



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

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

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"This woman is a major hero of our time." —Richard Dawkins

Ayaan Hirsi Ali captured the world's attention with *Infidel*, her compelling coming-of-age memoir, which spent thirty-one weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Now, in *Nomad*, Hirsi Ali tells of coming to America to build a new life, an ocean away from the death threats made to her by European Islamists, the strife she witnessed, and the inner conflict she suffered. It is the story of her physical journey to freedom and, more crucially, her emotional journey to freedom—her transition from a tribal mind-set that restricts women's every thought and action to a life as a free and equal citizen in an open society. Through stories of the challenges she has faced, she shows the difficulty of reconciling the contradictions of Islam with Western values.

In these pages Hirsi Ali recounts the many turns her life took after she broke with her family, and how she struggled to throw off restrictive superstitions and misconceptions that initially hobbled her ability to assimilate into Western society. She writes movingly of her reconciliation, on his deathbed, with her devout father, who had disowned her when she renounced Islam after 9/11, as well as with her mother and cousins in Somalia and in Europe.

Nomad is a portrait of a family torn apart by the clash of civilizations. But it is also a touching, uplifting, and often funny account of one woman's discovery of today's America. While Hirsi Ali loves much of what she encounters, she fears we are repeating the European mistake of underestimating radical Islam. She calls on key institutions of the West—including universities, the feminist movement, and the Christian churches—to enact specific, innovative remedies that would help other Muslim immigrants to overcome the challenges she has experienced and to resist the fatal allure of fundamentalism and terrorism.

This is Hirsi Ali's intellectual coming-of-age, a memoir that conveys her philosophy as well as her experiences, and that also conveys an urgent message and mission—to inform the West of the extent of the threat from Islam, both from outside and from within our open societies. A celebration of free speech and democracy, *Nomad* is an important contribution to the history of ideas, but above all a rousing call to action.

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

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hayls says

When I began this book I knew there'd be some opinions I would not share (knowing Ayaan's been published in a prominent right-wing newspaper in Australia). But I always think it's good to challenge yourself with differing opinions as they can only enhance your own views, so I persevered 'til the end.

The one thing I really liked was her chapter on Western feminism and their ignorance and inaction on Muslim women's issues for fear of being Islamophobic. However, a similar and better critique of Western feminism is made in *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here* by Karima Bennoune, so I suggest you just read that. Our agreements end there, as she goes on to attribute the oppression of women to Islam itself, rather than to patriarchy (needless to say, her argument completely fails to explain the oppression of women in non-Muslim countries). She also states that European anti-Semitism ended with Hitler which is just blatantly wrong. Her apparent idolisation of Western society is also quite irritating, but it is to be expected if one went from experiencing life in Saudi Arabia to living in the Netherlands, arguably one of the most liberal democracies in the world.

Her more favourable opinion of Christianity is more puzzling still (being a declared atheist), as she seems to have forgotten that, even with reform, the Church has had to be dragged kicking and screaming into modernity, and (with the exception of a few isolated parishes) is still not a bastion of social equality.

Edit:

Also, an obvious critique which I should've added earlier is to do with the title. Her use of the phrase "Clash of Civilisations" clearly indicates her agreement with Samuel P. Huntington's theory that cultural and religious identities (particularly in relation to Islam and "The West") are the primary cause of conflict in the post-Cold War world. For me, this idea is so easy to refute (look up Edward Said and Noam Chomsky)... I'll only say this: Islam is an Abrahamic religion and therefore closely connected to Judaism and Christianity. The idea that Islam has suddenly become the opponent to "Western civilisation" ignores the fact that these three religions have co-existed for centuries, have influenced each other's cultures, and have endured periods where one or other of the three religions was the dominant political force. There is no "clash of civilisations" between Islam, Judaism & Christianity because they are born of the same God, and consequently have a shared civilisation and cultural background.

Mikey B. says

This, again, is a most striking work by the maverick Somalian, ex-Muslim writer. She is begging the West not to give away its' values of liberty and secularism, and to stop giving into and appeasing Islamism. She provides many useful warnings – as in honour killings (in the U.S. and Canada) not recognized as being linked to Islamic beliefs for the fear of being offensive to religious values.

This book is even more personal than her previous books. She describes in some detail her family and the problematic relationship she had with her parents, grandmother, siblings and cousins. Ms. Ali strongly suggests that in some ways Somalian society may be historically regressing – not only in Africa but in its Western ghetto enclaves.

Most of her positive nostalgia is about her transformation in Holland. I believe she is not quite ready as yet to pronounce on the United States, where she is currently settled.

She slams some Western feminists who have appeased Islamists. The Woman's Movement did so much to

instill the equality of the sexes in civil society. Some feminists today (Germaine Greer) appear to have a double standard for non-Western women.

Ms. Ali even suggests (problematically) that Christianity should take more of an offensive in trying to convert Muslims – particularly the new arriving immigrants. This is an interesting proposition.

Once again we have a very forceful and unaccommodating stance from a woman who made a unique transition to self-reliance.

Trish says

Undoubtedly an exceptional mind here. There is no surprise that she has attracted so much attention. One only wishes that her personal life could have been richly rewarding, but then, one can't have everything. Perhaps if she had a family that loved her, we would not be the recipients of her mental largesse. A couple of things stand out: 1) this is yet another woman from a Muslim background telling us Islam an irreparable and damaged religion focused on doing harm to women and non-Muslims and we should do everything we can to make them change their minds--especially when Islamists emigrate to Europe or the USA; 2) an American encountered by Ali when boarding an airplane said that "Americans cherish their diversity" when challenged to put greater restrictions on the behaviors of Muslims in the USA; 3) she herself admits that many Muslims are "instinctively appalled by the violence committed in the name of their faith." She asserts that *most* Muslims do not know the content of the Quran or the Hadith or any Islamic scripture. My thoughts exactly. I have often thought that many Muslims are rather like many Christians who have barely read the Bible. They are just ordinary people trying to get on with their life. They have a superstructure--a religious belief--but it is not profound or deep. It gives them a parameter for daily life and behaviors. I believe most mothers, Muslim or not, would be appalled if their sons decided to blow themselves up for any reason at all.

I am grateful to Ayaan Hirsi Ali for writing the book and giving us insight into her life, her family, and her thoughts. The section on her family was difficult to read, in fact. It was so depressingly brutal, one cannot imagine how this woman emerged whole. But she certainly has my attention, and I wholeheartedly support her cause--to stop violence against women in any country, culture, or religion that seeks to harm them.

Karla says

Religion has always mystified me, even as a kid.

When I heard about the whole "no meat on Friday" thing as a young grade schooler, I immediately - and for *years* afterward - assumed that these people would get sick if they ate a wrong food on a specific day. Catholics obviously had different digestive systems. Seemed logical. Same with that whole kosher deal.

HOLY SHIT, A FORK THAT HAS TOUCHED PORK WILL MAKE THEM DROP DEAD?!!?!? D:

Silly me assumed that there was something scientifically valid in these culinary rules. They were so weird that there *had* to be some hard, deathly consequences to make them such serious business, and I was so glad that I could eat what I wanted when I wanted with whatever implements were at hand. It was just food: fuel to have energy to do stuff, to stay alive and breathing. That seemed like the most important issue. Living life

in this world. That these rules existed (and were obeyed) just so some all-powerful invisible being wouldn't get in a snit didn't even occur to me.

And the yearly brouhaha over Easter seemed to be more about that one girl in class bragging about her new fancy dress to wear to church, a foofy garment totally unsuited to the weather (since snowstorms through April is practically guaranteed around here). My thought was always, "You'll outgrow it by next year, so your parents are wasting money they really can't afford *and* you'll freeze your butt off."

