

Infidel Study Guide

Infidel by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

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Contents

Infidel Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Part 1 - Chapter 1 and 2.....	6
Chapter 3 and 4.....	8
Chapter 5 and 6.....	9
Chapter 7 and 8.....	10
Chapter 9.....	11
Part II, Chapter 10.....	12
Chapter 11 and 12.....	14
Chapter 13 and 14.....	16
Chapter 15 and 16.....	18
Chapter 17.....	20
Epilogue.....	21
Characters.....	22
Objects/Places.....	29
Themes.....	32
Style.....	35
Quotes.....	37
Topics for Discussion.....	39



Plot Summary

This book is an autobiography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's life, from childhood to becoming a Dutch citizen and a Member of Parliament. She chronicles through her rough childhood, which included moving around frequently from her home country of Somalia to Saudi Arabia and then on to Kenya. Her father was not present most of the time as he was fighting to free Somalia from the regime, which was in power. Her mother was extremely abusive, especially to her, but also to her younger sister. After being married off, she decides to change her life and runs away, escaping to the Netherlands and seeking refugee status on false grounds, which she obtains. She changes her life and beliefs as she becomes less Somalian and more Dutch.

Ayaan was born in Somalia in Mogadishu and spent her early childhood years there, living with her mother, brother, sister, and grandmother, while her father was in prison. When her father escapes prison, he lives in Ethiopia for a time before moving to Saudi Arabia. Her mother and the children move to Saudi Arabia to be with him, only to find that as they leave, a major insurgency takes place and Ayaan's father is again fighting the regime on the border of Somalia.

The family lives in a small apartment in Mecca for several years where it is difficult for them to move around freely because they do not have a man in the house. Her mother often becomes angry and beats her harshly. Eventually, her father joins them and Ayaan is very happy to be with her father, although this family time together does not last long.

The next move takes the family to Kenya, deeply against her mother's wishes. Her mother does not want to live in an Infidel (non-Muslim) country and is not happy in this place. Additionally, her father is soon swept away by the war again, leaving Ayaan and her sister, Haweya to bear the brunt of their mother's unhappiness and anger.

As Ayaan grows older, she becomes more conservative in her practice of Islam, though she continually struggles to find answers to her many questions. A brief stay with family back in Somalia does not answer these questions. Instead, Ayaan gets involved with her cousin, loses her virginity, and secretly marries him. She makes it back to Kenya just as Somalia is falling into heavy civil war. When her father finally joins the family in Kenya again, her mother is harsh, but Ayaan is overjoyed.

Her happiness does not last long however, as a distant relative, who is living in Canada, meets her father and arranges her marriage. Her brother and mother discover and then quickly hide information about her previous marriage. Although she is not happy with the decision, Ayaan is married to the Osman and awaits her visa to go to Canada.

They send her to Germany where she is waiting for her visa, but she makes a huge decision to run away to the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, she gains refugee status and begins to work hard to become an active part of Dutch society, going to school and learning the language. She eventually receives a degree in Political Science and begins working for a think tank for the Labor Party.



She finally decides she does not believe in God and focuses her energies on what she perceives to be the neglected women of Islam. She changes parties and runs for Parliament with the Liberal Party, as threats come in and as she continues to insult and speak out against Islam. She lives under tight security for months, as the threat on her life is seen as severe after a man she made a movie with is killed in broad daylight. She is kept safe, though secluded from friends and eventually assimilating back into Dutch life, only to be called out for lying on her refugee application. As the book ends, she maintains her Dutch citizenship and moves to the United States to work for a think tank in Washington.

Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

The introduction introduces you to the death of Theo van Gogh who was killed by an extremist after making a film with Ayaan Hirsi Ali which questioned Islam and the Quran. The short film was 10 minutes long and aired on Dutch television, questioning the idea of submission and was about defiance. Although, they both knew making the film was dangerous, Theo would not remove his name from it, as he had spent most of his life questioning and insulting different belief systems.

Ayaan introduces herself briefly, sharing her moves from different countries in the Middle East and Africa and then to Europe, where she became a Member of Parliament in Holland. She lived with armoured guards and was forced out of her home because her neighbours argued they had a right to safety as well. She eventually decides to move to the US as a debate about her Dutch citizenship erupts.

Ayaan starts the book with the death of her friend Theo van Gogh, who assisted her in making a moving questioning the values of Islam to grab the attention of the reader and persuade them quickly to her line of thinking. She dedicates the book to her family and to the millions of Muslim women who have had to submit, which foreshadows her unwillingness to submit. She gives a great deal of information for someone who is not familiar with her life: she grew up Muslim, but has moved starkly away from that belief system.

Part 1 - Chapter 1 and 2

Part 1 - Chapter 1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

In chapter one, "Bloodlines" Hirsi Ali introduces the beginning of her life, recalling living with her grandmother who saw it very important that she memorize her bloodline. Tribal alliances and family clans were what kept you safe in Somalia and knowing who she came from was vital.

Her grandmother tells her brother, sister, and her stories from time to time to try to make them understand life and how to survive. Her mother also shares about her life growing up and being taught survival skills before moving away to live in Saudi Arabia to make it on her own. Eventually, her grandfather met her and told her there was a request for marriage and she accepted this, as was custom. Her mother moves to Kuwait and became a "baarri" or dutiful wife to her husband. After her father dies, she requests and receives a divorce then moved to Mogadishu where she meets and marries Ayaan's father.

A brief introduction is given to her father, who grew up wealthy and is well taken care of. He then studied and attended university in the United States. He returned to Mogadishu inspired. He teaches Somalis how to read and write. One of his students is Ayaan's mother and they marry in 1966. By 1972, her older brother, Mahad, Ayaan and her younger sister, Haweya were in the picture, but her father is taken away and put into prison for not supporting the existing government.

In the second chapter, "Under the Talal Tree" the story focuses on Ayaan's early childhood memories growing up in Mogadishu with her mother, grandmother, brother, and sister, while her father is in prison. Her mother often travels to receive food and necessities for living from family members outside of the city. During this time, the children run wild and play, disturbing their grandmother.

Then the family moves out of the city to a countryside village of Matabaan for a short time, only to return to Mogadishu later. The two sisters continue to play and annoy the adults to such an extent that they decide to put them in school. She is taught to hit first, to fight for her honor and to not allow others to make her cry.

While her mother is away on a trip, her grandmother arranges for the 3 children to be circumcised, which is a common custom in Somalia for boys and girls. This is a traumatizing event, especially for Ayaan and Haweya who are sewn tightly to ensure their virginity.

At the end of the chapter, her father escapes from prison and makes it to Ethiopia where he forms the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, SSDF, with others opposed to Siad Barre's rule over Somalia. She does not know this at the time, as it is safer to keep the



children ignorant of such political issues to avoid the possibility of them saying something.

