



**DECONSTRUCTING AYAAN HIRSI ALI:
ON ISLAMISM, NEOCONSERVATISM AND THE CLASH OF
CIVILIZATIONS**

Journal:	<i>Politics, Religion & Ideology</i>
Manuscript ID	FTMP-2016-0021.R1
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Islamism < Keywords, neoconservatism, ideology < Keywords, biography, Hirsi Ali, Orientalism

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DECONSTRUCTING AYAAN HIRSI ALI

ON ISLAMISM, NEOCONSERVATISM AND THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

In *The Evidence of Experience*, a notable essay by the historian Joan W. Scott, she questions the naturalness attributed to subjective experience. Experience as personal testimony is commonly conceived as authentic and true, and the authority granted to experience powerfully buttresses claims to knowledge. Emancipatory projects – whether centered around the identities of workers, minorities, feminists, or gays – have often relied on subjective experience to question dominant, ‘objective’ paradigms. But the appeal to experience, Scott contends, leaves aside ‘questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured’.¹ Therefore the ‘evidence of experience’ can end up essentializing identity and reproducing rather than contesting given ideological systems.

In the case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, arguably those very qualities lend her writing its persuasive power and impressive popularity. A series of critical analyses has identified Hirsi Ali’s work as an example of the political efficacy of autobiographical writing in reinforcing dominant stereotypes through an appeal to authenticity and personal experience.² Kiran Grewal, for instance, has

¹ J. Scott, ‘The evidence of experience’, *Critical Enquiry*, 17:4 (1991), pp. 773-797; 777.

² See: S. Mahmood, ‘Religion, Feminism and Empire: The New Ambassadors of Islamophobia’ in Joan Wallach Scott (ed) *Women’s Studies on the Edge* (Durham: Duke, 2008), pp. 81-115; S. Sheehi, *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 2001); A. Yaghi, ‘Popular Testimonial Literature by American Cultural Conservatives of Arab or

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3 described Hirsi Ali's work as a falsification of the emancipatory function often
4 attributed to autobiographical writing, offering instead 'a reinforcement of the
5 dominant order through the "authentic" voice of the victim.'³ Due to the personal
6 nature of the narrative, Hirsi Ali's biographical narrative is immediately imbued
7 with an authority that other forms of non-fiction writing would need to proof
8 through argument, leaving them open to criticism. As a result, Hirsi Ali's writing
9 seduces readers and scholars alike in the belief that her views on Islam are an
10 expression of her personal experiences, resulting in an influential impact on
11 academia. Saba Mahmood has commented on the uncritical popularity with
12 which Hirsi Ali's work has been received in some American university
13 departments.⁴ And Adam Yaghi points to the growing appeal of Hirsi Ali's work
14 in academia 'where her serial autobiographies are treated as honest and reliable
15 testimonies'.⁵ The analysis offered here follows up on recent calls for more
16 critical scholarly engagement with Hirsi Ali's work by authors such as Grewal,
17 Mahmood and Yaghi.

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While there exists a growing literature on Hirsi Ali containing cogent critiques of the essentializing and simplifying quality of her writing, this article tries to take

Muslim Descent: Narrating the Self, Translating (an)Other', *Middle East Critique*, 25:1 (2016), pp. 83-98; D. Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012). N. Gana, 'Introduction: Race, Islam, and the Task of Muslim and Arab American Writing', *PMLA* 123:5 (2008), pp. 1577-1578; M. Bosch 'Telling stories, creating (and saving) her life: An analysis of the autobiography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali', *Women's Studies International Forum* 31 (2008), pp. 138-147.

³ Grewal, 'Reclaiming the Voice of the Third World Woman', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 14:4 (2012), pp. 569-590; p. 582.

⁴ Mahmood, op. cit., p. 83.