I was a snarky, parsimonious child. (And some things never change. :P)

My upbringing didn't involve religion or spirituality of any kind. My parents weren't declared atheists or even vocal about their attitudes. It just wasn't a factor of daily or weekly life. There were more important things to do on Sunday or concern ourselves with. My sister and I played outside all the time, wandering in the woods and making forts and cutting down old rotted trees to make canoes and playing in the rushing water of the ditch along the driveway. It was play, it was fun, but there was never some spiritual spark to it that made me think some old man in the sky was beaming down in approval or making my insides sparkle with flashes of the divine. Life was school and good grades, chores and helping out, and play and enjoying random whims and pursuits. Everything was rooted in the here and now.

I wouldn't trade that kind of mental upbringing for anything in the world.

So it's no surprise that I have read both of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's memoirs with a kind of horrified fascination. I cannot relate to her experiences in any way, shape, or form. It is so alien to my own, so restrictive and suffocating - not only is the whole clan culture beyond my comprehension (my maternal family is pretty distant and casual about keeping in touch, even if we live in the next town or even next door to each other), but also the insertion of Islam (or any religion) into nearly every single aspect of daily domestic & municipale life and conversation. When is the self, one's own person, the only focus and concern? If the family (and all of its hundreds of extensions) isn't consuming your time and energy, it's God and his many, many self-appointed watchdogs. How inutterably exhausting. But at least you will have carried your soul in a pure and dutiful vessel so that you can enjoy yourself in the hereafter? What a great trade-off. Seems like a sure bet based on an empirical foundation of solid bedrock.

To be fair, I would be as mystified in the Deep South's heavily Christian atmosphere. It's probably a regional thing as much as my own personal upbringing. New England had its overboard religious phase with crazed believers who rooted out heretics and snuffed the life out of them for perceived infractions of Divine rules. We've experienced religious-inspired violent misogyny and repression born of hysteria and fear, and the toxic tonic of the few dictating to the many via intimidation and the arm of the law based on a book presumed to be holy and above reproach. Perhaps we're not keen on letting that seed ever take root again.

I watch events unfold about ISIS in the Middle East and Boko Haram in Africa and the lone wolves in Paris and elsewhere, and Ali's memoir - written nearly five years ago - has a far deeper layer of sadness and defeat for the reader that it could not have had when it was originally published. If matters continue as they are, with fundamental Islam taking the wheel and an inactive majority of believers in the faith failing to hold them to account, then the situation can only get worse. Terror is a powerful tactic. After all, some citizens in Salem no doubt remained silent while others were marched off to their deaths because they didn't want to get a bull's eye on *their* backs.

New England eventually bred out the Puritans' religious mania. The South finally managed to start diminishing the Klan and its own brand of Holy Book violence. Can the same happen to a faith over 1.5

billion strong? I want to think that it's possible, but what a task. Do the inhabitants even want to clean house? To undergo a Reformation of their own? (How chill and transformational would a large Unitarian Universalist Islam movement be?)

It may take decades or even centuries, and the geographical boundaries of future generations would no doubt be unrecognizable to us in the present, but this raging fire is likely to burn out. But only after consuming a senseless amount of human fuel.

Negin says

Yet another author that I wish I knew personally! This book is an excellent sequel to her first book, "Infidel". Everyone should read both of them, and, mind you, this is coming from me. Honestly, I'm rarely pushy with books, or at least I try not to be. The older I get, the less I seem to tell people what to do. Her two books are an exception.

Towards the end of the book, she does a brilliant job calling feminists to action to take up the cause of Muslim women and girls. After all, how can today's feminists call themselves that if they don't stand up to discrimination in the name of religion and culture? That chapter was one of my favourites.

Some quotes that I loved and wish to share:

"The veil deliberately marks women as private and restricted property, nonpersons. The veil sets women apart from men and apart from the world; it restrains them, confines them, grooms them for docility. A mind can be cramped just as a body may be, and a Muslim veil blinkers both your vision and your destiny. It is the mark of a kind of apartheid, not the domination of a race but of a sex."

And one of my all-time favorites:

"The trap of resentment. It is probably the worst mental prison in the world. It is the inability to let go of anger and the perceived or real injustices we suffer. Some people let one or two, or maybe ten unpleasant experiences poison the rest of their lives. They let their anger ferment and rot their personality. They end up seeing themselves as victims of their parents, teachers, their peers and preachers."

I have a few other favorite quotes, but I'll spare you all. Again, recommended reading for all! I hope that she will continue writing and contributing.

Meneesha Govender says

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was born in Somalia into a strict Muslim family.

When her father sent her overseas to marry a man she did not know, Ali chose to ignore her family's wishes and carve out a new life for herself in the Netherlands.

After studying political science and getting a degree, she joined the Labour Party.

After 9/11, Ali denounced Islam and this paved the way for her to become a member of the Dutch

Parliament.

She captured the world's attention with her first book *Infidel* - a coming-of-age memoir.

This was followed by a collaboration with Theo van Gogh to make the movie *Submission* - it drew praise and outrage over its portrayal of the abused women and mostly outrage for its simplistic understanding of Islam.

From refugee, to politician, to writer, to being voted one of Time magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2005, it can be said Ali has achieved a great deal in her life.

Her latest offering to the world in *Nomad* is to warn the West of the extent of the threat from Islam.

I couldn't help but laugh incredulously when I read this on the back cover of the book.

But I soldiered on, deciding to give Ali the benefit of the doubt. I confess, I could not stomach much more of this book. The last few paragraphs of the first chapter, which set the tone for the rest of the book, did not sit well with me at all.

"All these people had left their countries of origin only to band together here, unwilling or unable to let go... We all were far from where we had been born, but only I had left behind that culture. They had brought their web of values with them, halfway across the world. I felt as though I was the only true nomad."

If a person can see absolutely no redeeming qualities in a culture or a religion, then I have to question that person's critical thought processes.

Ali claims to be fighting for the rights of women, but her understanding of Islamic practice with regard to women comes across as Eurocentric and paternalistic.

Her belief in herself as the ultimate nomad is laughable and frustrating.

While I agreed with a number of the injustices Ali highlights in terms of Muslim women, I have to say the solutions she offers are unrealistic and embarrassing.

It is said that the world's worst zealots are the converts and I am afraid this is true for Ali. In her search for belonging, she is so enamoured with a Western culture and mindset that she has forsaken all of the good values and traditions she has been brought up with.

For her, her status as a nomad ends when she finds her place in the US.

Irony?

I'll leave it to you to decide. - Meneesha Govender

Jillian O'connor says

Hirsi Ali's second polemic is a personal story of her disillusionment with Islam and her infatuation with the

West. Her romantic interpretation of American ideals through show tune lyrics smacks of a newcomer's naivete. Her assertion that her family's dysfunction is entirely the result of Islam ignores the role that mental illness seems to have played in her family's history.

Her passionate arguments for feminists to stand up and call out the mistreatment of women within the Muslim community are solid -- religion and culture are not acceptable excuses for misogyny. Her praise for Enlightenment values are a good reminder of both our rights and responsibilities as citizens.

After this, however, her solution that Western Christians seek to convert Muslims to Christianity seems contradictory. If the Western secular democracies are the pinnacle of human society, why does she see a modern crusade as the way to go? What's more, the Roman Catholic church remains a bastion of sexual inequality.

Cheryl says

I was thirty-eight years old and I was only beginning to truly understand why people want to belong somewhere, and to understand how difficult it is to sever all ties with the culture and religion in which you are born. Outwardly I was a success. People wrote articles about me, they asked me what books I was reading and what I thought of Barack Obama. My speeches received standing ovation. But my personal life was a mess. I had escaped from my family and gone to Europe because I hadn't wanted to be trapped in a marriage to a virtual stranger I didn't like. Now, In America, I felt rootless, lost. To be a nomad, always wandering, had always sounded romantic. In practice, to be homeless and living out of a suitcase was a little foretaste of hell.