The main characters and influences of Ayaan's life are introduced here. We learn about her parents' lives before they married and her grandmother's upbringing. The descriptions show how quickly life in Somalia is changing, as she lives in the city of Mogadishu, which is currently a police state. Politics will play a heavy role throughout her life.

These chapters introduce you to a bit of the culture of Somalia and the mix of traditions with Islamic beliefs. They allow the reader to picture the life which was being lived by Ayaan and others in Somalia in the early 1970s. Life is not easy for the children or the adults as political pressures rage and modern life intermixes with deep traditions.

Ayaan's tragic circumcision and her sister's fight for health through it leave a deep impression on Ayaan, which will be a major cause for her later to fight against later. This tragedy is described in horrific detail and the reader is left feeling the agony and pain which she experienced. It will be difficult for any Western reader to not sympathize with this situation from her life.

Additionally, her father starting the SSDF will continue to be a recurrent theme throughout his life and interaction with her. She knows her father fights for a freedom which he believes in, which teaches her to fight for what she believes in as well.



Chapter 3 and 4

Chapter 3 and 4 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3, "Playing Tag in Allah's Palace" starts with the family moving to Saudi Arabia where Ayaan's father is working for a government ministry in 1978. When Ayaan arrives with her mother, brother and sister in Jeddah, her father is not there. They are stranded in the airport, until they are discovered by a distant relative who took them to his house to stay. Her father has rushed off to join a coup against the Somali government.

With the help of other clan members, the family moves to a small apartment in Mecca. Her mother is upset and beat them, but also finds comfort at the Grand Mosque. One evening, her father, Abeh, arrived and for the first time Ayaan met him and got to get to know him. She compares her parents, her father more gentle and believing in the spirit of the laws, her mother stricter and teaching the letter of the law. Her parents continue to have difficulties.

In 1979, the family is deported from Saudi Arabia immediately or will be put in jail. After not being able to enter Sudan, the family goes to Ethiopia, a non-Muslim country. Her mother is livid.

The fourth chapter, "Weeping Orphans and Widowed Wives" discusses Ayaan's year in Ethiopia. The family lives among soldiers and men fighting against the Somali government.

Ayaan attends school with Christians and noticed differences on the streets in how women dressed and how people behaved. After Ayaan's mother loses a child who is stillborn, she becomes even more hostile toward others.

Eventually, the family moves to Kenya where other exiled families lived. Her mother is not happy to go to Kenya, again a non-Muslim country, but knows the soldier's compound is not place for the family.

The deepening conflicts between her parents are introduced as well as Ayaan's inclination to her father's more lenient views. She is just a child, but looking back she now knows that by the age of 10, she lives in three different countries with governments she does not believe were successful. She lives with the old Somali government which is ruled by clans and created destructive civil wars in many parts of Africa. Somalia is a police state that rations out food to hungry people and bombs those who were not compliant. Finally, there is Saudi Arabia, which gives no freedoms or rights to women. Her reflection on governments foreshadows her strong belief in governments working for the good of people and that it is possible for there to be good government.



Chapter 5 and 6

Chapter 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5, "Secret Rendezvous, Sex, and the Scent of Sukumawiki" details Ayaan's growing up in Kenya. Her mother becomes more hostile and beats her relentlessly. She attends school where she struggled with another language, Swahili and then also English.

Once again her father leaves the family. While her brother does well in school, Ayaan struggles to keep up with her homework and all her chores. Her mother decides to send her to a Muslim Girls' school.

She has many ordeals and struggles over the years in Kenya. She rebels mentally and questions and to some extent, becomes insolent. Her mother beats her and even a religious teacher beat her. She ends up in the hospital after a particularly brutal bout. Finally, her mother stops beating her for several years.

The chapter continues to show Ayaan's struggle between following and learning about Islam and her emotions and physical desires for boys and other unaccepted things.

In Chapter 6, "Doubt and Defiance" Ayaan continues to struggle in her choice of following Islam. She begins to cover herself, wearing a veil, and becomes disciplined in following the rules. Her sister, Haweya, rebels against all of it.

Her mother does not know how to raise teenagers and begins beating the girls again as she is angry and lonely in the world. As times become tougher, Mahad goes back to Somalia and the three women move into a house with a distant relative.

Ayaan experiences her first kiss, but knows it is doomed, as he is Kenyan and does not believe in God. Haweya also returns to Somalia for a short time. Ayaan finishes school and becomes increasingly stricter in her religious activities as the Muslim Brotherhood becomes active in Kenya during this period. However, her many questions continue to plague her with doubt.

Haweya returns and the two girls attend a secretary's school together. After graduating, their mother refuses to allow the girls to work. So Ayaan goes to a clan leader, Farah Goure and seeks permission to go back to Somalia. He approves and in 1990, at the age of 20, Ayaan leaves her mother in Kenya to go back to Mogadishu with her sister.

Ayaan grows up in Kenya, spending 10 years of her life there, a non-Muslim country. Her exposure to novels and boys led her to questioning the rules and values of her family and religion which is shown progressively throughout these chapters. Her statement that she likes the Christian girls at school when she is young, leads the reader to know that this idea will be with her throughout her life.



Chapter 7 and 8

Chapter 7 and 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7, "Disillusion and Deceit" steps us through the seven months which Ayaan lived in Somalia. She does not get what she expected, as many people were not living by Islamic values.

She again experiences a boyfriend relationship, which plagues both of them with guilt, as he is also a Muslim. She ends the relationship, seeing him as a hypocrite for speaking against some of the very acts they did. She continues to struggle with many questions of faith and how that should involve daily life.

She meets a maternal cousin, Mahmud, through her great aunt and has a strong physical attraction to him. With her aunt's encouragement, they decide to secretly marry before her leaves for Russia. Her wedding night was a painful sexual experience and then he left. Ayaan shared her secret only with Haweya.

Somalia falls further into civil war and fighting spreads even to the city of Mogadishu. Both girls head back to Kenya to escape the danger.

Chapter 8, "Refugees" starts with the long journey back to Kenya. With the war raging the family's apartment back in Kenya soon fills up with various Somali family and friends.

Ayaan accompanies her cousin to the border to bring back his family and returns for a 3 week journey with over 20 people. At some points 35-40 people live with them in the apartment.

The chapter ends with Ayaan receiving a letter from a Finnish girl who wants to marry Mahmud, but is questioning who Ayaan really is. She writes back to her saying she is only his cousin and they aren't married. She feels relief that the problem is solved.

