



Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam

Asra Nomani

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As President Bush is preparing to invade Iraq, *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Asra Nomani embarks on a dangerous journey from Middle America to the Middle East to join more than two million fellow Muslims on the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca required of all Muslims once in their lifetime. Mecca is Islam's most sacred city and strictly off limits to non-Muslims. On a journey perilous enough for any American reporter, Nomani is determined to take along her infant son, Shibli -- living proof that she, an unmarried Muslim woman, is guilty of zina, or "illegal sex." If she is found out, the puritanical Islamic law of the Wahabbis in Saudi Arabia may mete out terrifying punishment. But Nomani discovers she is not alone. She is following in the four-thousand-year-old footsteps of another single mother, Hajar (known in the West as Hagar), the original pilgrim to Mecca and mother of the Islamic nation.

Each day of her hajj evokes for Nomani the history of a different Muslim matriarch: Eve, from whom she learns about sin and redemption; Hajar, the single mother abandoned in the desert who teaches her about courage; Khadijah, the first benefactor of Islam and trailblazer for a Muslim woman's right to self-determination; and Aisha, the favorite wife of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam's first female theologian. Inspired by these heroic Muslim women, Nomani returns to America to confront the sexism and intolerance in her local mosque and to fight for the rights of modern Muslim women who are tired of standing alone against the repressive rules and regulations imposed by reactionary fundamentalists.

Nomani shows how many of the freedoms enjoyed centuries ago have been erased by the conservative brand of Islam practiced today, giving the West a false image of Muslim women as veiled and isolated from the world. *Standing Alone in Mecca* is a personal narrative, relating the modern-day lives of the author and other Muslim women to the lives of those who came before, bringing the changing face of women in Islam into focus through the unique lens of the hajj. Interweaving reportage, political analysis, cultural history, and spiritual travelogue, this is a modern woman's jihad, offering for Westerners a never-before-seen look inside the heart of Islam and the emerging role of Muslim women.

Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam Details

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From Reader Review Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam for online ebook

Chadijah Mastura says

A must-read! This is a revolutionary book which sets a small path yet significant toward a peaceful living and better understanding among all humans. It shows the real face of Islam--Nomani said that she could be rated as 'Moslem Generation X', but I think, indeed, she should be rated as Moslem Generation A: the real one. Because the ones who teach and spread hatred, violence and intolerance are actually the ones who should be called the X-Generation, the ones who misinterpreted and bended the teaching itself in the name of power, such as Osama bin Laden (I consider him as a 'kafir' because no man had ever spread hatred and ambiguities toward God as he does).

I like the critic from BOOKLIST which said: "Ultimately, Nomani's riveting, cogent, and inspiring account urges the moderate majority in all faiths to rescue their traditions from those who twist religion into a weapon of mass destruction and terror." -- so true.

Ad Astra says

I can't express my gratitude for having this book written. This is a manifesto of women's rights in Islam. It is a book that questions and speaks to me as an American, and as the wife of an Islamic follower.

This is a really engrossing, and at times very intimidating, story of the female psyche in Islam. One woman's journey and the forces that supported her to bring more rights to women in mosques and for the right to practice Islam alongside men. It is about her travels to Mecca and her experience at the Hajj.

It is a very dense book, with a lot of ideas and analysis to unpack. I will certainly be reading this several times over so I can better appreciate and understand her position. It took me a long time to get into her book.

I found my own copy in a used bookstore. I wish more knew or have heard about Nomani.

Linda ~ chock full of hoot, just a little bit of nanny ~ says

DNF @ 28%

88 pages all saying about the same thing: radical Islam hates women. Which I didn't even need to read one page to know that. There are certainly a lot of interesting things here, and I enjoyed what I learned, especially about the roots of Islam and how it's changed. The issue is that while this is technically well-written (the author is a journalist and knows her grammar), it's not very absorbing. It's repetitive, and reads like an article rather than a book. Half of these 88 pages could have been trimmed out without losing anything essential.

Kristina says

Asra Nomani's *Standing Alone in Mecca: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam* is an interesting book because it's a very intimate look at an American Muslim woman's struggle to align her Muslim cultural values with her Western lifestyle. I recently read Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Heretic* and her point of view is that Islam itself needs to be reformed and modernized. She spent most of her life as a Muslim, but now considers herself an atheist. Nomani's perspective is that Islam is a good religion, but it is being transformed into a religion of hate, intolerance, misogyny and violence due to radical interpretations (mostly coming from Saudi Arabia's Wahhabism). She is still a practicing Muslim and this book is very spiritual in nature. I read both books to get a different perspective on the same growing problem: terrorism fueled by Islam. My goal in reading these books is to answer a question for myself: is Islam itself the problem or is it radical interpretations of Islamic scriptures?

