

What Ayaan Hirsi Ali Means to Free Speech and Feminism

by Gary Fouse



Somali-born activist, apostate from Islam, and Islam-critic, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, is no stranger to controversy. On February 11, Ms. Ali appeared in a virtual speaking event for the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. Appearing with her was former New York Times journalist, Bari Weiss (who asked the questions). The host for the event was Dr. Gloria Duffy, the president of the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco. The Commonwealth Club has, over its long history, hosted speakers from a wide range of viewpoints on important issues.

Earlier in the week, the Council on American Islamic Affairs (CAIR) in San Francisco had attempted to get the Commonwealth Club to cancel the event, arguing that Ali and Weiss were

“hate mongers”. To her credit, Dr. Duffy refused to give in to the pressure. I, like others, had written to Dr Duffy asking her not to cave into the pressure. I received a short reply informing me that the event would not be canceled.

Also, this week, a Jewish board member named Emily Howe (aka Family) [resigned](#) from the Commonwealth Club in protest. Howe, who is an advocate for Muslim issues describes her motivation as follows in Jewish Weekly of Northern California:

*“As a religious minority myself (Jewish), as a fervent ally to the Muslim community, and as an anti-racist, being an ally to Muslim and other targeted communities is at the *heart* of what I’m literally doing on this planet and in this lifetime. Listening to marginalized communities is core to my work as an anti-oppression diversity consultant. I can no longer in good faith remain a part of the Commonwealth Club.”*

I think you get the flavor of where Ms. Howe is coming from with that quote. I would suggest she brush up on the plight of Jews in Europe at the hands of this wave of migrants. Ms. Ali could provide all the details.

At any rate, the event was held. The video of the event, posted by the Commonwealth Club and the Ayaan Hirsi Ali Foundation, may be viewed [here](#). The principal topic is the treatment of women in Europe at the hands of Muslim immigrants-particularly the young, male Muslims who have been arriving in Europe since 2015.

A brief recap of Ali’s life is in order here to underline her importance to feminism and free speech. Born in Somalia, she suffered the agony of female genital mutilation. Later, she fled from her family to escape a forced marriage and wound up in the Netherlands, where she eventually attained membership in the Dutch Parliament. She also left Islam. Another crucial turning point in her life came in 2004 when she produced a film about the plight of women in Islam with Dutch film

producer Theo van Gogh. The film was called "Submission". That same year, Van Gogh was murdered in retaliation for the film, and Ali's life was also threatened by the assassin.

Eventually, Ali left the Netherlands and moved to the US. She is now a fellow in the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. She still has to travel under armed guard as she continues to speak out against Islam. Contrary to the claims of people like CAIR, Ali does not propagate hate towards Muslims as people, but she is outspoken against those who wish to impose Islam upon the rest of society. Her latest book is entitled, *"Prey: Immigration, Islam, and the Erosion of Women's Rights"*.

Efforts to silence Ali underline the need for free speech protections-even in the US. As I write, French politician Marine Le Pen is on trial in France for showing images showing ISIS atrocities. She joins other Europeans like Dutch politician Geert Wilders and Austrian housewife and activist Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff, who have been prosecuted for speaking out against Islam and Islamic immigration into Europe. Ali has the benefit of the First Amendment in the US, but her life is still in danger.

Ali is also a feminist, but not necessarily in the mold of many Western feminists. As she points out so eloquently in the video, while Western feminists are concerned with glass ceilings and getting a female elected president, the concerns of poor immigrant women, particularly Muslim women, are largely ignored. Also ignored is the plight of European women who have been victimized by young, male Muslim immigrants who now roam around Europe by the hundreds of thousands-millions even- in countries like Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, and France. In the video, Ali vividly describes what happened next to the famed cathedral of Cologne on New Year's Eve (2015-16) when over 1,000 of these migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers stormed the area and sexually assaulted hundreds of German women as German police were unable to come

to their aid for some reason or another. Ali also referred to the infamous sexual-grooming cases in the UK involving mostly Pakistani men who have preyed on young British girls for years. According to Ali, one reason it has gone on so long is that police and authorities looked down on the victims, many of whom were runaways and/or drug addicts, as "white trash".

It is one thing for Western feminists to turn a blind eye to the suffering of Muslim women in places like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and so many other Muslim-majority countries; after all, they may not be able to affect change in other countries. It is quite another to turn a blind eye to the outrages that women must suffer in the West. Sweden is the rape capital of Europe-not because of Swedish men- and yet the government and police refuse to admit the problem, much less do anything about it aside from the occasional convictions and ridiculously low sentences. Aside from the fact that victims may be considered as "white trash" not deserving of protection, the fact is that the European system is flat-out intimidated by the Muslim presence in their countries. And yet, Covid or no Covid, the flood continues.

In addition, we in the West have a legal and moral obligation to ensure that Muslim immigrant women enjoy the same rights as our own women. That means domestic abuse will not be tolerated. That means strict laws against female genital mutilation. That means no forced child marriages. That means no honor killings. That means that parents who send their young daughters back to the home country of origin for purposes of female genital mutilation or forced child marriage are subject to prosecution. If we in the US can prosecute Americans who travel to other countries for purposes of having sex with children, we can also enforce laws against travel to other countries for the purposes of subjecting a child to female genital mutilation or forced child marriage.

We are fortunate to have Ayaan Hirsi Ali here in the US as a voice against the abuse of women. If that occasionally offends

the sensibilities of Islamists like CAIR, so be it. I commend the Commonwealth Club for not bending to the bullies of CAIR and other activists.