These chapters show Ayaan's growing independence and free-thinking. She is rebelling against many things. She makes many choices, even though she knows they are not all good. She is becoming a stronger person and not allowing her family to dictate all her movements, taking control and saving lives by going to the border. At the end of the section, the reader can foresee that this will not be the last thought of her secret marriage, her pride is too great and that often leads to not being correct.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9, "Abeh" ends Part I of the book, starting in April 1991, when Abeh, her father, returns to Nairobi. The house becomes more orderly out of respect for him being back home, but although both Ayaan and Haweya are pleased he has returned, her mother is not so forgiving. She does not speak to him.

The refugees begin to find their own places to live and make decisions about what to do next with their lives. As her mother's silent treatment toward her father continues, he again marries his first wife, Maryan Farah and moves with his other two daughters.

In January 1992, after mosque, her father came excitedly to see her, as he had met a man, Osman Moussa, a distant relative living in Canada who she would marry. He was very pleased, as this man was well-off and looking for a proper bride. Ayaan is skeptical and after meeting him she is not happy with the decision, as she does not want to marry this man. She tried to speak with Abeh about it, but to no avail.

Ali Wersengeli, the cousin who had officiated as her guardian at her wedding to Mahmud, hears news of the engagement and rushes to put an end to it. However, he meets Mahad instead of her father when he tries to stop it, who send him away because he has no proof and there was no proper guardian. Mahad rips up the certificate when Ayaan shows it and tells what happened - of course leaving out the wedding night.

The marriage takes places, first the Islamic ceremony, without her there and then she signs the official government paper her father brings to her. Osman Moussa returns to Canada to file for a visa. As she is waiting to join him there, it is decided she will travel to Germany to wait there.

Before she leaves her mother overhears her and Haweya discussing plans for Ayaan to divorce Osman Moussa in Canada and live her own life. Her mother is furious and forces her to tell her father the truth about the first marriage. However, Abeh does not want to hear it and dismisses any talk of it and says good-bye to her again. When she returns she tells her mother. Her mother wants her to promise to stay with her husband, she does not, so her mother does bid her farewell.

The end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood is upon Ayaan at this point. She is leaving for Germany and then Canada to live with a man who is her husband, but she does not want this. Her refusal to tell her father the truth and speak up from the beginning shows she still struggles with actually being an adult. However, at the end of this section, she refuses to promise her mom to stay with her husband. The reader awaits how she will manage herself and escape the life which has been dealt to her.

Part II, Chapter 10

Part II, Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Part II of the book, "My Freedom" begins with chapter 10, "Running Away" and Ayaan has just arrived in Germany. She is a bit frightened at first, looking around at the sterile and modern landscape, but she makes her way to from the airport to a smaller town to meet a distant relative. He is impressed by her ability to navigate and make her way as he has had many Somalis who called in the middle of the night lost and helpless.

Ayaan is amazed with Germany, the cleanliness of the streets, the friendliness of the people, and the orderliness which permeates everything around here, unlike she has ever experienced before. As she falls in love with Europe, she begins to plan and think about how she will get out of going to Canada and the marriage to Osman Moussa. At first, she thinks she will try to run away to England, since she knows English and believes she is familiar with London from the novels she read growing up.

Ayaan is determined to escape and so she goes to visit Fadumo in Holland, whom she helped rescue and bring into Kenya from the border of Somalia. She feels certain that she will help. She arrived in Amsterdam late, so she stayed with Mudoh, a relative of Fadumo, who convinces her to seek asylum in Holland instead of trying to go to England. When she meets Fadumo, she finds out how to become a refugee in Holland and then does so. The process was easy and she is amazed at how kind all the people are, even the police give her helpful information.

When Ayaan fills out her official paperwork she changes her name from Ayaan Hirsi Megan to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, her grandfather's name. She also changes her date of birth, in hopes of being harder to find by her family and clan. During her interview she lies to the immigration personnel piecing together stories from refugees who had stayed with them in Nairobi.

Ayaan begins to settle in more to life in Holland, deciding to remove her headscarf and start wearing more Western-styled clothing including pants. She learns that the family is looking for her through a letter from her sister and she is nervous about lying to immigration and also about being found by her family.

However, her fears are allayed, as she receives her A-status refugee card, which entitles her to stay in Holland legally and work, buy property and even apply for citizenship after five years. She is elated and feels like she is dreaming.

This chapter gives an idea of what it would be like to make such a huge change in life, so many new experiences and ideas being presented to a person can be overwhelming. In some ways, Ayaan is blinded by all the newness and things she sees at positive and she does not allow herself to see any negative things about Holland or Europe. She becomes narrow minded in her fixation on the wonders of the West and closes her mind

to any good from the places she was raised. This is the beginning of Ayaan's transformation into a Westerner and totally leaving behind all of her culture and past, including her family and religion.



Chapter 11 and 12

Chapter 11 and 12 Summary and Analysis

"A Trial by the Elders" opens with Ayaan's euphoric feeling of freedom as she can now register for services and official living arrangements. She begins receiving her refugee allowances and takes language classes to start learning Dutch. She feels some guilt about lying, but also lucky to have her refugee status, so she tries to help other people. She begins volunteering at the center and became an unofficial translator when Somalis were have difficulties in the camp.

As the days grew colder, she received a letter from her father, addressed with kindness and love and trying to persuade her to return to her husband and requesting help with money for eye surgery. Several days later, Osman Moussa, her husband, called the center and spoke with her. He told her to return to Germany and she said she would, she also told him her father needed money for the surgery. At this point, she knew she was on borrowed time and was frightened that they would soon come to claim her and the violence that might mean, but determined to stay.

Of course, Osman Moussa shows up about a month later when Ayaan does not report back to Germany. He is skeptical of why she is there, as he feels he can offer her a much better life than the one she has in the asylum camp. She is not persuaded to go with him and he leaves peacefully.

He returns a few days later and they agree to have a tolka, a meeting with the elders of the clan. On the evening of the meeting some of the highest ranking Osman Mahamud elders came to discuss the matter. Each of them talking in turn and then allowing Osman Moussa to speak, saying her was sorry for not knowing her better, but wanting to and ready to be a proper husband for her. Finally, Ayaan had a chance to speak and she was dignified and said that she did not want to go. They asked her many questions, trying to give her a way out or blame her husband, but she didn't. They said they accepted her answer and Osman did too.

The elders and Osman left without violence or threats, accepting that Ayaan's decision respectfully. She knew that she could never undo this decision; she had cut herself off from her clan and family. She wrote her father to tell him that a divorce was the decision. He wrote her back and told her she had disgraced him and would not accept word from her again. She spoke with her mother who was deeply disappointed and sad, but they promised to speak later.

In Chapter 12, "Haweya" Ayaan's life continues as she has chosen. She often translates for Somalis when needed and begins making friends with Dutch people and experiences different parts of Dutch society.



She receives housing and moves into her new place with Yasmin, another Somali woman seeking refugee status in Holland. She takes on various temporary jobs as she doesn't want to continue to only take from the country. She is continually amazed at the way the country runs smoothly and how people work together. She continues to distance herself from Somalis and other Africans and adapt more to Dutch life, she becomes disappointed in Somalis and the way they live in Holland. Her roommate stole her A-status refugee papers and left.