The book is split into seven parts and it's unfortunate that it's not until Part 6: "Asserting the Lessons of the Pilgrimage" that Nomani finally captures my full attention and I can see her as an intelligent, determined woman instead of a thirty-six year old bratty, immature teenager. The majority of the book details Nomani's pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina with her parents, young nephew and niece and her young son. It's exhausting, rather boring, full of spiritual details of Islam that had me rolling my eyes (they greet the angels who sit on their shoulders when praying?) and reveals Nomani to be, for an experienced traveler, journalist and woman in her mid-30s, immature, ignorant of her own religion, somewhat stupid, immersed in her own musings and rather oblivious of the outside world. She's also *very* taken with her infant son, Shibli, and readers must endure many mentions of his toes, his radiant smile, how much fellow pilgrims adore him and her struggle to breast feed him. I found that the most irritating—she seemed surprised that the baby would get hungry! Then many paragraphs would follow of Nomani's search to find somewhere private to breast feed, worry that she'd be caught boob out, and possibly arrested. Seriously. You'd think she would have invested in a breast pump and a bottle. Even though she wrote this book after her pilgrimage and after she'd educated herself more fully, it's interesting to see how different "during" pilgrimage Nomani is to "after" pilgrimage Nomani. This earlier Nomani doesn't seem to connect the way Saudi Arabia interprets the Qur'an as a problem for Western Muslims or Islam itself. I don't want to call her an apologist, but she does lean heavily into the stereotype that the Muslim men who committed the horrendous act of terrorism on 9/11 were men driven to despair by their economic inequalities and lack of opportunity. In her view, they committed suicide via terrorism. This view has since been disproven but it continues to be a false view of Islamic terrorists. They are often well-educated and wealthy. What do they all have in common? Hirsi Ali would say they are following the guidelines of the prophet Muhammad. Nomani would say they are following radical interpretations of Muhammad's words. Nomani and Hirsi Ali both quote the Qur'an and some of the hadiths to prove their points. During the pilgrimage, Nomani discusses the early life of Muhammad and his first wife, Khadijah, and describes how much power and independence women had at that time. She uses this as proof that at the time of Muhammad, Islam is a woman-friendly religion. However (as she later specifies), this is pre-Islam. Islam, like Christianity, wasn't a fully formed, organized religion until after the death of its originator. So I'd say those examples don't count. Also, she says that many of the more misogynist practices of Islam are carryovers from pre-Islamic tribal culture. So was pre-Islam woman friendly or not? It's a bit muddled.

Nomani's inability to grasp the seriousness of the misogyny of the Wahhabism practiced in Saudi Arabia often left me flabbergasted. On page 80, she discusses that women in SA cannot drive and calls it "one of the most imposing restrictions on a women's right to self-determination." Then she compares that with the panic

she felt one day when she couldn't find her car keys and how relieved she was when she did. Um, you momentarily couldn't find your car keys. How is that at all relatable to the experience of a woman in Saudi Arabia who is probably a professional, but can't drive anywhere, even if she's holding the keys to 50 cars in her hand? During the pilgrimage, they went to Muzdalifah, a place where you throw stones at a symbolic image of the devil: "They were a wonderful image to see: Samir in his white, my father in his white, the two of them separated by two generations but united in purpose: collecting stones for the three days of stoning" (131). All I can think is, lady, they STONE women in Saudi Arabia. Her sentimental description of her father and nephew gathering rocks for a stoning really creeped me out, even if it was for a symbolic ritual.

