

The Muslim Missionary Position

REVIEW BY BRENDA WALKER

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's long strange trip of a life thus far tells volumes to the patient reader about the clash of civilizations. She was raised as an obedient Muslim girl in a traditional Somali family in Africa. She was on her way to Canada to marry a man of her father's choosing when she decided to bolt from the heavy yoke of clan responsibility to explore European culture and freedom.

Her earlier book, *Infidel*, described in detail the transformation from a submissive Muslim female to an outspoken Enlightenment fundamentalist, as she has described herself.

There is much to admire about Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She has spoken out courageously about the oppression of women under Islam, and helped Theo Van Gogh produce a short film on the subject, *Submission*, for which he was murdered on an Amsterdam street in 2004 by a Muslim angry at the truth being told about Islam's cruelty. Despite the danger, she has continued to criticize Islam since that time.

Her account of personal cultural transformation is a valuable document for the psychological aspect alone. Garrett Hardin said that it takes five years to change a mind, yet Ayaan's open-minded encounter with Europe set her well upon the path in much less time than that. However, it did take years of university education in the Netherlands for her to grasp the intellectual background to Western concepts of free speech, citizenship, and government by consent of the governed.

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The book is a sometimes dystopic exploration of the byways of Muslim and Somali cultures, all very unappealing to persons who appreciate our Western freedoms and values. The author informs the reader in great detail how Somalis are a violent people who oppress women and remain stubbornly attached to their desert superstitions. Then she says that Muslims are coming here in the millions and we Americans should welcome them because they are ignorant little lambs who need our helpful guidance. Being an intellectual person, Hirsi Ali believes that reason will convince others of her tribe of the superiority of a society built on science and empiricism. However, the actual social history of Somali immigrants is particularly not encouraging, as exemplified by

the dozens of young men who returned to their homeland to pursue jihad. A Somali refugee, Shirwa Ahmed, graduated from a Minneapolis high school and appeared well adjusted, yet he returned home within a few years to become a suicide bomber who killed dozens in Mogadishu. Somali gangs are a worsening problem wherever communities arise.

But even with a mountain of evidence showing Muslim immigration fails in many instances regarding assimilation and presents a real national security threat, she believes it should continue despite the growing disapproval regarding it here and in Europe. In fact, she thinks they *should* come, as part of America's missionary tradition, so they can partake of the fruits of freedom just as she has. That attitude is curiously generous considering that she requires 24/7 security as protection from Muslims who want to kill her.

As it happens, I e-mailed an NPR talk show when she appeared for an interview during her book tour, and my question was read, asking whether she thought Muslim immigration should be curtailed, citing reasons of cultural differences like FGM and honor killing:

NEIL CONAN: Here's an e-mail from Brenda

Nomad

From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations

By Ayaan Hirsi Ali

New York, NY: Free Press, 2010

277 pp., \$27



in Berkeley: “Don’t you think that persons from traditional Muslim societies are not a good cultural fit for the West, particularly America, and should not be admitted as immigrants? Not all diversity is desirable.” And she gives us examples of FGM, which by — I assume she means female genital mutilation, and polygamy.

Ms. ALI: You know, I don’t — I really don’t think that we — by excluding people or by kicking people out of the country, that that is where we should look for solutions. The United States is a highly moral country. Most Americans go out of their way to help people who are underprivileged, whether it’s in the United States or outside of the U.S.

And I know there’s a lot of criticism on American foreign policy, but I just see this great moral activity, and the only — my message is to share, first and foremost, the values that have made Americans successful and resilient with the newcomers.

And I think it’s justified for those people who truly understand what the American Constitution is about and what democracy and liberalism are about and who reject it and who want Sharia to say it’s common sense to tell them take illegal U-turn. Go back to where there is Sharia. I think that’s justified.

But for a lot of people who don’t know of these ideas and who are here, I think the first step would be to educate them on these, you know, on freedom and the institutions and Constitution of freedom.

‘Nomad’ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, On Reclaiming Islam, NPR, May 18, 2010

Realistic experts who have warned against Islam, like Dutch politician Geert Wilders and scholar Robert Spencer, have recommended that Muslim immigration be stopped for national security reasons. Such a policy change seems more common sense than fringe rant. Franklin Roosevelt did not attempt sensitive outreach to Japanese and Germans after the beginning of America’s entrance into World War II, for example. In comparison to FDR, President Bush hosted Iftar dinners at the White House every year after 9/11 to promote the lie that Islam is a religion of peace, despite its 1,400 years of war against free peoples.