In January 1994, Haweya comes to stay with her. She has just had an abortion because she became pregnant by her boyfriend. Ayaan was ecstatic to have her sister with her and helped her file for refugee status. However, she was deeply disappointed when Haweya became pregnant again by another man and had another abortion. Haweya did receive her refugee status in Holland, though.

Ayaan is admitted to college where she reads about Freud and Skinner and Pavlov and takes in the many theories which bring her to the understanding that where she comes from does not work. As she studies, Haweya becomes depressed and withdraws. They decide not to live together anymore.

Ayaan becomes an official Somali-Dutch interpreter and makes good money from the work. She continues working and studying and received her propadeuse, which gives her the level needed to enter university in Holland.

Although Ayaan is fearful of violence and being found by her family, the actual meeting with Osman Moussa and then the tolka are peaceful and respectful. She admits that they never laid a hand on her or threatened her in anyway, which raises questions about why she seems to believe that the men where she comes from are violent oppressors of women.

When Haweya comes, Ayaan is at first excited to have her sister there, but soon they choose divergent paths. Haweya is depressed and no longer the strong person she used to be growing up. Ayaan on the other hand, continues to pursue her own path and what she perceives as a more peaceful and efficient way of life, the Dutch way. She seems to become more selfish through these chapters and focused only on what is best for her, neglecting even her sister at a most vulnerable time.



Chapter 13 and 14

Chapter 13 and 14 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 14, "Leiden" tells of Ayaan's experiences as she studied Political Science at the University of Leiden. She continues to learn more about Dutch society and the way of life and accepts these ways as better and right over the way she was brought up. When there are contradictions with her faith, she simply justifies it as learning and puts a blinder on.

She continues her work as a translator and becomes further disillusioned by the Somalis and their way of living in Holland, as they squander money and treat each other horribly. She sees a great contrast to the way the Dutch live peacefully with each other and take care of each other's needs. The one part of Holland's society which she doesn't think works is their respect for Muslims' way of doing things. She feels that they should not be tolerant of Muslims and Islamic life.

Haweya becomes more religious due to her guilt over the two abortions and begins praying every day, but Ayaan questions her and does not think that the answers can be found in Islam. Her and Haweya continue to grow apart as Haweya falls deeper into mental instability.

Ayaan moves into a student house with sixteen other students and meets Marco, whom she quickly decides she likes and starts seeing. Haweya had a mental break down and was put into a hospital. She was let out, only to be put back in again when she stopped taking her pills. She insisted to go back to Kenya to be with their mom and around Muslims. Ayaan disagreed with this idea, believing that the medical treatment would be better in Holland, but to no avail.

Ayaan continues her pursuit of life in the Netherlands, working, studying and making more Dutch friends. In August 1997, Ayaan officially became a Dutch citizen. In January 1998, her father called, Haweya died after another mental breakdown, she had a miscarriage and an infection set in. Ayaan returned to Kenya, but not in time for the burial, she saw the way her mother was living and was appalled at the squalor. She gave her mother money and then returned to Holland, wanting nothing more to do with her old life.

Chapter 14, "Leaving God" outlines Ayaan's further acceptance of Dutch life and her decision to renounce her faith. She visited her father in Germany in the spring of 2000 when he was having eye surgery, and they were on friendly terms. In September 2000, she graduated from Leiden with her master's degree in Political Science.

Ayaan began attending meetings and participating in debates renouncing Islam and the beliefs it holds, urging for the Dutch to not tolerate their ways of living. She began working for the Labor Party's think tank and then 9/11 happened. She did not believe



that it was a fringe part of Islam that caused the actions, but rather a deep part of the faith. She continued her pursuit of halting the acceptance of Islamic ways in the Netherlands and wrote speeches and articles to this affect.

In May 2002, Ayaan looked in the mirror and said out loud that she did not believe in God. From this point on she has no guilt and constantly pursues new knowledge and her fight against what she believes is the oppression of Islamic ideas.

Ayaan at this point becomes single-minded and seems to truly hate her past, her culture, and her upbringing. She cannot seem to see any bad or negative ideas within Dutch society, only that it is perfect and that Islamic culture is horrible. She is so consumed by her pursuit within Dutch society that when her mother warns her to see Haweya before it is too late; she ignores this warning and worries about her university studies instead. Even when she returns, she feels life there is bleak and horrible, the reader sees her full transition into feeling superior to her family and others there.

She begins to study and reason that there should be no constraints to thinking and criticism as she denounces her faith and all faiths to become an atheist. Though many Dutch people warn her and do not agree with her direct and blatant attack on Islam, she pursues this route ruthlessly, sure that it is what is causing the only ills within Dutch society. She believes firmly it is a pursuit of truth.

Chapter 15 and 16

Chapter 15 and 16 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 15, "Threats" Ayaan tells about her continued outspokenness against Islam and participation in public debates on the matter. When a major politician was shot and killed, she immediately thought it was a Muslim, but she was wrong, as it was a white animal-rights activist. Threats begin being made against her by more extreme Muslims. Her father calls and warns her that she should stop speaking this way, feeling that she is not telling the truth and putting herself in danger. However, she refuses and continues with her frank opinions because a very divisive public figure, with people on both sides of the issue.

Ayaan does not seem to take the threats seriously, but eventually filed a complaint with the police and more people warned her threats were coming in. She did take a short break and visited California for awhile to let things settle down in Holland. However, while she is there she is approached by Neelie Kroes, a prominent politician in the Liberal Party who wanted her to join the party and run for Parliament.

Ayaan sees herself as a one-issue politician when she leaves the Labor Party think tank and joins the Liberal Party. She continues to speak her mind about the issues concerning Islam and religion, even though it contradicts some of the Liberal Party's platform.

In January 2003, the Liberal Party won 18% of the vote, and as 16th on the list, she is elected to Parliament. She feels excited and that she can make a difference.

Chapter 16, "Politics" continues with Ayaan's life in politics. She works on her agenda and continues to speak out against Islam. Some of her policy statements are added to proposals and legislation, including a motion requiring police to register how many honor killings to place in Holland each year.

In May 2004, her father contacts her to speak about faith and encourage her return to Islam, but she will not. He warns her that people will not be happy with her, but from that point on, they do not speak. The Dutch protective service continues to ensure her safety since she is a Member of Parliament.

In August 2004, a short film which she makes with Theo van Gogh airs on television, called Submission Part One. The film uses verses from the Quran to imply that the religion subjected women to unbearable oppression. She feels it is important to try to liberate Muslim minds so that both Muslim women and men can gain freedom.