I read and loved Ali's Infidel, a coming-of-age story about a young girl from Somalia, who was brave enough to follow the arrows of her heart, deserting all others, including family, to live the life she felt she was destined to live. If one were to think about leaders of modern feminism, this woman tops the list, for she stands for talk and action and her life is exemplary of the ideals she preaches. Ayaan Hirsi Ali left a Muslim clan where her father was a renowned leader, to flee the man she was to marry, seeking refuge in Europe. Not long after, she started to speak out against the religion she had been reared to revere. Soon, when her activist-filmmaker partner was killed on the streets (of The Netherlands if I can recall but don't quote me), Ali had to be escorted by bodyguards everywhere because of threats on her life from Islamists. At the penning of this book, she was still surrounded by bodyguards:

People often ask me what it's like to live with bodyguards. The short answer is that it's better than being dead. It's also better than wearing a headscarf or a veil, which to me represents the mental and physical restrictions that so many Muslim women have to suffer. Still, the irony of my situation has not escaped me: I am supposed to be a great icon of women's freedom, but because of death threats against me I have to live in a way that is, in a sense, unfree.

If you haven't read Infidel (which is my favorite of the two), I caution you to start there not just because it is

a memoir that speaks of the experiences of a young girl growing up in a rural clan of various Muslim communities (Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Kenya) and raised by a fundamentalist mother, but it also helps you understand the complexities of this second memoir, which frankly, reads like an Op-ed piece in some places. As an American Enterprise Institute Scholar, Ali seems to be partaking in debate about aspects of the Quran and Shari'a. I admit I don't know much about the Quran beyond the *suras* and the *Hadith* explored in my collegiate Comparative Religion classes, to formulate an opinion. And there are a lot of them in this memoir, opinions I mean. Some of which you could imagine would be very controversial.

However, when a person has actually lived through the perils of a society where free speech or personal freedom is not allowed, you can only appreciate the portrait of her life that she has mapped out through words. This memoir seems to be her celebration of free speech:

I was not born in the West and I did not grow up in the West. But the delight of being able once I came to the West to let my imagination run free, the pleasure of choosing whom I want to associate with, the joy of reading what I want, and the thrill of being in control of my life is something I feel intensely as I manage to extricate myself from all the shackles and obstacles

Ali doesn't glorify the West either. In this memoir she outlines what she views is wrong with the West. Like how free speech itself could be limited in the West for fear of "criticizing a particular religion." *The thin fingers of self-censorship begin to tighten around individual minds, then groups of people, then around ideas themselves and their expression.* But how far do you take free speech so that it does not become *hate* speech? This too is a debate that has taken place in the West, something that Ali doesn't mention as she talks about curtailing violence--this limitation of freedom of speech within a civilized society.

It is horrifying, when you think about the individuals and writers who instead of simply dealing with people who disagree with their views, have to deal with people who want to kill them for their views. When you think about this, I mean really sit and ponder this, you understand how important it is that books written by these nonconformists (Ali included) are published **and** reviewed. For who are we, if we can't agree to simply have a disagreement over words?

Salman Rushdie has lived under a sentence of death by fatwa for twenty years. Taslima Nasreen, who was brave enough to say that Islam doesn't permit democracy and violates human rights, now lives in hiding, without even an apartment to call her own. Irshad Manji in Canada and Wafa Sultan in the United States, women who have dared to criticize Islam in public, now require protection, as I do...

Marjorie says

Ok, no more pussy foot'in around about the conflict between tribal and urban, western, traditional. 'In the real world, equal respect for all cultures doesn't translate into a rich mosaic of colorful and proud peoples interacting peacefully while maintaining a delightful diversity of food and craftwork. It translates into closed pockets of oppression, ignorance, and abuse.'

