

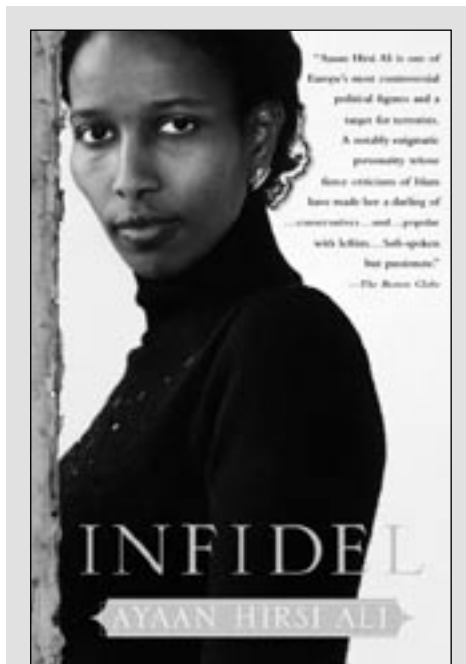
The Price Of Submission Is Too High

by Gina Liggett

In the fall of 2007 President Bush hosted his seventh *Iftar* dinner and spoke of “Islam’s learned and vibrant culture.” The President has used similar glowing words each year at this end-of-Ramadan celebration ever since Islamic radicals murdered thousands of Americans on September 11, 2001. His infamous quote that terrorists have “hijacked a great religion” is totally unconvincing to knowledgeable Atheists—the radicals were simply following the dictates of their religion.

We find out just how “vibrant” Islamic culture is in the illuminating autobiography entitled, “Infidel,” by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. This is the extraordinary story of a brave woman who grew up in Somalia, Kenya and Saudi Arabia and escaped a repressive cultural-religious upbringing. She became a champion of Western ideals of reason and individual rights and committed the worst sin according to her religion: she publicly renounced Islam and became an Atheist. Ms. Hirsi Ali’s autobiography speaks for itself, unlike the hollow praises for a brutal religion. And if there were such a thing as becoming “more Atheist than ever,” then I certainly have after reading this story.

The first striking aspect of the book is how Ms. Hirsi Ali exposes the facts about a barbaric religious culture in a style that reads like a novel. Her tales of living in a society that values primarily clan loyalty and strict obedience to Islam and tradition are morbidly captivating. The people closest to her are well “characterized” and the author gives depth to her story by framing it within the broader context of the politically chaotic east Africa and rigidly theocratic Saudi Arabia. The conspicuous absence of any concept of individual rights in these societies is a sobering reality check about the evils of religion.



Infidel

by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Free Press 2007, 350 pp., \$26.00

The events in Ayaan’s early life reveal the severe cultural dysfunction existing to this day in these tribal-Islamic areas, particularly in the treatment of women and girls. In addition to regular verbal, physical and emotional abuse, Ayaan is forced at age five to undergo the most egregious form of sexual abuse of girls sanctioned in many parts of the world: female genital mutilation. She explains, that while this ubiquitous ritual “predates Islam and is not practiced by all Muslims, (it) is always justified in the name of Islam.” Ayaan vividly details how the women themselves endorse Islam’s warped obsession with female “purity” and enthusiastically

enable their own repression in the name of Allah. It’s as if they collectively suffer from “Stockholm syndrome” in which victims of abuse sympathize with their abusers in order to survive.

Another compelling aspect of this book is how the author describes her intellectual journey as a back-and-forth struggle with conflicting ideas. Given the context of growing up in the fetid pit of such a stifling and horrific environment, her choice to reason her way through the muck is truly heroic.

What made it all possible was that she dared to exhibit a questioning spirit that took root early on. She idolized her often-absent father who fought for democratic reforms in Somalia. And she read voraciously, fascinated by the ideas in Western novels and Nancy Drew stories. She compared the “internal logic” of these books with the intellectually unsatisfying *hadith* of the Prophet Mohammad. This made me recall how unbelievable my Sunday school lessons seemed to me as a child, even before I knew I was an Atheist.

When Ayaan turned sixteen and began searching for “truth,” an influential Islamic nun inspired Ayaan to turn off her intellect and surrender mind, body and soul in order to “submit to God’s pureness and light.” Here, readers learn about some of the intricacies of Islam’s rules of “deep submission,” which is the literal meaning of the religion.

The author clearly makes the case that the surrender demanded by Islam is *absolute*—a degree of power and control that has not (yet) metastasized in the predominately Christian West. For example, Ayaan describes how girls were told that because God created women to be so irresistible to men, “(o)nly the robe worn by the wives of the Prophet could prevent us from arousing men

and leading society into *fitna*, uncontrollable confusion and social chaos.” Ayaan began to cover herself in an oversized black cloak and headscarf; she practiced the long ritual praying; and most importantly, she learned about the “*jihad* within ourselves: submission of our will.”

Naturally, Ayaan started experiencing the many contradictions of her religion; but unlike her peers, she began to reason: “I needed my belief system to be logical and consistent.” When she challenged the inviolable rules, she was told, “You may not question Allah’s word! Satan is speaking to you, girl!” She discovered that Islam “restricted (her) to a very narrow role” and provided “no real answers.” Many Atheists with a strict religious background can relate to this inner dialogue of questioning absurd ideas. While death may not be the price for challenging “divine authority” in the West, there are still risks such as overcoming religion-induced guilt and being ostracized by family and community.

The last straw was when Ayaan’s father brought her the “good news” that he had ar-

ranged her marriage to a Somali Muslim from their clan living in Canada. Instead of meeting her new husband there, she escaped to Holland and created a new life for herself. She devoured books on history, political science, philosophy and psychology, learning “theories about what makes human individuals tick” and absorbing ideas about liberty that displaced the mind-asphyxiating rules of Islam.

When terrorists attacked the United States in 2001 (leading to mob orgies of glee among Muslims worldwide) Ayaan experienced a transforming realization. Having fully embraced ideas depicting the true meaning of the word, “vibrant,” she eloquently writes: “By declaring our Prophet infallible and not permitting ourselves to question him, we Muslims had set up a static tyranny. (W)e Muslims suppressed the freedom to think for ourselves and to act as we chose. We were not just servants of Allah, we were slaves.” Then she made a life-changing decision: she would no longer submit, and declared to herself in the mirror, “I don’t believe in God.”

Ayaan Hirsi Ali went on to become a member of Dutch Parliament, speaking out

against the unquestioning Islamic religion and the transplanted abuse in Holland’s Muslim immigrant communities. She produced the provocative movie, “Submission, Part I,” with Dutch filmmaker, Theo van Gogh, who was soon after savagely killed by a Muslim radical. Herself a target of Islamic extremists, Ms. Hirsi Ali now works as a scholar at an American think tank where she continues her fight for reason and liberty, unleashed from the chains of *submission*.

This autobiography about a voyage to freedom through the brainwashing maze of a violent and dehumanizing faith is a significant achievement. Overcoming huge odds that have psychologically and intellectually damaged people for centuries, the author (literally) unveils the dignity in confronting blind obedience to religion.

As an Atheist who values reason and individual rights, I am inspired by the courage of Ayaan Hirsi Ali who has explicitly named and boldly repudiated the core element that keeps religion alive: *the surrender of free will*—the choice to reject the irrational belief in god. *

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by Char Matejovsky
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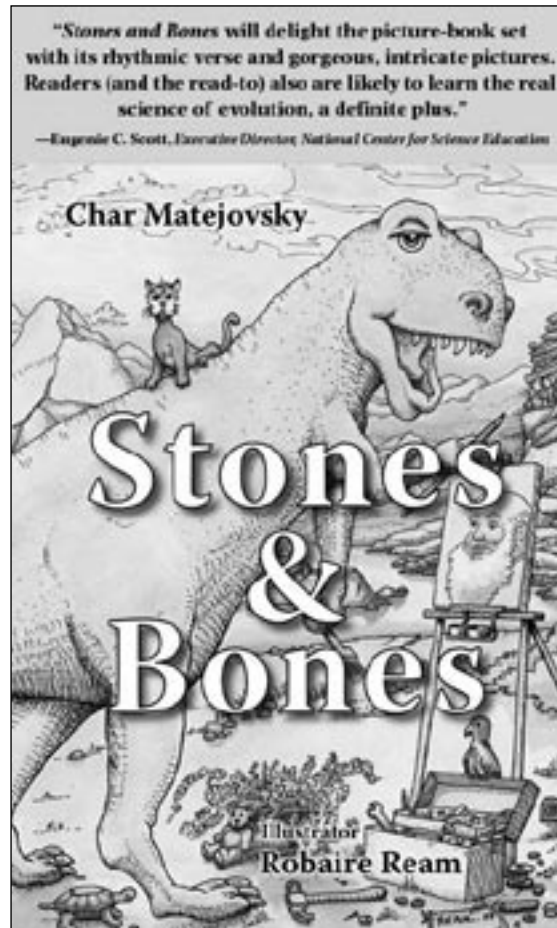
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