By this point, Ayaan is firm in her new atheist belief system and quite frank and blunt about her views against the ills of Islam. She heeds no warnings from others, about political correctness. Even the Dutch ideas of acceptance and multiculturalism are unacceptable to her, as she does all she can to influence others to recognize the abuse



of Muslim women. She is single-minded in blaming the religion and men for the oppression of women. She seeks to free them, whether they want to be free or not, as she has very few Muslim women who support her efforts.

The reader is either fully on her side and against Islam by this point or left wondering if she has become much like the zealots which fight her, in her steadfastness to such ideas.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 17, "The Murder of Theo" opens with the threats which are becoming more real on Ayaan's and Theo's lives for the film and her continued speaking out. On November 2, 2004, Theo is shot and killed in broad daylight on the street on his way to work. Ayaan's security becomes more intense as she is shuffled from place to place to keep her whereabouts secret.

Ayaan learns of the letter left on Theo's body, which threatens her life. She does not attend his funeral so as not to put others in danger. She was able to say good-bye at the morgue, as both of them are atheist, this is the end.

Her security detail becomes even tighter and over the next 75 days she is allowed minimal contact with friends or anyone in the outside world. She is kept in a small town in Massachusetts and only returns to Holland once.

On January 18, 2005, she finally returns to Parliament. Her return is welcomed with reporters and other government members embracing her. She is happy to be home.

As Ayaan becomes secure from the threats ,the reader is left with two opposing emotions. The first is sympathy and feeling that it is not right that she doesn't have freedom to move around and contact friends. The opposite feeling that also creeps up is one that question whether she will now see any negatives of Western life and society, as it made her a prisoner. Alas, she does not. She again shuns all aspects of her former life and embraces her new way as home.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary and Analysis

This is a brief ending, which takes the reader quickly through the investigation into Ayaan's right to Dutch citizenship. She knows that she lied, but feels that she has allowed that to be public knowledge since she entered public life. Under political pressure, Rita Verdonk, the head of the Ministry of Justice, began an official investigation into her asylum case. She is found to have lied and her citizenship is void and she has six weeks to respond.

Ayaan's citizenship was left intact, as she traveled promoting her first book in the US, and made several declarations about her legally being allowed to use the name Ali. She was decided to take a position with the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, which she claims was on her mind before her citizenship was brought into question.

Ayaan finishes the book with a response to why some people say she wrote the book and what she says is her reasoning. She says she firmly believes that life is better in Europe than it is in the Muslim world because human relations are better, and that the reason relations are better is because the West values life and individuals enjoy rights and freedoms which are protected by the state. She believes that the values which her parents' world generates and preserves poverty, tyranny, and the oppression of women.

It is up to the reader to decide whether they believe Ayaan's side of the story about moving to America and leaving the Netherlands and about the West versus Muslim perspectives of the world. She presents both sides eloquently.

First, she in no way admits that Holland has any problems, just that she simply is ready to move to another level and that the American think tank is where she thinks she can best serve. Second, she is positive that the Western way of life is far superior to the Muslim world in all aspects, which is why she is not in Kenya making angels, but in the West propagating her agenda and ideas.



Characters

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Ayaan is the author of the book and thus the main character. The book details her struggles through a tumultuous life of moving from one country to another and experiencing political strife. Much of her younger days are spent without her father present. Her mother is angry and beats her terribly. The story focuses on her struggle of whether to accept Islam and submit to the will of God or not to believe.

After being forced into marriage by her father, she escapes to the Netherlands and seek Refugee status. She puts all her energies into working and studying so that she can be a productive member of society. After 5 years, she becomes a Dutch citizen and eventually graduates with a Political Science degree. Her candor and decision to leave her faith lead her to be an outspoken critic of Islam, endangering her life, as she further sweeps into the national spotlight.

Ayaan continues to fight for what she believes is right against Islam's suppression of women's rights. She wins a seat in Parliament and quickly becomes a target for extremists when she makes a short film criticizing submission in Islam. After the co-producer of the film is killed, she is rushed into hiding and deep security for months on end without contact to the outside world.

As she finally gains freedom again, she makes a decision to exit politics in Netherlands and work for a think tank in Washington in the US. Before she leaves, there are questions about her citizenship, but as politics go, things quiet down and she is allowed to keep her Dutch citizenship.

Asha Artan - Ayaan's mother

The views on this woman might be varied, as she undoubtedly abused her children, especially Ayaan. However, looking on a deeper level, the reader can see a strong woman, who left the countryside of Somalia to pursue a future of her own making. She followed tradition and was a dutiful wife when her father chose her husband, but quickly divorced him after his death.

She then married for love, thinking that her life would be more harmonious and fulfilled, which did not happen. She raised 3 children, Mahad, Ayaan, and Haweya, had 2 children who died at birth, and a son Mohammed from her first marriage. She did not know how to raise children without her husband and often took to beating them into obedience.

When Ayaan departed, the reader might feel that she is hypocritical, not wanting Ayaan to leave her husband, when she herself divorced her first husband as soon as her father



died so that she could find her own path. Others might see her as not wanting the same mistakes to happen to her daughter as she feels life dealt her.

This woman is deeply troubled and lonely throughout her life. She has little to no control over situations, which take her places and becomes angry and drawn inward, pushing away all those who might care about her.

Hirsi Magen, Abeh, Ayaan's father

A spoiled young man, he rarely placed his family's need above the love of his country and desire to free it from the regime he disagreed with. Throughout his life he married three different women, having children with her and later leaving her to raise the children, so that he could pursue his political interests.

Abeh doted on Ayaan to some extent when she was young and seemed to love her deeply. Even though he is not always present in her life, he seeks to teach her what is right and did not want her or her sister to be circumcised.

When Ayaan runs away, he seeks to find her and when he does, he does not come and beat her or disown her. Throughout her denunciations of Islam, he warns her to be careful and urges her to pray, he might be in denial about his daughter's faith, but he is not harsh with her. Eventually, he does stop taking her calls, as she insulted that which he held most dear.

Haweya Magen, Ayaan's sister

Haweya is a troubled soul and deeply rebellious in many ways throughout her entire life, trying to find her own way and never quite succeeding. The circumcision which she underwent was tougher on her than the other two and her cut took longer to heal and scar, which seemed most traumatic for her.

As she grew older, she defied her mother and refused to clean or do chores. When her mother beat her senselessly she would take her mind to another place and seem to not be present. Eventually, she left her mother to try her own way in Somalia, only to return to Kenya because of needing to obtain further education. When she obtained her secretary's certificate, off she went to pursue her own destiny again, only to return again because of war and danger.

After Ayaan left and ran away, she stayed in contact with her and eventually moved to the Netherlands and also sought to obtain refugee status. However, she never could quite adapt to life in Holland, torn between her rebellion and her need to obey. She had two abortions, which further tormented her spirit.