Women, girls bare the weight of Islamic violence of male domination; physically, legally, psychologically. Female genital circumcision (without pain relief) is not dead and neither is confinement and slavery.

Everyone who wants a practical hope of understanding the completely poles apart values/standards of the west and Muslim middle east must read and think hard about this one. We enjoy 4+ centuries of the Age of Enlightenment (reason, science, logic, individual reasoning thrumps group think) whereas Islamic rule (home, country, religion) is based upon unquestioning submission to top dogs.

All those folks worried about political correctness are going to swoon.

Triple guess review; yes I can tell you skimmed and looked for offense to end your inquiry, zero'ed in and shut down to everything else. Lazy thinking.

This should be on Oprah's must read list.

Jake says

"We make our sons. This is the tragedy of the tribal Muslim man, and especially the firstborn son: the overblown expectations, the ruinous vanity, the unstable sense of self that relies on the oppression of one group of people--women--to maintain the other group's self image."

I found the above quote to be one of the most powerful statements in Ayaan Hirsi Ali's book *Nomad*. It is all the more significant because it occurs in a chapter devoted to her brother who, Ms. Hirsi Ali argues, is as much a victim of fundamentalist Islam as she was. This book is more than just a memoir of one woman's personal journey. Through frank reflection, Hirsi Ali makes a bold rebuke of Islam, but also of groups and institutions that she regards as passive enablers.

"Textbooks gloss over the fundamentally unjust rules of Islam and present it as a peaceful religion. Institutions of reason must...reinvest in developing the ability to think critically, no matter how impolite some people may find the results."

For me, the most informative sections of this book deal with immigration. Through personal and professional experience, Hirsi Ali has attained a high degree of insight into this problematic issue. She lays some blame at everyone's feet, but shows empathy for various parties. People on both sides of the Arizona/Mexico border could learn a lot from reading this book. I know I did.

Some of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's subjective reasoning struck me as faulty. She is prone to generalization and exhibits a double standard. She gives recognition to moderate Christians and Jews but not moderate Muslims. To her credit she admits this contradiction. Yet she justifies it by claiming even moderate Muslims take the Koran to be inerrant (a generalization that may not be true in every case). Regardless, I thought this book was rooted in the best kind of vigorous debate. She praises this approach late in the book.

"When I came to the West what I found truly amazing was the fact that believers, agnostics, and unbelievers could debate with and even ridicule one another without ever resorting to violence."

At a time when tempers are running extremely high in the U.S.A., I hope this generalization remains generally true. Bottom line: I strongly recommend this book as a resource for increasing one's understanding of the great friction between Islam and Western society.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

Ayaan is just impressive. It is hard to believe she was born speaking Arabic and Somali and that English is not her mother tongue. I was born speaking Arabic, but she is far more sophisticated, more intelligent, more academically analytical than I am. I read her book, sit at her feet and learn from her, such an excellent scholar. Her life comes through this book and she is every bit as real and at the same time she is really well-learned and you can't help but read her phrases over and over again so you can learn from her. That is what I have been doing since I got into her world in that book. She is one of the few rare honest people that our world needs, that world blinded by political correctness at the cost of truth. I plan on reading every book of hers and no doubt I am getting richer through that.

The first three parts are dedicated to what is wrong with Islam, and the last part is supposed to offer "Remedies", as of p. 205. When I read that part, I liked some of it and most of it seemed like far-fetched solutions. Like many intellectuals, Ayaan offers us the Enlightenment as the savior of Islam from the deep mess it has got into. Well, Enlightenment is based on "Go, Inquire", even if this means you would end up free of all religion. We all know that no Muslim would venture to do that, knowing he might eventually lose his religion. Ayaan herself has beautifully stated it on page 214 that Islam, by contrast, is incompatible with the principles of liberty that are at the heart of the Enlightenment legacy. If that is the case, Ayan, and indeed it is, why bother to offer Enlightenment as a solution to Islam when Islam itself doesn't accept any form of change in obedience to the sacred text of the Quran? The whole chapter is excellent read, but the whole book could have been written without that part on "remedies". However, it poses some questions for us to elaborate on further research projects. Overall, a huge salute to the free woman, the free thinker, the free soul, the liberated, intelligent woman that she is!

