

A Conversation with **AYAAN HIRSI ALI**

A best-selling author and fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School and the American Enterprise Institute, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a brave, impassioned, and provocative analyst of the problems in Islam, today, including the dangers of what she calls "Islamic totalitarianism." In this conversation, Hirsi Ali narrates her own experiences as a young woman in Kenya attracted by radical Islam and explains the dangerous allure of Islamism to youth all over the world. She calls on Westerners to assert the superiority of liberal societies to political Islam—and argues that our current obsession with multiculturalism and political correctness has rendered us ill-equipped to do so.

On freeing herself from radical Islam, Hirsi Ali says: I graduated [university] just before 9/11. When 9/11 happened, I was a believing Muslim, not a practicing Muslim, but a believing Muslim. When I was confronted with the atrocity of the attacks in New York and Washington, DC, I couldn't say to myself: "this has nothing to do with my religion." And I think it was those five years [of university studies] in Leiden [Holland] that got me to that place where I could have an honest conversation with myself about my faith, morality, and background. And what I shared with those 19 men...I would have been a willing executioner of Jihad if I had stayed on the path of [my radicalized teenage education].

On Islam's unique characteristics, Hirsi Ali says: No one is denying that there are religious texts and other religions with violent elements. What makes twenty-first century Islam unique is the separation from politics and religion hasn't occurred. Violence and the idea of violence—the idea of jihad—hasn't been put to rest. [Radical] Muslims instruct their children and they indoctrinate young people with an idea that life after death is more attractive. And so they turn Islam into a cult of death. Even if they are not violent.

On multiculturalism as a national security threat, Hirsi Ali says: There is now this notion of multiculturalism [that says] "all groups are the same and all cultures are the same and all religions are equal." You are punished by the mainstream if you challenge that. But it's dangerous to think this because you become complacent and you forget that liberalism is a relatively new idea and liberal societies are relatively new. And the open society has enemies. And we will forever have enemies because there are people who just hate civilization. And that's not because of [Islamic extremism.] The challenge of the day is Islamic totalitarianism. But once we defeat that there is going to be some other totalitarianism. The only way to maintain [an open society] is to have an educated policy that doesn't entertain these nonsensical dangerous ideas such as that all cultures and religions are equal.

On the battle of ideas, Hirsi Ali says: We should be proud of articulating exactly what it is that makes the idea of America so exceptional and superior to the idea of political Islam and other bad ideas in history...We're not fighting on

the battlefield of ideas when in fact we have a superior idea. The idea of America and the content of the Constitution is so much more superior to everything in the Koran. We should be able to say this explicitly. If there is somebody here in our mosques and Muslim centers taking our Americans Muslim audiences and trying to indoctrinate them that Sharia law is superior to the idea of America we should be able to have a rebuttal ready.

Chapters in AYAAN HIRSI ALI Conversation

[The Challenge of Radical Islam](#)

[How to Fight Back](#)