⁵ Yaghi, op. cit., p. 84

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3 the argument one step further by offering an in-depth engagement with the
4 literal text of Hirsi Ali's biography. Hirsi Ali has rightly been labeled as an
5 inauthentic voice by the aforementioned authors. This paper sets out to
6 demonstrate in detail how her writing is inauthentic, showing the discord
7 between Hirsi Ali's political views on Islam and her personal experiences as
8 described in her autobiography. The aim is to deconstruct her biographical
9 narrative, situating Hirsi Ali's writing in relation to two formative and interacting
10 ideological influences: Sunni fundamentalism and neoconservatism. To do so
11 convincingly, the analysis will necessarily cover some familiar terrain. It will use
12 the work of Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel to unpack the contradictions of Hirsi
13 Ali's description of political Islam in her autobiography, and to show Hirsi Ali's
14 intellectual debt to Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington. But the argument
15 proceeds along less familiar paths, in particular Hirsi Ali's early intellectual and
16 political development in the Netherlands and the essential role of Dutch
17 neoconservatives in Hirsi Ali's rise as a controversial public figure. The Dutch
18 episode is key to understanding Hirsi Ali's paradoxical description as
19 'contemporary doyen of "conservative left criticism"'.⁶
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44 What follows is an attempt at exposition in five sections: the first introduces
45 Ayaan Hirsi Ali's relation to Islamic fundamentalism and neoconservatism as
46 described in *Infidel* and lays out the basic argument, the second looks at Sayyid
47 Qutb's Islamism, the third describes U.S. neoconservatism and the clash of
48 civilizations paradigm, the fourth section explores the Dutch reception of U.S.
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58 ⁶ Mahmood, op. cit., p. 87.
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3 neoconservatism, and the final chapter uses the preceding to contrast Hirsi Ali's
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5 views on Islam with her autobiography, *Infidel*.
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11 I THE DOUBLE LIFE OF HIRSI ALI

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14 *Infidel*, the English edition of Hirsi Ali's autobiography, was published in 2007
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16 and quickly became an international bestseller.⁷ Echoing the divisions in her
17
18 personal trajectory, the book is divided in two parts: 'My Childhood' and 'My
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20 Freedom'. In the first section is recounted how Hirsi Ali's family, a prominent
21
22 clan in Somalia, fled the country in 1976 during the dictatorship of Siad Barré,
23
24 before the ensuing civil war. Their first place of refuge was Saudi Arabia,
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26 followed by sojourns in Ethiopia and finally Kenya, where she would stay for
27
28 twelve years. There, Hirsi Ali came in contact with the *Sahwa*, the puritan
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30 religious revival that emanated from the Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi
31
32 Wahhabism, onto the broader domain of Sunni Islam. Hirsi Ali describes how she
33
34 became part of this movement, through the religious education she received at
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36 the age of sixteen in Kenya, given by a certain 'Sister Aziza'. Hirsi Ali recounts her
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38 subsequent conversion, how she started to veil herself in a hidjab, and read
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40 Islamist texts with a community of like-minded believers.
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47 In the process of escaping from an arranged marriage and coming to the
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49 Netherlands as a political refugee in 1992, Hirsi Ali slowly started repudiating
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51 her Islamic belief. She describes the day of her arrival as her 'real birthday': 'the
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57 ⁷ A. Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*. (New York: Free Press, 2007). The Dutch edition appeared as *Mijn Vrijheid*
58 (My Freedom) in 2006.
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3 birth of me as a person, making decisions about my life on my own.⁸ From 1995
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5 to 2000, Hirsi Ali studied political science in Leiden. Amongst others, she was
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7 taught by Paul Cliteur, a prominent New Atheist inspired by U.S.
8
9 neoconservatism, and the former head of the thinktank of the conservative
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11 liberal party (VVD). Cliteur was part of a circle of neoconservative intellectuals
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13 who devoted themselves to the propagation of Western enlightenment values
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15 and the critique of religion, in particular Islam. After her studies, Hirsi Ali joined
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17 the thinktank of the Dutch Social Democrat Party (PvdA), the Wiarda Beckman
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19 Stichting (WBS), where she started writing on Islam and immigration. As shown
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21 below, Hirsi Ali's writing at the WBS was inspired on the work of the
22
23 neoconservative Orientalist Bernard Lewis. In the months after 9/11, Hirsi Ali's
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25 critique of Islam could count on a receptive audience. While still working at the
26
27 WBS, Hirsi Ali was adopted as their protégé by the neoconservative intellectual
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29 circle surrounding Cliteur. The group is described in her biography as the 'Gent's
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31 Club': Chris Rutenfrans, Jaffe Vink, Paul Cliteur, Sylvain Ephimenco, Hans
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33 Wansink, Leon de Winter and Herman Philipse. She refers to Frits Bolkestein, the
34
35 erstwhile Eurocommisioner and former leader of the conservative liberal party
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37 (VVD), probably the most prominent Dutch exponent of neoconservative ideas –
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39 as her 'intellectual mentor' in the acknowledgements.⁹ After calling Islam a
40
41 'backward religion' on Dutch public television in September 2002, Hirsi Ali
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43 started receiving death threats. She became an instant celebrity in the heated
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45 debate on freedom of speech, women emancipation and Islam that followed.
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53 Following a short period in the U.S., hiding from the threats, Hirsi Ali, exchanged

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55 ⁸ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 188.