Haweya felt mentally ill and needed psychiatric help, which she was receiving in the Netherlands. She begged to return to Kenya to be with her mom. However, she only fell further ill and died. Ayaan did not return in time to attend her burial.



Mahad Magen, Ayaan's brother

Mahad is a typical boy brought up without a man constantly in his life in a male domineering society: he goes on whichever path he chooses. He is very smart and succeeds in earning a placement at a top school in Kenya, only to later drop out.

He moves to Mogadishu to fight for his country and live a life on his own, coming back only when the war has reached its peak. He does not show great kindness to Ayaan, as she is his little sister, but when he is older he does his best to protect her honor and the family's honor with it.

Ayeeyo, Ayaan's grandmother

A strong, sturdy, and self-reliant woman, she was raised in the countryside long before the developments of modern day. She is very stubborn in her beliefs and often condemns her daughter and grandchildren to hell.

She oversees the three children being circumcised as she feels strongly it is for their protection against evils. She is caught between ancient traditions and the beliefs of Islam.

Theo van Gogh

This is a liberal, flamboyant, Dutch man he often goes against the current. He helped Ayaan in making a short film criticizing submission in Islam. He was shot and killed in broad daylight on his way to work. There was a letter stabbed into his chest left for Ayaan.

Mahmud, Ayaan's secret husband

This is her maternal cousin and portrayed as a very good-looking man whom Ayaan was sexually attracted to from the beginning. He agreed to marry her in secret and they consummated their marriage on their wedding night in a dirty hotel because they did not have proper documents to register in a nice hotel.

The next day he left to study in Russia and does not keep in touch. Several years later, a Finnish girl writes seeking information about Ayaan because he has told the girl that she is her cousin. When Ayaan's father announces her marriage to another man, Mahmud does not speak up or let it be known they were married.

Osman Moussa, Ayaan's husband

He comes from Canada to help give money and aid to Somalis in Kenya. He is seeking a dutiful Somali wife, as he feels the Somali women in Canada have left their traditions.



He is a distant relative and immediately Hirsi Megan, Ayaan's father, chooses her to be his bride.

Ayaan does not agree to the marriage, but this is not brought to his attention, as her father is very eager. He leaves back to Canada assuming that when her visa is ready she will join him there. When she disappears, he hunts for her and finds her in Holland. He calls a meeting of the elders, a tolka. After listening to the elders and speaking himself, he peacefully agrees to accept Ayaan's decision for a divorce.

Siad Barre, Afwayne

This is the President of Somalia during the time Ayaan was growing up. Her father attempted to oust him from power on several occasions. He ran a police state and rationed food and kept people under tight control.

Maryan Farah

Maryan is Hirsi Megan's first wife and mother of Ayaan's two half-sisters, Ijaabo and Arro. Haweya lives with her during her first trip back to Somalia and then Ayaan lives with her when she moves back to Somalia.

After Ayaan's mother gives him the silent treatment, Hirsi Megan remarries Maryan and moves in with her in Kenya before Ayaan is married off.

Ijaabo

Ijaabo is Ayaan's half-sister through her father. She is very religious and wears the veil.

Arro

Arro is Ayaan's half-sister through her father. She is more modern and wants to live like the West.

Ibado Dhadey Megan

Ibado Dhadey is Ayaan's aunt on her father's side. She takes a liking to Haweya when she is living in Somalia and convinces her to go back to Kenya to study and work for what she wants in life.



Sister Aziza

Sister Aziza is the new religious teacher at the Muslim Girls' School in Nairobi. She is very firm in her beliefs and teaches a strict form of Islam to the girls at school. She is influential in Ayaan's attempt to live a holy life.

Boqol Sawm

Boqol Sawm is a strict Islamic teacher who was from the Muslim Brotherhood and gained a large following among the Somali women in Kenya. He teaches a strict form of the religion and does not tolerate any questions.

Jawahir

Jawahir is a Muslim friend of Ayaan's in Nairobi. When Ayaan visits her after she is married, she explains to her how awful sex is for her.

Halwa

Halwa is a Muslim friend of Ayaan's in Nairobi.

Farah Goure

This is a wealthy member of the clan who supports many of the soldiers' families who are living in Kenya. He gives permission for Ayaan and her sister to travel back to Somalia when their mother won't allow them to work.

Aunt Khadija

Khadija is Ayaan's grandmother's step-daughter, the daughter of her father's first wife and almost the same age as her grandmother. She is married, but barren. She encourages Ayaan's secret wedding to Mahmud.

Amina

Amina is part of the Osman Mahamud clan and hosts Ayaan when she first arrives in Germany. Her son, Ahmed, shows Ayaan how to get around Bonn.



Ahmed

Ahmed is Amina's son and does all the errands she needs done because she doesn't know how to get around in Germany. He shows Ayaan how to get around and explains how the trains and busses work.

Mudoh

Mudoh hosts Ayaan in the Netherlands her first night. She convinces Ayaan it will be easier to seek asylum in Holland rather than going to England.

Yasmin

This is Ayaan's roommate for awhile in Holland who is seeking refugee status and has lied about her age.

Sylvia

Sylvia is a refugee worker in Holland who encourages Ayaan to study and educate herself. She also helps Ayaan get a job as a translator.

Johanna

Johanna welcomes Ayaan into her home and encourages her to continue her education. She teaches her about Dutch culture and society and in many ways is her Dutch mother.

Ellen

Ellen is a Dutch Protestant Christian and befriends Ayaan during her time in the Netherlands.

Chantal

Ayaan rents a room from Chantel after her and Yasmin have a falling out. Chantel is an older Dutch woman.



Marco

This is Ayaan's first Dutch boyfriend. They dated and then lived together for 5 years. He met her father on a trip to Germany, but they did not tell Abeh that they were together. They eventually separated.

Neelie Kroes

Neelie is a prominent politician from the Liberal Party in the Netherlands. She suggested that Ayaan join the party and run for a seat in Parliament.

Rita Verdonk

Rita is the head of the Ministry of Justice and starts an investigation into Ayaan's Dutch citizenship. She determines that Ayaan is not Dutch, but later recants on political pressure with several promises from Ayaan. However, this was her political demise and soon she was out of politics.



Objects/Places

Mogadishu

This is the capital of Somalia where Ayaan was born. The beginning of the story takes place here as she lived here until she was 5 years old. She returns to the capital when she is 20 years old.

Mecca, Saudi Arabia

This is the city in which Ayaan's family lived during the beginning of their time in Saudi Arabia. The home of the Grand Mosque, of Islam.

Grand Mosque

This is the holiest site on earth in Islam, located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. A pilgrimage is completed by Muslims there annually. Ayaan visits the holy site with her mother on numerous occasions during their time in Mecca.