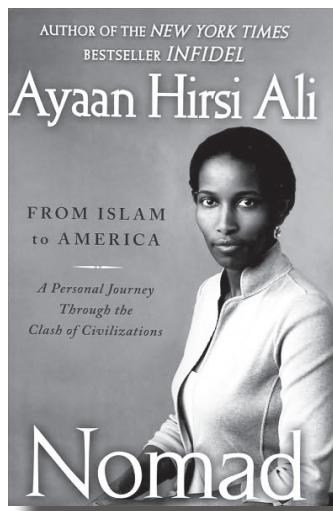
Why would any sane society welcome large numbers of a historic enemy? Political correctness embraced to this degree is a suicide pact for our civilization. We are infested with an alien force that seeks, Borg-like, to assimilate us to their totalitarian system of religion and society. It is profoundly imprudent, as well as arrogant, to think our belief in our culture’s superiority — as demonstrated by science, progress, and representative government — will convince hostile Muslims. They want a worldwide caliphate to please Allah; nothing else matters.

So the book has a big problem with a major underlying proposition, that Muslims should come and we generous Americans should show them the moral superiority of Western civilization over their retrograde

quasi-religion. What’s remarkable is how her description of Somali culture is highly convincing that her tribe is not a good cultural fit with the West. Nevertheless, she examines the social institutions she believes are most helpful in her project of modernizing Islam, specifically public education, feminism, and churches.

However, history is full of the failure of missionary efforts. Less capable societies are generally more angry than grateful at having their ineptitude demonstrated in comparison with a more clever tribe. Millions of Muslims have flooded into the West, but that is not a sign of respect, but rather greed. Africa is still complaining about colonialism decades after it left. America has defended Muslim interests in Kuwait, Kosovo, etc., but they still hate us. Helping out a less-capable country or tribe is practically a guarantee of future resentment — a pattern the State Department should keep in mind.

Nomad has more personal family stories than her previous book, *Infidel*. (See my review in *The Social Contract*, Spring 2007, “*Infidel* — Ayaan’s Long Walk to the Enlightenment.”) The chapter in *Nomad* about her brother is fascinating from the perspective of Muslim family dynamics. As the eldest male, Mahad was called a “prince” by adult family members and treated with more deference than discipline. Ayaan herself noted his youthful talent with languages and writing in school,



expecting him to attain great success as an adult.

Still, being the favored son was not an easy position in an influential family where the father was often absent and the mother seemed constantly angry. Once a normal argument among the kids caused the mother to criticize Mahad using strangely escalated accusations: “How will you ever lead an army? Control a battalion? Rule a people? You can’t manage two little girls — what good are you?”

Whoa! An American parent would have simply hollered, “I want you kids to pipe down right now!” No guilt trip over a little noise. But in this Somali family, calmness was not the norm, and in fact people frequently hit those of lesser status.

Instead of rising to meet tall expectations, Mahad failed to engage as a young man. He refused any beginner’s position at the bottom of a business or organization as being beneath him, because of the high status he inherited from his father. A coronation was not forthcoming, so frustration followed. More curious still was his eventual psychological breakdown, requiring hospitalization. Did he suffer from an onset of schizophrenia, or did the oppressive structure of familial stress finally overcome his ability to cope?

The answer is unclear, but the brother’s institutionalization does spotlight the inherent pressures of the Somali clan system where it encounters elements of modern society. Traditional Somali children are taught, and are expected to memorize, their lineage going back many generations in order to understand their identity. Discovering a distant relationship with a Somali stranger brings with it a mutual obligation. Such a relation-based social framework may have advantages in a nomadic community out in the desert, but it only intensifies the complexity that comes attached to city living with its jobs, schools, politics, and what have you. As Ayaan

observed, modernity looks easy to the wide-eyed outsider, but it is not, as she experienced in her naive early months in Amsterdam.

Moreover, the author characterizes violence as being a norm throughout Somali society. Physical force is used to enforce conformity in the family, at school, and in society generally. “Violence as you will have guessed by now, was an integral part of my upbringing,” she observed and said that was “typical.” There is a chapter titled “Violence and the Closing of the Muslim Mind,” which is an eye-opener even for those deeply critical of Somali culture. Near the end of that chapter she reflected, “Islam is not just a belief; it is a way of life, a violent way of life. Islam is imbued with violence, and it encourages violence.”

One episode in the war between Islam and the West occurred in a Netherlands classroom: Ayaan was brought in to translate and referee a situation where a Somali boy had beaten up a Dutch kid. The teacher complained that little Mohammed (age 7) was aggressive and had struck the first blow. Mohammed’s parents responded, “Of course you don’t wait to be hit first. We taught him to punch any child in the face who so much as gives him a wrong look.” The Dutch teacher was shocked that a child was being taught to use violence as a way to solve conflict.

It’s a little story that might elicit surprise at the naivete of the teacher: Somali society is deeply imbued with violence — how could anyone not notice? Yet Washington continues to welcome thousands of Somalis and Muslims into our country as if history and culture don’t matter. What could possibly go wrong?

Nomad curiously promotes American outreach to Somalis and Muslims while portraying them as some of the most backward people imaginable. And the author is one who should know. ■