stark and real portrait of the contrast between two worlds.

Also important to read was her observations and perspectives of the 9/11 attacks. At the time, Ayann was a political refugee in Holland. These attacks and the world's responses thereafter led her on a spiritual journey

of questioning her faith, questions and doubts that had been brewing for some time.

When I was in Iraq back in 2005 (roughly the same time this book was coming out), I met a man named Omar, he was a Kurd, who spoke English and we struck up a conversation. It turned out that we were the same age. I was dumbfounded by the great disparity in our childhoods. While I had enjoyed a pleasant and non-eventful youth in the suburbs of America, Omar had been beaten, shot, and his family had been kicked out of their home. As we talked, I could not help looking at Omar's right arm. He was lucky to still have it; there was a horrific deformity in the forearm, the result of a gunshot wound. Omar explained that he had been taken to the nearest hospital and given rudimentary first aid and sent miles away ... to a Kurdish hospital. The first hospital had been only for Arabs.

I could not believe that while I was riding around with my friends and having fun, Omar was experiencing a much harder life. Ayann is my age too, and her childhood was very similar to Omar's. Growing up in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, and across eastern Africa, Ayann described seeing beatings, punitive amputations and beheadings, and depicted receiving violent beatings and mutilation at the hands of her own family. Her escape to Holland and her emancipation from the darkness of her past is a great story. Her continued fight for civil and human rights and her ongoing struggles and life threatening difficulties are inspiring.

T.S. says

This masquerades as pure autobiography of the daughter of an iconic Somali revolutionary, who was absent for most of her life and left her, her brother, and her sister to be cared for by a heavy handed grandmother and an abusive mother. If I were rating the review as an autobiography, I would give it an additional star. As an autobiography, it does not let you down, although it does drag a little slower towards the end.

When reading this book, however, you quickly realize that there is somewhat of a political agenda. I am not sure if most Americans would understand this since most would know very little, if they know anything at all, about Ali. The fact is that she is, again, the daughter of a highly respected Somali nationalist and revolutionary. She also served in the Dutch parliament, which later became scandalous when it was disclosed that she had lied to obtain refugee status. When you look at her whole life, however, it's easy to justify her lying. Anyone who says they would not lie to escape some of the circumstances she endured in Somali, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kenya is lying. She also became famous for her speeches and holding up the "art mirror" to Muslim society, in particular its treatment of women and others who are, mildly putting it, pushed off to the sidelines.

In the end, however, the book does become political and I eventually found that she becomes a bit too heavy handed, one sided, and judgmental towards Islam. For this reason, I had to deduct some of my stars. Unlike some of the other reviewers, however, I do not think Ali wrote an autobiography purely as an autobiography. She has always been in the political spotlight; if anything, I think she's now riding the wave on this book while she can.

Caroline says

I'm kind of shell-shocked. The squishy Liberal views that have, up to now, dominated my concepts about immigration, multiculturalism, integration, Islam, the burqa, and a live-and-let-live philosophy, have all been

shaken and stirred beyond recognition.

Hirsi Ali is an extraordinary woman, to have survived and risen above her incredibly dysfunctional upbringing. Dysfunctional in part because her family was rife with superstition, anger, and violence - largely because her mother was a volatile and depressed Muslim fundamentalist, from an incredibly restrictive culture, who foisted a whole stack of bizarre ideas upon her children. But her father was not a lot better. Her description of her childhood - in Somalia, Saudi Arabia and Kenya - is quite overwhelming. For me one of the outstanding features was the degree to which it was permeated with burdensome religious ideas - and the heinous practices that these ideas generated. Even just the degree of time they had to spend learning about Islam and the Quran, meant they were limited in the time they had to learn about other things.

The incredible thing was that when Hirsi Ali finally absconded to the Netherlands and met Western culture and ideas, she was able to take huge intellectual gulps of fresh air, and embrace the freedom, politics and fairness of the society she found there. She talks a lot in the book about Muslim women who are not able to make this leap, but who remain stuck in the rigid structures of their upbringing. This was not so for Hirsi Ali - she learnt Dutch, educated herself, and eventually even ended up as a very popular member of parliament.

Of course there are many Muslims who practise a benign and philanthropic form of Islam - but Hirsi Ali makes it very clear that this is not always the case, and it is not always the case in the West either. She talks about Muslim enclaves in our cities, where all sorts of gross Islamic traditions are still being continued - forced marriages, domestic violence against women, FGM and honour killings. She makes it clear that fundamentalism can often be an issue in immigrant societies, and she stresses the difficulties of changing these attitudes, and how these attitudes are often embraced by younger generations.