Milan/zzz says

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's books are not the type of books for which you can say "*I like it*" or "*I don't like it*". Those sorts of evaluations are just too trivial and utterly inadequate. "*Nomad*" is not exception. Her *Infidel* blown me away and this one is a sort of sequel.

She's an exceptionally brave woman and in her books she's not compromising with very sensitive issues which leaves two options to the reader: to agree or disagree. But then she elaborates her statements incredibly strongly so when you're disagreeing it's more in the form of some unpleasant feeling than strong disagreement.

For instance I opt to consider myself as a very tolerant man who respect individuality in every single form and as such the word "assimilation" never raised positive emotion. But then if you're moving from a tribal society that lives according the few centuries old rules into 21st century Holland you just can NOT live according to the tribal rules! You can NOT perform genital mutilation to your daughter, you can NOT teach your son to hit first if his schoolmate is disagreeing with him, you can NOT hate your new adopted society.

So I realized when reading this book that assimilation is NOT necessarily wrong. In Hirsi-Ali's words "*when I talk about assimilation I talk about assimilation into civilization*".

When I was in Holland last April I talked with one very dear man in his 60s-70s. He has a lovely house, lovely family, grandkids, still working (because he loves not because he has to); I could say he's quite wealthy. So I was interested what would be his concerns [to make small digression Jostein Gaardar answered on the same question "Global warming" and I was stunned because, wow what kind of life you were suppose to live if global warming is your main concern (I guess you just have to be Norwegian)] and indeed global warming would be very rational concern if you're a Dutch but he said "Islamic radicalism". You know this is not response you would usually hear in Holland because people who think that way are labeled as non-tolerant but reply has had perfect sense to me but I was surprised.

We don't even recognize in how many forms Islamism can be among us. There is one part when Hirsi-Ali describes her experiences from lecturing among US universities. Usually before she even finishes there is a line of Muslim students who are waiting to express their disagreements (before she even finishes her thoughts by the way):

"...but every now and then I realized that my arguments were achieving something. Perhaps I was not changing the minds of the self-appointed defenders of Islam, but I was opening the eyes of the majority of non-Muslim students in the audience. Often I glimpsed the horror on their faces as they realized that these veiled and bearded youngsters, with whom for years they had shared cups of coffee, books, and classes, did not share their most basic values."

This book is mostly about her life in USA and therefore there is one question (which stricken me and I think it overcome America): "*Can you be a Muslim and an American patriot?*" and she replies immediately "*You can if you don't care very much about being a Muslim*". You know, it must be horrifying being a Muslim if that's indeed truth. So horrifying that I feel an empathy towards them. She wrote one great imaginary dialogue between a Muslim girl Amina and her friend Jane after the Mumbai attacks in Nov 2008 when almost 200 died:

[to short things: Jane asks Amina what she thinks about attackers since they called out "Allah is great!" when they attacked thinking they were doing it for Islam. Amina rejects to answer saying that it's only that people kills other people in the name of their religion whatever that religion is. In the end Jane asks:]

J: Would you kill for God? Would you kill me, your friend?

A: Why do you ask?

J: Because you say Christianity makes people do this, Hinduism makes people do that, Muslims defend themselves in the name of Islam, whatever. Would you kill me? If a Muslim wanted to kill members of my family, would you stop him?

A: I don't like where this conversation is going. I want to stop talking about this.

J: Would you kill me? Would you stop a Muslim from killing me or my family?

A: Would you stop a Christian killing me in the name of Christianity?

J: Well, yes, actually. In a nonsecond. And you know, I'm not a Christian. [...] Life is my religion.

A: I really don't want to talk about this.

