



Infidel, by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. New York: Free Press, 2007. XII + 354 pages. \$26.
[German](#)

Reviewed by [Wolfgang G. Schwanitz](#)

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's radical critique on Islam was a wake up call in the Netherlands that culminated in the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004. Two years later, the author came to the United States, where she is pursuing research at the American Enterprise Institute. In her latest book *Infidel*, a *New York Times* bestseller, she explains how this all happened.

But this book is more than an autobiography. It reflects contents and structures of civilizations. This illuminates her unique life. Born in 1969 in Mogadishu, Somalia, she experienced harsh turns from nationalism to Islamism during the time she spent in Nairobi, Kenya, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Just nine years before her birth, during the *Year of Africa*, a clutch of European colonies attained their independence. Yet, in a number of these cases, military rulers seized power. In her home country the dictator Siad Barré embraced communist ideology, thereby provoking an Islamist backlash by the tribes. Thus, the tribes protected the male order against Socialist experiments.

Hirsi Ali's own clan went through this. At first, she was inspired by the liberal Islam of her father who had studied at Columbia University. Later, having been exposed to Wahhabism, which her mother had adopted in Jeddah, Hirsi Ali became a Muslim Brotherhood activist. But as a teenager Hirsi Ali failed to find ready answers to questions such as why a married woman has to be submissive to her husband and why her words count for only half of his in a court of law. Hirsi Ali's restless mind, touched by English literature and Hollywood, was too developed to submit to the life of a *Caged Virgin* (the title of her previous book).

As she was to be married to a Canadian Somali against her will, Hirsi Ali fled from Africa to Europe. To obtain asylum in the Netherlands, she altered slightly the story of her past. Thereafter, she worked and studied political science at University of Leiden. She learned, among other things, about how married couples can and do live as equals.

The author discusses how the native Dutch and immigrants interacted. She observes that Muslim immigrants, though regarding themselves as superior to their infidel counterparts, nonetheless struggled and often failed in their daily lives. Some who were unable to cope with the daily load of work and with integration simply withdrew - leading lives of indolence and dependency, playing on Europeans' guilt, and relying upon allegations of "racism" to extract what they wanted.

The Dutch fought their guilt complex, i.e., their failure to realize that the immigrants had implanted old traditions in a new region. By importing these traditions, Hirsi Ali claims, Muslim immigrants had, in effect, refused democratic values. The native Dutch, she contends, allowed this to happen in the interest of multiculturalism. Thus there developed parallel societies wherein the oppression of women and children was tolerated, if not approved. She argues that the Dutch should never have allowed this to occur.

In 2004 Hirsi Ali intensified her atheistic crusade, using her role as an elected member of the Dutch Parliament. She tried to enlighten fellow citizens about circumcision, coerced marriage, and honor killings. She fought against Islamic segregation and unsupervised Islamic *madrassas* (schools). She illustrated the danger by her experience as an interpreter in law courts, hospitals, and safe houses for women. In her eyes, the notion of Islam as a peaceful and tolerant religion is a fairy tale.

Hirsi Ali wrote the documentary "Submission" produced by van Gogh. In this film, the audience watches a woman being whipped, on whose skin are inscribed Qur'anic verses that advise such beating. After the airing of the film, the immigrant Muhammad Bouyeri murdered van Gogh, impaling on the victim's chest a threatening letter to Hirsi Ali. In May of 2006, Dutch minister Rita Verdonk stripped the author of citizenship for having provided incorrect asylum data. Yet, Hirsi Ali had previously explained this fact publicly. Though subsequently regaining Dutch citizenship, she now lives in the United States.

This book is a breathtaking account by a seaker of truth. It is a powerful exposé of the failure of Muslim immigrants to be integrated into a predominantly non-Muslim Western European society. Her life provides a lens through which to observe the Islamization of Africa and Europe and the Europeanization of Islam. Can the emerging Euro-Islam be a hope for Europe? Ironically, the Netherlands is the first European country threatened with losing its social cohesion and democratic values.

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