She is currently living in America, working for The American Enterprise Institute - a centre right think tank. Under its umbrella she started the AHA Foundation, which fights for women's rights, especially concerning issues like FGM and and honour killings. If I have moved a metaphorical five miles over the course of my life, Hirsi Ali has moved at least a hundred miles over the course of hers. I am still stunned by what she has managed to achieve.

What an incredible woman, and what an incredible communicator. If you only read one more book this year - make sure it is this one.

There are a lot of articles questioning Hirsi Ali's attitudes. Here is one...

<http://www.slate.com/articles/life/fa...>

Rebecca says

Just finished Infidel. I leave the memoir with mixed feelings.

On the one hand, I appreciate the strides that the author has made in life, considering the huge obstacles she has overcome. Additionally, I admire her outspokenness concerning women's issues. I left the book feeling an even greater resolve to support organizations and charities that are working to level the gender playing field. It causes me to reflect on my own personal practices and belief systems that work against equity (of

any type). In this way, I benefited from reading her work.

On the other hand, there were moments in her book that felt elitist and lacking compassion. Her views on immigrants who were "taking" from the welfare system in the Netherlands reminded me of many conversations I have had with bigoted Americans concerning refugees in America. Ayaan was lucky. When she arrived in the Netherlands she was literate, young, left relatively unscathed by war and had lived in conditions that provided her with consistent food and water.

The refugees that I work with are often suffering from a form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Additionally, they are illiterate and have NEVER experienced any type of formal education. These alone are HUGE setbacks in cultures where education is highly valued. Not only is their access to education limited, they are forced into service-oriented jobs that limit their exposure to English. The mind-numbing nature of the work they perform further erodes away at their mental health. Isolation, poverty, and the horrors of war plague many. The systems that are meant to support them often lack funding, political support or manpower. To simply point to the number of people who remain dependent on welfare systems is an injustice to them and their suffering.

Adding to that, I felt like the second half of Ali's memoir acted as an Anti-Islamic Manifesto. I was taken aback by some of her generalized statements concerning Muslims. They were simply not consistent with my own personal experiences (not just with white American Muslims, but with Muslims from all over the world). Thirty percent of the students I teach are Muslim. They come from a variety of African and European countries.

Here are just a few of my experiences that are quite different than the Muslims Ayaan describes in her book:

1. I taught a young man from Egypt whose mother was a visiting ENT doctor. She was an example of a well educated and highly independent woman who was dedicated to the Islamic faith.

2. I have several young Somali students whose connection with their faith is as varied as they are. One student's father is a prominent Imam in Salt Lake. He has conferenced with me many times. Each time, he has spoken to me about the importance of his daughter's education. He has explained his concern that the Muslim school she attended in Kenya did little to promote her literacy. While another student's mother comes to school and asks if she can volunteer her time, regardless of the fact that she cannot read or write. She simply wants to show her son that education is important through her example.

3. I have several female Muslim students who do not wear the Hijab. They indicate that the veil is just one interpretation of how a female expresses modesty.

4. I have never met with a single father or male student who did not show the utmost respect to me as a female and a teacher. My male students not only show respect to me, they are highly respectful of the young women in the class. Many come to me to ask advice about college, scholarships, life out of high school and community service.

While I do not doubt the overwhelming number of women who suffer under the hands of abusive fathers, brothers, and husbands, I have not seen this as an endemic problem to the immigrants that I serve. (Sadly, my experience with domestic abuse has come from Christian homes, not Muslim homes.) It has always been attached to poverty!

I fear Ayaan's focus on Islam dilutes women's rights issues. I left with a sense that she felt that if Islam is eliminated, misogyny and abuse will be eliminated with it. But, when looked at with a closer lens this does not hold. Consider:

Islam is not a single organization. There are as many widely variant practices and beliefs in Islam as there are in Christianity. Just as Christians interpret their holy book, The Bible differently, so do Muslims have varying interpretations of the Q'uran. There is not a single interpretation.

Additionally, dangerous practices that limit women's independence, freedom and self worth are not specific to Muslims. Child brides can be found all over the world. The documentary *The Day My God Died* is a great testament to the wide spread nature of this problem. *Born Into Brothels* is another great documentary that exposes the suffering of women and their children forced into sex slavery, isolation and social segregation. Thailand, a primarily Buddhist country has the dubious distinction of the greatest number of known child prostitutes.

The general devaluation of women is endemic to the world. While relatively mild in comparison, first world countries carry their own wounds and scars surrounding this important human rights issue.

I don't believe that equity will be found by attacking people's faith. I believe that it comes from condemning misogynistic practices. It comes from agreeing on laws that protect women and bring them out of poverty, war, environmental disasters, and limited educations. An intolerance to anything that minimizes women in anyway needs to be promoted.

There is not a single traditional religion or culture that has not played a role in the denigration of women. At the same time many of these organizations have done things to support women's education and rise from poverty. Moving forward, we must find a way to use religious organizations to help fight against inequity.

Gary says

A truly fascinating and inspiring autobiography of a true human rights activist and a truly courageous fighter who has survived the victimization of Islamists and their despicable leftwing backers, for speaking the truth and standing up against evil and abuse of women.

The author talks of her childhood and youth in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kenya, and of the narrow minded bigotry of the Muslim world today.

She recounts the horrors of genital mutilation in Somalia, the racial prejudice in Saudi Arabia against non-Arabs (especially Africans), the complete hatred and Nazi-like brainwashing she witnessed in Saudi Arabia against the Jews (which takes place in most of the Islamic world: "In Saudi Arabia everything bad was the fault of the Jews. When the air conditioner broke, or suddenly the tap stopped running, the Saudi woman next door used to say the Jews did it. The children next door were taught to pray for the health of their parents and the destruction of the Jews. Later when we went to school, our teachers lamented at length all the evil things Jews had done and planned to do against Muslims...Sister Aziza told us about the Jews. She described them in such a way that I imagined them as physically monstrous: they had horns on their heads and noses so monstrous they stuck out like great beaks. Devil and djinns literally flew out of their heads to mislead Muslims and spread evil. Everything that went wrong was the fault of the Jews...The Jews controlled the world, and that was why we had to be pure, to resist this evil influence. Islam was under attack and we should step forward and fight the Jews, for only if all Jews were destroyed would peace come to Muslims".

The author describes the slow opening up of her minds against Islamic bigotry and enslavement of the spirit. When she lived in Kenya, which was relatively free compared to Somalia, Saudi Arabia and the then Marxist Ethiopia, she recounts how discovering the school library and the books of Enid Blyton and Nancy Drew adventures of pluck and independence, tales of freedom and adventure, trust equality between boys and girls, opened up her mind to another world.

And yet her battle was long, as she explains opening up and deconstructing a mental cage is a long process.

Ayaan shockingly reveals the horrific fate of rape victims in Islam who are blamed for being raped and murdered or tortured.

Finally the author migrated to the Netherlands and became a member of parliament for the Dutch Liberal Party a defender of human rights, and opponent of Islamic fanaticism.

As a result she became a victim of death threats and had to live in hiding. Vilified by both Islamists and their leftist backers, who hypocritically claim to be pro-feminism and human rights but attack those who highlight abuses in Islam.

Indeed the liberal Dutch politician, Pim Fortuyn, highlighted the danger of Islamic fundamentalism and uncontrolled immigration to the Netherlands and was murdered by a Dutch pro-Islamic leftwing radical. The international left today are helping the Islamists to plunge the world into darkness and need to be stopped.

Ayaan's friend and colleague Theo Van Gogh was brutally murdered by a Muslim terrorist because of a documentary he was working on with Ayaan highlighting abuse of women in Islamic societies.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was eventually stripped of Dutch citizenship and went to live in the United States. She stresses that the central message of her book is that "We in the west would be wrong to prolong the pain of that transition (to a culture that respects women and human rights) unnecessary, be elevating cultures full of bigotry and hatred to the status of a respectable and alternative way of life."

Let us support people like this and break the stranglehold of the Islamic/Leftist axis that threatens the very existence of the free world.

sisraelt says

MARCH 25, 2015

Immensely disliked this book and tired of all the comments so I took down my review. Moving on!

Mary says

I first saw Ayaan Hirsi Ali on *Real Time with Bill Maher* a year or two ago and quickly placed her book on my to-read list. It was weird because I tried several times to order the book and it kept getting cancelled from several different vendors. Eerie. Especially when you consider that Hirsi Ali is such a controversial figure who lives her life with bodyguards under the threat of death to this day.

It's a fascinating story. A young girl from a fundamentalist Muslim family in war-torn Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kenya who escapes as a refugee and eventually becomes an activist and member of Parliament in Holland. In between there's physical and verbal abuse, arranged marriage, poverty, death and absolute sheer horror. Critics slam the book for painting a dark picture of Islam, but Hirsi Ali is writing about *her life and experiences*.

Then she transforms from devout Muslim to Atheist. Try finding a more extreme leap than that.

Probably one of the most horrifying things I've ever read was the excruciatingly detailed parts about female genital mutilation.

I enjoyed this autobiography. Although I felt it was uneven at times and longer than it needed to be. It's difficult not to admire her outspokenness about the inhumane treatment of women, but if she was a tad less bitter and politically motivated in the writing of this book I think I would've been less turned off.