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57 ⁹ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 352.

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3 the thinktank of the PvdA for a position as parliament member of the VVD. After
4 a spectacular and controversial political career as a parliament member for the
5 VVD, Ayaan Hirsi Ali moved to the United States in 2006, where she started
6 working for the *American Enterprise Institute*, a prominent neoconservative
7 thinktank. She subsequently married the neoconservative author Niall Ferguson.
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10 With this remarkable course of life, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is one of the few people to
11 have been part of both the Islamic fundamentalist and the neoconservative
12 movement. In this itinerary of contrasting conversions and opposing allegiances,
13 the strategic use of enemy images and essentialism that is inherent to both
14 currents, provides a connecting thread. 'You're either with us, or against us',
15 would become a shared mantra of both George W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden.
16 Both movements are seen to derive strength and legitimacy from an aggressive
17 opponent. Both movements share an essentialist view of Islam, in which the
18 fundamentalist perspective is seen as the true nature of Islam. In his book *War*
19 *for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, the French Middle East scholar Gilles Kepel
20 described the ascendancy of these movements and famously argued that both
21 are to a certain degree each other's mirror image, feeding and reinforcing each
22 other.¹⁰ *Infidel* is a poignant example of that confluence. In her autobiography,
23 Hirsi Ali has sought to consciously transpose the fundamentalist image of Islam,
24 known to her from her teenage years, unto the Islamic world as a whole. This
25 fundamentalist image – defined by a literalist approach to Quran and Hadith; the
26 myth of the timelessness of Islam; the stress on Islam's inherent hostility to
27 modernity and the West; and the view of Islam as an all-embracing societal
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¹⁰ G. Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

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3 system – bears a striking resemblance to the perspective on Islam in the ‘Islam
4 criticism’ developed by neoconservatives, which has its roots in the Western
5 tradition of Orientalism. As the Middle East scholar Olivier Roy writes: ‘Critics of
6 Islam and Muslim fundamentalists are mirrors of each other, and each
7 corroborates the other in the view of Islam that they share, merely with the signs
8 reversed.’¹¹

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Hirsi Ali has made ample use of these analytical tools of Western Orientalism. Following Edward Said, the principal dogma’s of Orientalism, a long tradition of partisan Western scholarship regarding Islam and the Orient - can be reduced to four themes. First, ‘the absolute and systemic difference between the West, which is rational developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior’. Second, ‘abstractions about the orient’, particularly those based on texts representing a classical Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. Third, ‘the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself.’ Four, ‘the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared [...] or to be controlled.’¹² As we will see, the above themes characterize Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s views on Islam. Which is unsurprising if we consider that they are largely inspired on the work of the Orientalist Bernard Lewis, a principle target of Said’s critique. Hirsi Ali can rightfully be described as a ‘native informant’, a term used by Edward Said to describe an Oriental scholar sitting ‘at the feet of American Orientalists’, who uses his Western training ‘to feel superior to his own people, because he ‘is able

¹¹ O. Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 43.

¹² E. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 300.

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3 to 'manage' the Orientalist system.'¹³ Orientalism, according to Said, has a
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5 theatrical quality, and he describes that learned system of viewing the Orient as a
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7 'stage on which the whole East is confined':
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12 'On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the
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14 larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be,
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16 not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but
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18 rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.'¹⁴
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22 Ayaan Hirsi Ali is an actor on that theatrical stage, representing the Orient to a
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24 Western audience. Specific to Hirsi Ali is that she uses the Orientalist paradigm,
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26 not so much to study Islam or her society of origin, but to make sense of her own
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28 personal story, and to adapt that experience so as to fit into the public role she
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30 has crafted for herself on the confined space of the stage. In other words, she is a
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32 'native informant' with regards to her own life. Hirsi Ali has offered her personal
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34 story as an illustration of the clash of civilizations thesis developed by Bernard
35
36 Lewis and Samuel Huntington, referring to her life as 'a personal journey
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38 through the clash of civilizations'¹⁵. In *Brown Skin, White Masks*, the Iranian
39
40 scholar Hamid Dabashi writes fiercely of critics of Islam such as Ibn Warraq and
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42 Hirsi Ali as 'native informers who at once inhabit and target, personify and
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44 alienate, the hated abstraction they wish to exorcise from the moral psychosis
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46 that has posited them as aliens.' For Dabashi, the particularity of Ayaan Hirsi Ali
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52 ¹³ E. Said, *ibid.*, pp. 323-324.