The last one hundred pages or so of the book are a welcome change from all the mommy touchy-feely, sentimental navel-gazing. Descriptions of Shibli playing in his Evenflo Portable Fun Ultrasaucer are replaced by Nomani's realization that her own mosque is spouting radical interpretations of Islam and is becoming more and more misogynistic. This is the story I wanted to read: Nomani's defense of women's rights and using Islam to support her perspective. This is the best part of the book. Nomani consults scholars of the Qur'an and legal experts (at one point, consulting with a tax attorney in a defense that I found to be particularly brilliant) to say to the prophets of hate and misogyny: you are WRONG. Islam supports equal treatment of women. While reading, kept thinking: this is just like Christianity. Later, Nomani echoes my thought when she too realizes that misogynists use religion—any religion—to deny women their equal place in society alongside men. I don't know why I never thought of it like that, but the more I read of Nomani's research into the Qur'an, the more obvious it seemed to me. Islamic misogynists have many reasons why women cannot enter the mosque, cannot pray with men, must keep their head covered (or in some cases, their whole bodies), why they cannot drive, why they cannot walk alone, why they cannot be educated and all of these reasons supposedly come back to the need to keep women pure, to protect them, to show humility before Allah, etc. Supposedly all these "nos" are for the benefit of women. How familiar does this sound? I'm certain fundamental Christianity has much stricter rules that I, thankfully, am ignorant of, but how many times have I heard a Congressman say that all the restrictions placed on abortions are for "women's protection" or for "women's health"? Bullshit. It goes back to religion and keeping women from owning their own bodies. "Some men don't want to relinquish the power and control it has taken them centuries to accumulate. Some think it is their God-given right to express this power and control over women" (271). Exactly, Nomani.

So is my question, posed earlier in this review, answered by either of these two books? No. Not definitively. Both women approached the issue differently. Hirsi Ali didn't focus specifically on the misogyny of Islamic teachings (although she did write about it) but addressed the problem as a whole: the Qur'an contains many passages that espouse violence against women and nonbelievers and moderate Muslims need to reform Islam and disregard those passages. Nomani focused on the problem of women's rights within Islam. She sees it as a problem of interpretation, and she is not alone in this. Many scholars she spoke with said that the more radical and hateful interpretations come from Saudi Arabian clerics. When tracking the hate speech back to its source, Nomani discovered Sheikh al-Ghazzawi. He is so dangerous that his critics call him the cleric version of Hitler Germany's Goebbels. A UCLA law professor, Khalid Abou El Fadl, spoke with Nomani about Islamic feminism. He argued against the theological arguments used by al-Qaeda leader al-Zarqawi to behead prisoners: "Al-Zarqawi searches for the trash that everyone threw out centuries ago and declares the trash to be Islam" (274). Of course, my question is, again, but what is that "trash"? Is it located within the Qur'an? Is it located within one of the hadiths accepted as being part of Islam? I think the answer to my question is that the Qur'an, like the Bible, contains many passages that encourage violence and ways of treating people that are absolutely unacceptable today. Both this book and *Heretic* discussed Martin Luther's Reformation and say Islam needs its own version of this. In the end, I don't think my question is all that important, but I'm glad I took the time to investigate it. I'm now much more informed on the subject. Both Hirsi Ali and Nomani discuss the cognitive dissonance that American Muslims must feel when trying to

practice their religion yet live in a society that seems to contradict its teachings. Nomani has several excellent paragraphs about this, but I'll quote just a few things she says:

“We need to create an American Muslim versus having just Muslims in America” (185, actually a quote from a man named Amir Kanji).

“Both the world and the Muslim ummah (community) are at a crossroads in history. Within the Muslim world, we must open the doors on *ijtihad*, not slam the doors on critical thinking for the sake of political correctness” (255).

“If we were going to truly live up to the ideals of an honest society, it seemed to me, Muslims had to reconcile these contradictions (holding sexist attitudes but participating freely in American society), guided by the principals of tolerance and equity” (263).

If you're trying to comprehend the rise in terrorism around the world being perpetrated by men who yell “Allahu Akbar” while committing these heinous acts, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Heretic* and Asra Nomani's *Standing Alone in Mecca* are both good books to read. Nomani's book is a more spiritual view of Islam, but I think both women's goals are to inform people about the causes of these terrorist acts and how to counteract them. If terrorists and misogynists get their validation from the Qur'an itself or radical, questionable interpretations of the Qur'an, the problem is still the same: how to effectively stop them and their ideology of hatred and violence. Both women express amazement at America's reluctance to question the more intolerant practices of Islam due to political correctness. Both of them also think that while America is guarding its airports and borders, it's letting radicalization in via Islamic websites and radicalized clerics in the mosques. This type of ideological terrorism cannot be fought solely by guns and bomb-dropping drones. Moderate Muslims like Nomani who speak out against the hate being preached in their mosques must be supported by their communities and the American government. For anyone at all interested in the subject of Islam, both of these books are recommended, although Nomani comes with the caveat that the first three-quarters of the book are rather tedious and annoying, but the last 100 pages or so make up for it.