Ethiopia

This is a neighboring country to Somalia, where Ayaan lived with her family for a year. Her father returned there on many occasions as he fought against the regime in Somalia. His 3rd wife and child were from Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a non-Muslim country and Ayaan's mother did not want to live there.

Nairobi, Kenya

This is the capital of Kenya and where Ayaan lived for over 10 years growing up. It is a non-Muslim country and her mother did not want to be there, but there were many Somali families living there.

Quran

This is the holy text of Islam.

SSDF

This is the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, a political movement founded by Ayaan's father and other Somali exiles in an attempt to overthrow the Somali regime.



Miye

The countryside in Somalia, it is sometimes used as a descriptive word in the book to explain people who are "backwards" or not modern and progressive.

Osman Mahamud

This is the Somali clan to which Ayaan and her family belong.

Ridiyah, Saudi Arabia

This is the city where Ayaan's father worked and the capital of Saudi Arabia. The family moved here with their father from Mecca, despite their mother not wanting to move. This is where Ayaan spent most of her time in Saudi Arabia.

Germany

This is the first western country which Ayaan traveled to while waiting for her visa to Canada. She ran away from Germany to Holland

Holland

This is the place where Ayaan filed for refugee status and eventually became a citizen and then a member of Parliament.

Leiden

This is the university which Ayaan studied and obtained her Political Science degree when she was 30 years old.

Tolka

This is a Somali gathering of elders to discuss and decide on an important matter. During the tolka in Holland, Ayaan is granted a divorce to Osman Moussa by the elders.

Labor Party

This is the political party which Ayaan is first aligned with after graduating. She works for them at a think tank when she first begins speaking out against Islam.



Liberal Party

This is the party which Ayaan joins to run for Parliament. She was 16th on the list of for her party to enter, but was voted 6th in terms of voters' individual preference.

Propadeuse

This is an official level of education required in order to enter university in Holland. Ayaan received hers by attending vocational college and then entered the University of Leiden to study Political Science

DKDB

This is the Royal and Diplomatic Protection Service which is in charge of keeping Ayaan safe. They seclude her and keep her in a small town in the US for a long period of time, not allowing her phone calls or Internet.



Themes

Finding Yourself

Infidel is first and foremost about a young lady who grows up searching for herself. She is brought up to believe in certain cultural values and religious beliefs, but often finds herself questioning them and struggling. As she gets older, she becomes slightly more courageous in speaking up for herself and asking the questions she has. She opposes her mother's beatings when she is in her early teenage years.

When she wants to continue her education, she pursue a secretary school so that her mother will fund part of it for her. However, when her mother doesn't want her to work, especially because of living in a non-Muslim country, she goes around her. She fights to become her own person, so she gets permission from an elder in the clan to go back to Somalia to work, overriding her mother's wishes.

Later, when she returns to Kenya, she takes it upon herself to travel to the border with a cousin to help him retrieve his family. She fights to rescue several women and saves the life of a child through her work. She later refuses to do all the chores to maintain the house when so many people are living in it. Slowly she decides that it is up to her to form her own destiny and not just accept what other people have in mind for her.

Her father chooses her husband and marries her to him, but she is determined to let him know that it is not what she wants. When he will not listen to her and follows through anyway, she finds her own way. She runs away to Holland and becomes her own person.

Eventually, she denounces almost everything that is dear to her family. She denounces Islam and God altogether. She speaks her mind and discovers her own beliefs and the life that she wants to live.

Against All Odds

Infidel is a book that inspires people to do their best no matter what adversity they experience in their lives. Hirsi Ali had a tremendous amount of challenges in her life. Her country was in civil war and her father led an opposition movement to fight the government. Her father was imprisoned by the regime then later traveled as part of his key role in fighting against the regime. This led him to be largely absent from family affairs and so he rarely present in Ayaan's life, especially her childhood.

While her mother is portrayed as a strong-willed woman before marrying her father, during Ayaan's life she seems to no longer have that strength of will. Ayaan's mother was angry and depressed, much of the time during Ayaan's childhood and even more so during her teenage years and took this out on her, beating her mercilessly.



Ayaan lived in a male-dominated society that controlled all her decisions. However, she did not have a strong male influence in her life to actually make those decisions, often leaving her in limbo or to the whim of her grandmother's controversial belief system or her mother's mood swings. Her father would determine who she would marry and spend her life with. She overcame all of these obstacles to start a life in Holland.

Reaching the Netherlands didn't magically make Ayaan's life perfect. She continued to have challenges. She was a poor, refugee who did not know the language. She did not pass the IQ tests at a high enough level to enter university. She was on her own and nobody was supporting her.

She overcame these obstacles as well. She took extra classes so that she could be proficient in Dutch. She became a translator so that she would not be dependent on unemployment benefits, but rather self-sufficient. Additionally, she obtained her Dutch citizenship and a degree in Political Science.

Ayaan became a successful debater and eventually a Member of Parliament. She defeated the challenges that stood in her way against all odds and has become an international spokesperson for her agenda.

Questioning Beliefs

Hirsi Ali lives her life struggling to identify her beliefs and what is truly right and wrong. She is taught a belief system, which is tangled between Islam and traditional tribal beliefs. She questions and challenges those in charge to give her answers. She tries hard to be faithful initially. This belief system surrounds many aspects of her life at home, at school, and in public around other Somalian people. There is a deep-rooted system of faith mixed with everyday life. Politically and socially, faith is the acceptable answer and questioning it is not permitted.

However, Ayaan can not stop her mind from realing and questioning many aspects which seem to contradict each other. When leaders do not want to answer her questions, she doesn't sit back and just accept that she should believe whatever they say. She continues to search for what she believes and why it should be right.

During her time in Holland, she reads endlessly to continually educate herself. Her readings continue to bring more questions about her faith system to mind and she wrestles with them, not giving them up easily, but also not sticking to them endlessly.

Eventually, she resolves her questions by denouncing her faith and becoming an atheist. She no longer believes in what she was brought up to believe, or the religion of her new home. Questioning the belief system which a person is brought up in is difficult and brings many challenges with it. Denouncing that belief system in totality is rarely done, in most societies around the world, people continue to hold the same beliefs their parents and grandparents hold.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali questioned, denounced the beliefs for herself, and then began challenging the rights of others to hold those beliefs and practice them within Holland. She fights against multiculturalism and tolerance of Islam within Western society.



Style

Perspective

Infidel is written from the perspective of Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She is a Somali immigrant who suffered through the civil war there and then escapes to the Netherlands. She has had a very tough life, including an abusive mother and an absent father most of the time. Moved around through several countries, Ayaan had to readjust and learn new languages each time. This constant readjustment exposed her a great deal to diverse opinions, cultures, and ways of living.

After moving to the Netherlands and studying there, she no longer has any faith in God. Her new outlook as an atheist, along with her harsh childhood, leads her to be very biased against Islam.