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54 ¹⁴ E. Said, *ibid.*, p. 63.

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56 ¹⁵ A. Hirsi Ali, *Nomad. From Islam to America: a Personal Journey Through the Clash of*
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58 *Civilizations*, (New York: Free Press, 2010).
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3 is that her aversion 'for her own collective identity remains abstract and hidden
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5 within the stories that she keeps weaving about her life.'¹⁶ By retracing the
6
7 intellectual 'double life' of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, this text aims to deconstruct the
8
9 staged persona she has created, thus revealing and making concrete what has
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11 remained hidden and abstract.
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14 15 16 17 18 II QUTB AND POLITICAL ISLAM 19

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21 The Sunni Islamist part of the story has its crystallisation point in the figure of
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23 Sayyid Qutb. Born in 1906 in a traditional rural context in Egypt, Qutb first
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25 became a teacher, then a prominent intellectual, and finally the most important
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27 voice of modern Sunni Islamism.¹⁷ The Sunni Islamist movement has its origins
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29 in the nineteen thirties, when Hasna al-Banna, the Egyptian founder of the
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31 Muslim Brotherhood and Abul-Ala Maududi, the leader of the Indian-Pakistani
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33 Jamaat-i-Islami party, founded a new political movement that aimed to reinvent
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35 Islam as a political order. Qutb would build on the work of al-Banna and
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37 Maudadi, with the goal of developing Islam into a holistic alternative for modern
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39 20th century ideologies. The leading Middle East scholar Olivier Roy - whose
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41 interpretation I will follow here, with the aid of John Calvert's probing
42
43 intellectual biography of Qutb - defines this movement as Islamism or political
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55 ¹⁶ H. Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks*, (London: Pluto Press, 2011), p. 92.

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57 ¹⁷ For reasons of brevity, the focus of this article is restricted to the Sunnite tradition, which has
58
59 been central to Hirsi Ali's development. The Shiite tradition will not be discussed, since it
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occupies a more marginal presence in the life and writings of Hirsi Ali.

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3 Islam, because it redefines Islam as a political ideology.¹⁸ This attempt at the
4
5 modernisation of Islam was paradoxically given legitimacy by presenting it as a
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7 restoration, a return to the source, to the original texts and the original
8
9 inspirations of the first community of believers under the Prophet Mohammed.
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11 Islamism, Roy argues, is a movement that denies its own historicity.

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15 The core proposition of the work of Olivier Roy is that this movement, of which
16
17 Qutb would become the intellectual epicentre, is a product of modernity. Both
18
19 sociologically and intellectually, Roy states, Islamism is a result of the rapid
20
21 modernisation process of the Muslim world. Like Qutb himself, the vanguard of
22
23 adherents and disseminators of political Islam did not originate from traditional
24
25 Islamic clergy (the *ulamas*). They did not write in the ancient Arabic, the learned
26
27 language of the Koran, but in national popular languages. The Islamists 'are a
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29 product of the modern education system', Roy writes, 'where they took classes
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31 together with militant Marxists, whose concepts they used, and translated in the
32
33 terminology of Koran.'¹⁹ In Islamism, special attention is given to organisational
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35 form, reminiscent of Leninist vanguard parties on the one hand (the role of party
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37 secretary is fulfilled by the Amir and that of the central committee by the Shura,
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39 the advisory council) and the Sufi brotherhoods on the other.²⁰

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42 Like other Muslim intellectuals of his generation, Sayyid Qutb searched for a
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44 formula to modernise Islam, in such a way that Western technological and
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52 ¹⁸ J. Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islam* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo
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54 Press, 2011).

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56 ¹⁹ O. Roy, *The failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 40.

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58 ²⁰ Roy, *ibid.*, p. 3.