Katrina says

The book chronicles Nomani's coming to terms with Islam and her own identity through a series of major events over a period of 3 years: the death of her friend Daniel Pearl at the hand of Muslim terrorists in Pakistan; the birth of her son Shibli after she is deserted by the partner she had intended to marry; her decision to perform the hajj with her parents, son, niece, and nephew; and her struggle for women's rights within her own mosque in Morgantown, Virginia and in American Islam more generally.

My only complaint is with one aspect of her writing style: displays of (past) ignorance, as she walks you through what she learned about Islam. I was surprised at, and find hard to believe, her ignorance of some basic facts about Islam. I think she may have done this deliberately so her readers could learn alongside her, but I would have preferred her to speak with some authority.

Her descriptions of hajj are detailed and honest. I could imagine myself in her shoes, trying to tow the line with all the Saudi-imposed rules on hajj even when they conflict with my own beliefs about Islam.

I was really moved by her fight for an equal prayer space for women in her mosque and her bravery in speaking up at the Islamic Society of North America convention, in the media, etc. During her fight with her

own mosque, she wrote the Islamic Bill of Rights for Women in Mosques, which I agree with.

Through the course of her experience and research, she meets with Amina Wadud, Kecia Ali, Khalid Abou el Fadl, and many other progressive Muslims. Her book is a great introduction to their work for those who haven't already read them. She is a model for how we might all fight for our rights as women within Islam, and a voice of tolerance and open-mindedness.

Nabeela says

I didn't know what to expect when I picked this up, but I really enjoyed it. It is a candid point of view of the things many American Muslim women might wonder about but not have the courage to ask or question. Seeking to understand within one's faith isn't always the same as questioning one's faith though sometimes it may feel that way. In the author's case there were doubts about her faith which lead her down a path of self discover and actualizing her relationship with God. It is a book about how there isn't one version or one universal interpretation of Islam and how the Muslim community continues to spiral down a path of judgment and intolerance among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. I learned the depth of "Hadith Fishing" which means I can find two hadith to support my interpretation and combat your one hadith which supports your interpretation....in that case who is right? Well at the end of the day we should still be able to show humanity that Islam above all is about peace, dignity, respect and tolerance regardless of which Hadith I/we chose to stand/hide behind.

Marilyn Chilcote says

Al-hamdilulla! Praise be to Allah! I gave this four stars for the writing, but definitely five stars for the content. I'm so grateful for An invitation into Islam. This is Islamic liberation theology. I can't recommend it more highly. I am ready for my Shahadah, statement of faith, assuming as I do, multiple memberships– all in this kingdom of God. go to sleep what's my next book Bobby got it for me

Karla says

I've admired Asra Nomani ever since I saw her appearance on *Real Time with Bill Maher*, so I was excited to read this book and disappointed when it didn't live up to my expectations.

It mainly fell short in the writing department. I've enjoyed her editorials and articles in the WaPo and NYTimes, but the long format of a book showed a weakness in the pacing. There was a lot of repetitious musing and, well, navel-gazing as Nomani agonizes and analyzes over mundane details. She can't even see a Wal-mart shoe brand name ("No Boundaries") without mulling over its significance to her spiritual journey. Some judicious editing wouldn't have hurt the overall effect and tone of her story. As it was, I often felt like I was getting bogged down in a bunch of worthless verbiage.

I applaud Nomani for trying to "take her religion back" but often I wondered if it was worth saving. As an atheist, I don't see the attraction for religious belief and often her paens to Islam as it was originally conceived came across somewhat rose-tinted and idealized, as with the other Abrahamic religions whose adherents insist that if believers would just go back to the kumbaya *roots*, all would be well. Ehhhhh, I'm not

sold on that.

IMO all religions, Islam (as it exists today) in particular, would benefit from a "cafeteria Catholic" approach without those who adopt it fearing apostate and blasphemy laws and self-appointed vigilante squads trying to enforce Wahhabi/Salafi conservative orthodoxy with bombs, bullets and machetes.

Peacegal says

On one hand, I think it's good for my book discussion group to read this, as several of the members could use a basic education about the Islamic world that isn't taught by Glenn Beck.

On the other, the writing style and the author's constant repetition of herself did not make for enjoyable reading in my opinion. *Standing Alone in Mecca* became an utter chore.

The gist of Nomani's book is that Islamic fundamentalists have misinterpreted the Qur'an in order to repress women in Muslim communities. The author draws upon her own experience going on a pilgrimage to Mecca and enduring prejudice in various areas for having a child out of wedlock.