J: You don't want to talk it because you would not save my life or because ...

A (close to tears): I don't know. I want to do what is right. Allah tells me what is right. I just want to be good Muslim. I don't want to kill people, I don't want people to be killed, I just want to be a good Muslim.

J: Are you sure you want to be a good Muslim? Here! (She takes the Quran out of her bag and puts in on Amina's lap) Have you read the Quran? Do you know what it says? Look on this page: It says "Kill the infidels." Look, here it promises eternal punishment for all unbelievers, here it says "beat the disobedient

wife”; here “Flog the adulterer”. Are you sure that you want to do what Allah wants you to do? Are you sure?

A (now in tears, desperately crying): I really don’t want to talk about this.

What a mental torture this is. And then Hirsi-Ali is suggesting something that really shocked me: she (an atheist) is asking for a help from nothing less but Vatican! She calls Vatican to start a “harvesting souls”-mission, to preach in Muslim countries, to turn as many Muslims as possible into Christianity! OK it’s obvious that little Amina lost her compass but does Hirsi-Ali is still having her own?

This book is raising so many questions. I’ve written down so many of them while reading it; marking so many things to quote (I might quote entire book here) when writing my thoughts (which is the reason why I postponed it so long. I’ve read this book in July) but decided not to. If I start to write about feminism, sexuality in Islam, position of women; the shockingly wrong image educated Muslim women on the West have about women in traditional (poor) societies of east Africa, Central Asia and elsewhere ... I’ll never stop.

I really can’t comprehend how anyone don’t see the benefit of Enlightenment (something she wrote a lot about) and I can’t really imagine how Enlightenment Project can be done in 21st century but I’m glad I’m not in the part of the world that has to perform it. I just hope they’ll manage and in the meanwhile I’ll share fear of my Dutch friend.

You can hear an interview with Hirsi-Ali about this book she gave to the NPR’s WHYY Radio: Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Nomad" on a journey through the clash of civilizations

Chris Aylott says

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is an excellent writer. The events she has seen with her own eyes are gripping and worth serious consideration. However, I'm also convinced she's a paranoid wingnut who throws out a bunch of wild assertions instead of facts.

She is convincing when she describes the abuse she and the women she knows have suffered in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, and other lovely hotspots in Africa and the Middle East. "I saw this and that happen" is great evidence. However, there is no evidence that suggests she has any idea what she's talking about when she talks about Islam in America. Are there horrible things happening in Muslim schools, madrassas, or communities in America? Okay, take us there. Show us the mosque. Interview some people. Show us a pattern. Don't throw out McCarthyite crap like "if you see more women going to the mosque, it might be full of radicals."

Throw in a few obvious errors in fact -- the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were faked by Russians, NOT the Nazis -- and one has to wonder just how much research she's really done. (Maybe her bodyguards got in the way. Though it's odd that despite bringing up over and over again how she has to pay for round-the-clock protection, she never mentions any actual attempts on her life.)

There are some good ideas in here. I think she's right that we should be pushing the hardline Islamic nations much harder on their treatment of women. But unleashing the Catholic Church to try to convert those crazy Muslims to Christianity? Sorry, but this little old secular humanist will pass on THAT one.

Nicki Hill says

very pertinent to me: "Social workers in the West will tell you that immigrants need to maintain group cohesion for their mental health, because otherwise they will be confused and their self-esteem destroyed. This is untrue. The idea that immigrants need to maintain group cohesion promotes the perception of them as victim groups requiring special accommodation, an industry of special facilities and assistance. If people should conform to their ancestral culture, it therefore follows that they should also be helped to maintain it, with their own schools, their own government subsidized community groups, and even their own system of legal arbitration. This is the kind of romantic primitivism that the Australian anthropologist Roger Sandall calls "designer tribalism." " So yeah...this book revealed a whole new set of values for me. A must read for anyone who wants to be informed about policy regarding religious groups, war, immigration and feminist theory.