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3 scientific knowledge could be assimilated without the accompanying liberal
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5 values. For that to occur, Islam had to be developed into a fundamentalist and
6
7 all-embracing societal 'ideology' (fikra), a term derived from European
8
9 progressive thought. For Qutb, a reinvented Islamic ideology had to function as
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11 an alternative to Third World nationalism, communism, capitalism, and liberal
12
13 democracy. The titles of Qutb's most popular books, published around 1950, are
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15 a good indication of the worldly character of his religious thought: *Social Justice*
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17 *in Islam* (1949), *The Battle between Capitalism and Islam* (1951) *en Islam and*
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19 *World Peace* (1951). The central idea in these books is holism: Qutb describes
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21 Islam as *nizam*, an integrated order that encapsulates economy, society and
22
23 politics.²¹ This fundamentalist vision must be realized by the creation of an
24
25 Islamic state, starting at the national level. This was an important innovation. In
26
27 traditional Islam, Roy writes, '[t]he state is never considered in terms of a
28
29 territorialized nation-state: the ideal is to have a power that would rule over the
30
31 entirety of the *umma*, the community of the faithful, while actual power is
32
33 exercised over a segment of the *umma* whose borders are contingent,
34
35 provisional, and incomplete.'²² The term *nizam* is also a modern invention, and is
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37 not to be found in the Koran.²³ The break with Islamic tradition consists in that
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39 the idea of divine unity (*tawhid*) is now applied on society, while before it only
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41 referred to God. Society needs to be a reflection of God's unity. But where God's
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43 unity is natural, in society it will have to be constructed. A holistic society does
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45 not tolerate intrinsic segmentation, be it social, ethnic, or tribal, or national, or a
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54 ²¹ Calvert, op. cit., p. 130.

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56 ²² Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, op. cit., p. 13.

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59 ²³ Calvert, op. cit., p. 130.
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3 political order that claims autonomy from divine order.²⁴ Therein lies the
4
5 fundamentalist aspect of Islamism. Before the 20th century, Islam was used as a
6
7 verb describing a practice of personal belief and dedication. Only after the
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9 creation of the Muslim Brotherhood by Hasan al-Banna, does the word attain the
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11 meaning that Qutb bestows on it: an integrated societal system.²⁵
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15 Following the military coup of Nasser and the Free Officers in 1953, Qutb joined
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17 the Muslim Brotherhood and became the intellectual leader of the movement.
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19 The Brotherhood saw Nasser's regime as an opportunity to implement their
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21 fervently desired Islamic state in Egypt. Nasser, however, chose for a path of
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23 secular modernisation and relations with the Brotherhood turned sour. The
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25 Muslim Brotherhood subsequently attempted to overthrow the Nasser
26
27 government. The regime of the Free Officers then decided to eliminate the
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29 Brotherhood and arrests hundreds of its most prominent members. Qutb was
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31 among them. In the years of imprisonment that followed, Qutb was tortured and
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33 his views radicalized. His writings in prison were oriented at formulating an
34
35 Islamic doctrine that would legitimate a revolt against sovereign power (as in
36
37 Christian faith, obedience to God-given authority is required in Islam). Qutb does
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39 that, on the one hand, by placing divine authority (*hakimiyya*, again a term not
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41 existing in Quran) above state sovereignty and popular sovereignty. And on the
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43 other, by stating that Muslim societies in which this godly sovereignty is not
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45 recognised, in which there is no attempt to implement divine law (*sharia*) are in
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47 reality in a state of unbelief. Under Western influence, a form of bad faith had
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56 ²⁴ Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, pp. 40-41.

57 ²⁵ Calvert, op. cit., p. 130.
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3 developed amongst the political elites of Muslim countries, as in society more
4 broadly. Qutb called this *Jahiliyya* (a state of unbelief) a Koranic concept that
5 refers to the situation in the Arabic world before the arrival of Islam. Obedience
6 to secular authorities implied disobedience to divine authority:
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13 'God (limitless is He in His glory) says that this whole issue is one of
14 faith or unfaith, Islam and non-Islam, Divine law or human prejudice.
15 No compromise or reconciliation can be worked out between these
16 two sets of values. Those who judge on the basis of the law God has
17 revealed, enforcing all parts of it and substituting nothing else for it,
18 are the believers. By contrast, those who do not make the law God has
19 revealed the basis of their judgement, are unbelievers, wrongdoers
20 and transgressors.'²⁶
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32 Qutb's views are a mirror image to the friend-enemy distinction employed by the
33 neoconservatives, as we shall see later on. Qutb makes a comparable back and
34 white distinction between true Islam and the enemies of Islam, compounded by
35 essentialist views of Jews, communists, westernised elites, Orientalists and other
36 opponents of true Islam. In spite of the fact that Qutb saw his modernized
37 version of Islam as relying on 'Western ways of thought', he portrayed Western
38 thinking as especially hostile to Islam, due to the fact that Western science had
39 developed historically in opposition to religion:
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53 ²⁶ Cited in J. Calvert, *ibid.*, p. 216. