

Escape from tribalism

Ken Phillips reviews

Infidel

by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

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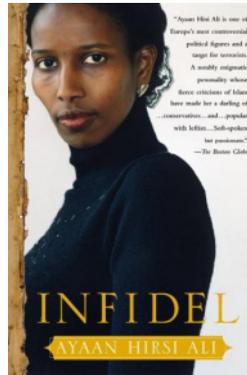
Societies structured on principles of liberty and tolerance can often be lulled into thinking that these core attributes are secure. But those who believe that the current threat from Islam comes only from a fanatical fringe may well be shocked when they read *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Liberty, she shows, is always under threat.

Ali's autobiography reads in many parts like a thriller novel. Early scenes start with a happy childhood under large shady trees but soon move to her desperate flight from war-torn carnage in the Horn of Africa in her late teens. As an adult, we find her being whisked from secret location to secret location under high-level police security.

Ali was a Somali refugee who was granted citizenship in Holland. She became a controversial member of the Dutch Parliament, whose speeches lead to riots and arson in that peaceful country, and whose short movie, *Submission Part 1*, resulted in the assassination of the movie's producer. She now lives under permanent high-level security and works for the Enterprise Institute, a free-market think-tank in the USA. She's an extraordinary figure.

Ali is the daughter of a respected Somali freedom fighter. She was once a devout Muslim who lived much of her early life in the Muslim-dominated societies of Somalia and Saudi Arabia. Her description of life as a Muslim woman is ugly.

To be a Muslim woman in a society ruled by strict adherence to the Qur'an is to have no liberty. Women are chattels of



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men. They cannot leave the home without a male escort. They must be available for sex when the husband wants. If they are beaten by their husband, it is because they defied him. If incest or pedophilia is committed upon them, it is their fault and they are shamed. If they are raped, it is because they have not guarded their sexuality from men. After all, men cannot be expected to control their sexual urges.

But Ali's most disturbing description is of the horrific manner in which Somali women were genitally mutilated.

Ali escaped her Muslim life at the age of 22 when she fled from an arranged marriage. Staying in Germany while in transit to her new husband in Canada, she crossed into Holland and applied for refugee status. Her new life began.

Dutch life was a stark contrast to that which she had known before. The sight of female flesh did not send men wild. She found that she had a voice and views that were listened to. She discovered that if a woman rejected one man for another,

there was no ensuing violence. She obtained a degree in political science, became an adviser to the Dutch Labor Party, but defected to the Liberals to win a seat in Parliament. She's now a firm proselytizer of the liberal society.

But it is her account of the small ways in which liberty is practiced that provides her greatest observations. She found that people in Holland readily say 'no' to one another and look each other in the eyes when they do so. Offence or shame is not taken. And it's these small behavioural features of everyday interpersonal acceptance of difference that are the bedrock of tolerant societies. Contrary to expectations, this casual tolerance of difference does not lead to chaos, but to a rather ordered and peaceful society.

However, Ali also witnessed an in-built weakness in the Dutch (and Western) societies psyche. She explains that the post-colonial guilt complex of Western society has created selective tolerance of intolerance. There's a double standard in applying expectations of basic human rights and dignity. This is dangerous, she says, particularly in the context of the Muslim-inspired terror being waged against free societies.

Working as an interpreter in the Dutch legal and social welfare systems, she saw the institutions turn a blind eye to forced genital mutilation, rape and murder within Muslim communities. She proved this, she says, when she forced the authorities to collect statistics of such occurrences. In an eight-month trial period, it was recorded that eleven Muslim girls were killed by their families in just two of Holland's 25 police regions. It was a rude shock for the Dutch to discover such barbarity within their midst, and the complicit blind-eye of their institutions.

Ali argues that the Dutch have been so keen to accept and placate their own Muslim communities that they have failed to apply the same standards of equality, tolerance and civil behaviour which they

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demand of themselves. She criticises Muslim leaders in Holland for not being prepared to talk about and confront the truth of their own religion.

It's easy to see why Ali challenges. She demands that Muslims openly confront the truth of their own religion. And she challenges free, democratic, liberal and tolerant societies to apply the same standards to Islam that they apply to themselves. She challenges Muslims to be tolerant and, at the same time, challenges Western societies not to tolerate Muslim intolerance.

Certainly Ali experienced life as a devout Muslim under one of Islam's strictest creeds. There is a wide diversity of interpretations of the Qur'an amongst the billions of Muslims worldwide. The vast majority of Muslims conduct their lives in peace and harmony. Only a tiny number of Muslims want to murder every non-Muslim. But Ali argues that the teachings of Muslims who seek violent jihad against every non-believer are accurate reflections of the Qur'an. Reading the Qur'an as a literal text, the intolerant views are plainly

present. The core problem of Islam is its radical intolerance of anyone who does not adhere to its literal word. She suggests that it's a religion caught in a seventeenth-century time-warp of ignorance.

Nevertheless, *Infidel* is much broader than a critique of Islam. Ali also targets *tribalism*—an ideology which demands blind adherence to dictated creeds, and which practises psychological control or physical destruction of those who are not compliant.

Rampant tribalism destroyed a functioning society in her homeland of Somalia. It occurred largely under the banner of Islam, but the destruction was in reality a result of centuries of ethnic and extended family hatreds. Tribalism can occur in any society and can take many forms.

Further, she states that Muslims who are tolerant and liberal must not pretend that the intolerance of Islam is not the truth of the Qur'an. She asks Muslims not to shy away from reality. Doing this, she argues, is effectively *de facto* support for Islam-inspired violence. Every Muslim who

disagrees with murder within families, rape, genital mutilation and the debilitation of women must not stay silent when they become aware of them within their communities. Silence is the oxygen that feeds Muslim violence and terrorism.

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Her message is, of course, particularly important given the violent terrorist jihad being waged against the non-Muslim world by some Muslims. But it's not an unfamiliar battle. It's the same battle waged against fascism and communism in the Twentieth Century. In this century, intolerant Islam is perhaps just the first of these tribal forces that will need to be confronted.

If free societies tolerate intolerance, we arm the destroyers of freedom with their greatest weapon.

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