

*Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*

By **Ayaan Hirsi Ali**

Fourth Estate, 2010

\$35, 277 pages

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*Nomad* is Ayaan Hirsi Ali's third published work in her campaign, as she describes, to enlighten Islam. Like her first two books, the author herself is the main subject of the work. She is the nomad of the book's title, having lived in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Holland, and now the United States, and having traversed the centuries that divide the poverty-stricken tribalism of Islamic Africa to the rich, liberal and individualist West. In *Nomad*, Hirsi Ali continues her now well-known role as a modern day Enlightenment heroine, advocating the continued resistance by Western cultures of what she sees as the tendency of Islam to limit and damage the lives of Muslim people.

*Nomad* is Hirsi Ali's call to arms to resolve the policy crisis at the heart of the clash of civilisations. She urges Western institutions, not just governments, to refocus their efforts to integrate Muslim immigrants. She calls for educators to encourage critical thinking, feminists to fight for the emancipation of Muslim women and girls, and Christian churches to promote themselves to Muslims as a more loving and tolerant alternative to Islam.

Hirsi Ali uses her own experiences in negotiating between the two conflicting cultures, as a refugee,

translator and Dutch MP, to re-affirm Samuel Huntington's 1990s thesis that a clash of civilisations will be the source of global conflict rather than economics or ideology. In *Nomad*, she makes a case against multiculturalism and the language of political correctness, which she says has muzzled rigorous intellectual discussion about the clash between Islamism and the West.

Hirsi Ali seeks to diffuse those critics who accuse her of misinterpreting the Qur'an in her previous works by restating Popper's warning against getting bogged down in semantics, in case it clouds the real issue at hand. The fight Hirsi Ali is picking with Islamists is about practice, not theology. She therefore devotes only small sections of *Nomad* to the meaning of Qur'anic teachings, focusing instead on the oppressive and violent outcomes of the manner

in which these religious instructions are put into practice, particularly in the areas of sexuality, the oppression of women, violence and attitudes to money. According to Hirsi Ali, Islamic cultural attitudes towards these three aspects of life have left Muslim immigrants ill equipped to live in

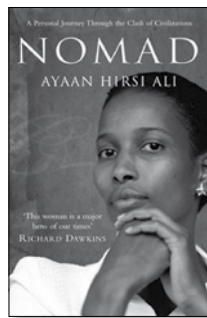
Western countries and relegated those in Islamic countries to a barbarous and squalid existence.

One of the most startling sites of the cultural clash elucidated in *Nomad* is in Hirsi Ali's description of the fatalism of Muslim believers. She describes a pervasive belief that it is Allah's wish that events occur in their lives, whether good

and bad, and that fate is not to be altered. She argues that this fatalism engenders a lack of agency and the sense that an individual's aims and desires are powerless against the status quo (God's will). This helplessness in the face of sickness, poverty, violence, oppression and cruelty is the opposite of the culture of self-reliance associated with the Enlightenment. Compared to Hirsi Ali, who is vigorously self-motivated and athletic in expressing her own agency, Islamic migrants are suffering under misplaced stoicism. Yet, Western democracies, with their cradle to grave welfare systems and grovelling multicultural platitudes, also engender helplessness and anomie within their communities. Hirsi Ali warns that this combination of religious and policy-based helplessness is destroying the lives of the next generation of European and American Muslims born into immigrant enclaves in the West.

She presents a series of highly personal vignettes in support of her arguments—harrowing accounts of her cousins who have failed, disastrously, to build functioning lives in the West. One cousin has contracted HIV but her naivety and resignation to Allah's will means she does not practice safe sex with her partner and continues to spread the virus. Illustrating the contradiction between tribal kinship and Western individualism, Hirsi Ali tells of another cousin who works around the clock to send remittances back to relatives in Somalia and fails to invest in his own life.

Hirsi Ali uses these anecdotes to put political philosophy into practice and to illustrate the effects of policy failures on individual lives. She argues that for some migrants,



clinging to Islamic attitudes to sex, violence and money is the cause of their suffering. In place of these attitudes, Hirsi Ali advocates the confident reassertion of contemporary Western social values that provide superior outcomes in people's lives.

For those who have read Hirsi Ali's earlier autobiographical works, *Nomad* may seem a less powerful progression. Hirsi Ali's fascinating life is well worth documenting, but pumping out three autobiographical books by the age of 40 has led to some disappointing and distracting repetition in *Nomad*.

*Infidel* offered raw details and often disturbing accounts of Hirsi Ali's life growing up under Islam. Her bravery and frankness in making her personal experiences public has, as in the feminist catchcry, made them political. Yet the potency of *Nomad* is the weight Hirsi Ali gives to policy rather than ideology. Hirsi Ali has a surer grip on the enormous issues she is grappling with and her certainty about positive solutions to them is closer at hand than in her earlier books. Her time at the American Enterprise Institute is reflected in her recent writing, in which she more clearly proposes solutions to the clash between Islam and the West.

*Nomad* is peppered with Hirsi Ali's poetic turn of phrase and the book flows intelligibly, although one discordant note is the facile list of the many airports she has travelled through and the folksy encounters with Dutch travellers. This chapter reads as though Hirsi Ali is labouring to justify the title of her book. I would argue that it is the subtitle that is more interesting and worthwhile, and something

she achieves without awkwardly spoon feeding her readers.

Hirsi Ali's aim is to change, or at least open up, the minds of millions of Muslims and multiculturalists, so her books are appropriately pitched at a general audience. While *Nomad* is insightful and easily read, it may have been more powerfully presented as a series of more formal essays or policy recommendations rather than the first person autobiographical style we're so familiar with in her writing. Having gained the world's attention, Hirsi Ali's many readers and admirers are ready for a more solid presentation of her policy ideas to instigate a new surge by the West in the clash of civilisations.

#### Reviewed by Leonie Phillips

*Why vs Why Gay Marriage*

Yes **by Rodney Croome**

No **by Bill Muehlenberg**

Pantera Press, 2010

\$19.95, 120 pages

ISBN 9780980741841

In 2004, the Howard government amended the *Marriage Act* to clarify that only heterosexual marriages would be granted and recognised in Australia. While pilloried by advocates of same-sex marriage, the amendments ensured same-sex marriage was off the election agenda at a time when its supporters were unlikely to win the fight.

But with shifting public sentiment and accumulating international precedents, the push to allow same-sex marriages is back. Recently Argentina's Parliament changed its law. So has Spain's. California's Proposition 8, which had successfully banned same-sex

marriage, is being challenged in the Federal District Court, while public opinion polls show Californians regret their decision. The former US First Lady Laura Bush disclosed her support for same-sex marriage in her biography. And Greens Party leader, Bob Brown, advocated same-sex marriage on morning television to rounds of applause.

The essays in *Why vs Why* on 'gay marriage'—for opening marriage to same-sex couples by Rodney Croome and against by Bill Muehlenberg—attempt to provide some clarity to inform public debate. But they fail in their task.

The arguments of both Muehlenberg and Croome are entirely predictable.

For Muehlenberg, marriage is a time-tested institution within which heterosexual couples raise children. Apparently same-sex couples don't want marriage; they are promiscuous and cannot conform to the expectations of monogamy; there is a homosexual agenda to destroy the family; and the biological incapacity of same-sex couples to have children without the assistance of a third party justifies excluding them from his sacred institution.

For Croome, accessing same-sex marriage is about equality, the rights of consenting adults, the necessity for a secular and universal law applying to every Australian, and the 'benefits' denied to same-sex couples.

But neither presents a bullet-proof case.

To justify the incompatibility between homosexuals and marriage, Muehlenberg attacks homosexual men for being promiscuous. The obvious retort is that heterosexual