She says that she wrote this book because she feels it is important for others to hear her story and become motivated to help overcome the oppression of women in Islam.

Her strong belief that life is better in Europe than it is in the Muslim world should be taken into account while reading the entire book. She formed this opinion after living in Europe, but before she decides to write the book. Her new perspective would probably greatly influence her recounting her childhood experiences.

Ayaan is also strongly influenced by the death of her friend, Theo van Gogh, who helped her create a short film insulting Islamic ideas. Her strong opinion against Islam permeates throughout the book as she retells her story.

Tone

Hirsi Ali speaks in a soft tone throughout most of the book, leaving the reader feeling sorry for her life, as if she had no control of how badly things continued to be for her. She seems to sympathize for her mother even though her mother beats her because she doesn't want to judge her too harshly. She often takes on a passive aggressive language, not ever speaking badly of the people and places where she grew up, but implying it in her words. At the end of stories and chapters, she would sometimes speak as an adult from her new perspective. She criticizes the governments and people that were a part of her early life.

However, the second part of her book takes on a very different tone. Hirsi Ali becomes very combative in her language. She continually insults Islam and the way that Muslims live. She seems to not care whether she is combative or insulting people and she becomes narrow-minded in her focus. She strongly believes that Islam suppresses women and also men and that it is a danger to Western society.



At the end of the book, the reader will be drawn into two different positions. The first impression is that Hirsi Ali told a compelling and heart-wrenching story which gives her a personal reason and basis for her pursuits toward a political agenda of nontolerance of Islam. The second impression that the reader will feel is that Hirsi Ali uses a sad and tragic upbringing to manipulate and propagate a non-tolerant stance toward a quarter of the world's population.

Structure

Infidel is a book written mostly in chronological order. Each chapter moves progressively through the years of Hirsi Ali's life.

Part I is about her childhood and she introduces herself in Somali terms of telling her bloodline, back for several centuries. She relates the stories of her parents and how they came to be married before she begins chronicling her own story. Each chapter focuses on a place in her life where she moved as she grew up: first Somalia, followed by Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and then back to Somalia and to Kenya. Her childhood was full of diversity and cultures and she takes you through the steps of her growing up into a young woman.

Part II is about what she terms her freedom and about the life she made for herself in Holland. She again chronicles through the steps of running away and then filing for asylum in the Netherlands. She continues her story of studying, leaving her faith, and then become a controversial speaker in the Netherlands. She draws to a close her story with her time in politics and then the aftermath of Theo's death which sent her into protective custody. She finishes with her move to the United States as a debate over her Dutch citizenship is settled.



Quotes

"With the other knife, he stabbed a five-page letter onto Theo's chest. The letter was addressed to me" (Introduction, p. xi).

"This is the story of my life. It is a subjective record of my own personal memories, as close to accurate as I can make them; my relationship with the rest of my family has been so fractured that I cannot now refresh these recollections by asking for help" (Introduction, p. xii).

"I had fantasized a father who would understand me, know that I was trying to be good. Now here was that man" (Chapter 3, p. 44).

"The evil unbelievers lived there, but we had no choice" (Chapter 3, p. 54).

"Ken asked, 'How do you feel about me?' and I said, 'I really like you.' He said he really liked me, too, and we started to kiss" (Chapter 5, p. 83).

"I mumbled no, and let him get on with it. If I had lied and told Mahmud I had sexual experience, then perhaps we would have had foreplay; but then, of course, he would probably have divorced me" (Chapter 7, p. 142).

"Ma paid for the taxi and looked at me, her eyes round with respect. 'Well done,' she said. It was a rare compliment" (Chapter 8, p. 160).

"I said no. I told her I wouldn't promise that" (Chapter 9, p. 180).

"I left, floating, staring at the pink card with my photo, printed in indecipherable Dutch. Suddenly, I could stay in this country, with all these nice people. It was like a dream" (Chapter 10, p. 199).

"But I looked out of the caravan as they walked into the blackness of the night and I knew I had done something I could never, never undo. There was no regret, but I knew that I had cut myself off from everything that was meaningful and important to my family" (Chapter 11, p. 209).

"I had a propadeuse. Now I could claim my right to attend the oldest and finest university in Holland: the University of Leiden" (Chapter 12, p. 235).

"Holland's multiculturalism - its respect for Muslims' way of doing things - wasn't working" (Chapter 13, p. 246).

"So when I came Haweya was already in the ground" (Chapter 13, p. 258).

"I walked into the office thinking, 'I have to wake these people up'" (Chapter 14, p. 269).



"At first Karin didn't tell me about that conversation. Later, when she did let me know, I didn't take it seriously. Who would bother to kill me?" (Chapter 15, p. 285).

"I was sixteenth on the list, but sixth in terms of voters' individual preference - a high score for a newcomer" (Chapter 15, p. 302).

"I had been gone from Parliament for seventy-five days, but now I was home" (Chapter 17, p. 335).

"I was no longer Dutch" (Epilogue, p. 338).

"Muhammed Bouyeri, Theo's murderer, and others like him don't realize how deeply people in the West are committed to the idea of an open society. Even though an open society is vulnerable, it is also stubborn" (Epilogue, p. 346).

"My central, motivating concern is that women in Islam are oppressed" (Epilogue, p. 348).

"... I looked in the mirror and said out loud, "I don't believe in God." I said it slowly, enunciating it carefully, in Somali. And I felt relief" (Chapter 14, p. 281).

Topics for Discussion

How would your family and friends react if you denounced your faith and separated yourself from all that they believed in?

Some critics say that Hirsi Ali sounds as "single-minded and reactionary as the zealots she's worked so hard to oppose." Do you agree with this?

If someone were to denounce American life, what would be some of the main criticisms they would have against American beliefs and life?

Hirsi Ali believes that women are mistreated and abused by men in Islam, but most of her abuse came at the hands of her mother and grandmother. Why do you think she blames men and Islam?

Do you feel manipulated by Hirsi Ali and do you think she told the story fairly?

In her Epilogue, Hirsi Ali suggests several reasons why people think she might have written this book as well as giving her own. What reason do you think truly motivated her?

Hirsi Ali is taught many differing views by people and through their actions as she grows up. She struggles to identify her own belief system. What is your belief system? How did you come to it? Is it the same as your parents?

In the end, Hirsi Ali denounces religion and God, becoming an atheist. What do you think of this and her reasoning for doing so?

Hirsi Ali states that people in the West are committed to the idea of an open society. Do you think this is true? If so, how do they show that commitment? If not, why do you not think so?

Hirsi Ali generalizes from her knowledge and experiences about the religion of over 1.5 billion people, do you think this is fair? Do you ever generalize about people? When? How? What harm does this cause? Why might it sometimes be necessary?