Non-parents, beware: expect a lot of smug and sticky-sweet mommy talk. You'll have to suffer lines like:

A spiritual umbilical cord connects all women through the timeless universality of motherhood.

Sigh. Where's that facepalm?

Facepalm

Ah yes. There it is.

There are also so many uses of the word "conception" and its variants that I wanted to throw something across the room (possibly the book).

Part of the *hajj*, or spiritual journey, undertaken by pilgrims to Mecca involves the sacrifice of an animal, usually a lamb. However, like most today's meat-eaters, Nomani doesn't participate in or witness the slaughter, but rather pays someone to conduct it out of sight:

We simply pay a fee to our travel agency to sacrifice lambs for our family and are told that the meat will go to pilgrims and the poor.

A picture in the photo section depicts a sea of sheep in a massive arena, the text explaining that they are "waiting to be slaughtered for the Day of Sacrifice." The animals are packed so tightly it would be difficult for one to turn around. A major theme of this book is family bonds; it is worth noting that every one of these sheep, as well as all of the other billions of animals slaughtered for food, are also mothers, fathers, children, and friends.

The author also speaks of renting a tiger cub from a roadside menagerie to appear at her baby son's birthday party. No legitimate zoo is going to farm out big cats in this way, and sure enough, a quick Google search revealed photos taken by zoo patrons of the facility. We see two bears (described by the photographer as

constantly pacing) in a barren, concrete-floored enclosure and a chimpanzee in a concrete-and-steel-bar enclosure that resembles a prison cell. The photographer pronounced the facility “the worst zoo ever.”

But back to the book. One of the aspects I found most intriguing was the author’s description of the mix of traditional and Western culture in Saudi Arabia. The road to Mecca, we learn, is lined with KFCs and Donut Houses. Avril Lavigne and Oprah appear on TV, and

In a country where homosexuality was illegal and punishable by death, “Will and Grace,” the sitcom about a gay man and his female roommate, could be seen on the Comedy Channel.”

However, some of the culture clashes the author described just didn’t ring true. At one point, the text reads:

Samir stared at the soldier. He thought to himself, He has a gun. It was not a scene he normally saw in West Virginia. Samir was scared.

I was born and raised in West Virginia. And while the scene of a military road block would indeed be an unusual sight, guns are most certainly not. From the fairground gun shows to the ubiquitous NRA stickers and gun racks on hunters’ pickup trucks, firearms are a huge part of everyday culture in this state. (There are probably more guns than people!) I understood the author’s point, but she worded the passage very strangely.

Sarah says

This is a great read if you are ready to hear about one woman's personal struggle with her religion. The tone isn't an "enlightened" one but it is an honest book (not some behind the burqa, thousand splendid suns or other opportunist "I am an oppressed Muslim woman" book). There are some insightful descriptions of Hajj and Mecca as well.

Lisa says

Interesting images of the author on her hajj with baby in carrier. However, the narrative was slow going.

Beth says

"The challenge for each of us," Asra Nomani writes, "is to discern our personal faith from the doctrines others try to impose on us" (255).

An independent woman, a journalist, an unmarried single mother, and a Muslim, *Standing Alone in Mecca* is Nomani's journey to integrate these disparate parts of herself in a way that allows her to become her fullest and most authentic self within her faith, not despite it. Her journey, though, is not merely a spiritual one, but the spiritual is reflected in the physical world as Nomani joins the hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

Standing Alone in Mecca is an intimate autobiography, a matrilineal history of Islam, and a spiritual

reflection told in an unflinching voice by an author who acknowledges both her strengths and her weaknesses equally. Indeed, even as she chronicles her crusade for the rights of women within Islam, Nomani positions herself as a pilgrim, not a savior, and she unfailingly credits those whose insights and guidance have made her journey possible.

Nomani's chronicle of her quest to find a place for herself within religion in which the Divine has been hijacked by cultural forces of patriarchy and control reminded me very much of my own search for a woman-affirming faith within the Christianity of my childhood, though perhaps she has found herself and her faith more effectively than I ever have. An interesting and thought-provoking read, I would recommend to anyone who is seeking a deeper understanding of Islam, particularly within the use, or who searches for a way to be a feminist woman within a deeply patriarchal social, cultural, and religious framework,

Yasmin says

Oscar Wilde said God's law is love. He asked the eternal question why is there separate rules for men and women? The title of this book is a woman's struggle for the Soul of Islam, it may be more accurate to say a woman's struggle for her soul within Islam. For the generation of young people in Islam that were either in North America or Europe as small children or where born there raises many issues and conflicts. Many governments cry that all citizens should declare alliance to nationalisation first and religion second and any affinity with their parents or grandparents homeland as a distant third at best. The usual questions since the civil rights began assimilation to a melting pot where mixed cultures and heritage is dismissed or separate but equal status? Does Asra Nomani mention or handle any of these necessary questions in her book? Not really. Only in around about way that the generation born in her life time in similar circumstances haven't studied their faith or when they grew up forgot their learning. In Asra Nomani's case she continually sought affirmation from Man and not Allah. The judgements of Man, although brutal, was the only thing that gave meaning to her life. She only mentions the love of God briefly as an after word at the end of the book. No where in the thrust of the book does she turn to the love of God, the teachings of the Sufis, who get scant mention or the affirmation that only Allah can give. Later on she admits pleased that no lightning bolt or thunder descended, however, she doesn't say but of course God wouldn't send those things as I have not sinned. They do not sin at all those that sin for love, another Oscar Wilde quote and there is no sin except stupidity, all from a man who was not religious in the way it is termed by modernists. Asra Nomani works hard for women to pray next to men equally in her hometown mosque. God's work again or still seeking confirmation among Man for who she is? In the end she could easily have another mosque for men and women to pray in and learn and meditate than the ascribed mosque. The fight against ignorance is knowledge, but what do you do with wilful ignorance? Wilful ignorance in my mind is people that deliberately not hear or heed the voice and word of knowledge. You can teach ignorance knowledge if a person is willing and keen. But you can't force wilful and intended ignorance until the person is open within themselves. It is human nature of course that we look to others to be confirmed, parents, peers, the community and sometimes law enforcement, we look to others when we are very young, to be assured. When are we ever sure of ourselves before we need assurance by others? When we learn to feed ourselves at our mother's breast, when we crawl on the floor to get where we need to go. After that? We need the guiding hand of a parent or guardian when we learn to walk, ride a bicycle, we think we need assurances on the steps of life. Asra Nomani looked for reassurances about who she was. American first or Muslim? One or other it couldn't be both for a long time. What was her identity? Her parents couldn't provide it because they were not in her shoes, she panicked, she rebelled, she withdrew and became afraid, there are countless others like her. Countless others that deem Islam's breaking point (in the world or at home) was defined in the latter period of 2001. Nothing else in the world to do with Islam existed before this one date in the history of

humanity. But these Muslims and others in North America and Europe should ask Muslims of Palestine, Sudan, Rwanda, of the Pacific part of the world if anything dramatic altered for them on this mind searing date? Yes many innocent lives were lost needlessly on this date, but more so to AIDS, to the massacre to Rwanda, the deaths in Kosovo, I don't seek to play the numbers game, these are human lives. But to constantly use this date as a stigma to say the world had changed. For countless lives in the world things didn't and have not changed. Poverty, sickness and death to millions of children still happen everyday as they have for countless generations needlessly. Women, in some aspects of Muslim households as with other faiths or non faiths are treated as second class citizens, a certain date in 2001 didn't alter this one way or another.

As a whole this book is well written, well worth a read regardless of the reader's faith or not having a faith. We must do what Asra Nomani lightly touches on. We must learn about each other, ourselves for a better understanding of the world and who and what makes up this world. You don't have to be an academic or have intense training to be a scholar of the world and what lies within it.

Aadisht says

1. I would be very interested in a publication that explores how much the author's campaign for womens' equal rights in mosques has progressed since she wrote this one.
 2. As someone who resorts to exit as a first option, I find it very hard to understand, or develop empathy with people who resort to voice. It is a little baffling to me that women would campaign to be allowed into mosques, instead of just giving up on the mosque or religion as a whole. But this book brought me a little closer to sympathy or empathy with that course of action, even though I am still not sure if I agree with it.
 3. The death threats described are horrifying.
 4. But one reason this book also is a little irritating is that as an autobiography (and this is autobiography far more than serious research or advocacy), it is a little too preening.
-

Lisa says

This is a great book for anyone interested in learning about some of the struggles progressive Muslims face in shaping how Islam will be expressed in the United States. Some of the writing was repetitive and a little choppy, but that was the least of my concerns--Nomani's story was so powerful that it kept things interesting, even when points were repeated. And besides that, the points that she repeated are extremely important: that women have a religious right to equality; that men have a responsibility to support women's equality. Her story of going on the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, was fascinating. Her experiences taking action for women's equality after returning from hajj are equally compelling. Highly recommended.
