

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

The Imam of Tawi-Tawi by Ian Hamilton

1. In *The Imam of Tawi-Tawi*, Ava proves that her accountant ability to follow a paper trail can uncover more than financial issues. What is her most ingenious strategy in revealing the story of Zakat College of Tawi-Tawi?
2. In international law, the Geneva Convention defines the basic rights of wartime prisoners and protects the wounded and sick, civilians, and non-combatants in war-zones. However, the Geneva Convention applies only to nations and not to revolutionary or terrorist groups. According to Senator Miguel Ramirez, the military are “dying to unleash their dogs on the [southern Mindanao] region” (p. 48). Considering the changing face of conflict in the twenty-first century, how should the Convention now be applied? How effective is such a response in dealing with popular uprisings?
3. According to Ramirez, the new Philippine president has a style best described as “shoot first, ask questions later” (p. 48). How effective is such a political style? Why do leaders use it?
4. What motivates Yasin Juhar (Commander of the Muslim Brotherhood of Mindanao for over thirty years) and Omar Wahab (his deputy) to work with Ava instead of with their own contacts within the Philippines? Besides his desire for redemption, what motivates Alasdair Dulles to work with Ava?
5. Wahhabism, Ava learns, is “at the core of most of the fanatical Islamist groups in the world today” (p. 206). Wahhabism is “a blend of hatred towards everyone who isn’t Sunni and an anti-modern romanticism,” (p. 207) which fuels rage at the modern, secular world. By contrast, Tom Allison, the American billionaire and a “publicly loud fundamentalist Christian,” (p. 234) believes that “the emergence of a Jewish state in the land promised by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Job was ordained by God. A unified Israel in the hands of Jews is a prerequisite for the Rapture and for the return of Jesus” (pp. 259–260). How do these two fundamentalist beliefs compare?
6. In telling Ava what he knows, Alcem, a janitor at the college, says, “They’re so used to seeing us, we’ve become like the walls or the floor — just part of the building. No one cares what they say when we’re around” (p. 78). Why is such disregard for the working class still so entrenched?
7. The students at the school — such as Boutros Hadad, age twenty-two, of Birmingham, United Kingdom — all seem to have been young men in their early twenties. In other words, they form the same demographic of the population that has always been engaged to fight in wars. Do you think that this instinct is hard-wired into young men, or are they just easier to manipulate because they are still idealistic and haven’t yet been swallowed by the system, like Harrison has?
8. Ava tells Ryan Poirier that she has never failed to find a Plan B. To what do you attribute her creative problem solving skills?

9. In explaining why he went to the college, and why he left, twenty-year-old Jason Said explains that it was his personal connections with Jews that made it impossible for him to continue even though he “wanted to join the holy war [and] help establish a true Islamic state” (p. 216). If these personal networks are so strong a force of unity, how can they be encouraged and strengthened? What are the social forces that unite us most?

10. Jason is “a dreamer, and he would have kept on dreaming if someone hadn’t taken him under their wing” (p. 217). In criminal law, “entrapment” occurs when a law enforcement agent actually induces a person to commit an offense that they would have otherwise been unlikely, unwilling, or unable to commit. Entrapment is considered a defence for the accused. How has the Zakat College of Tawi-Tawi entrapped its students?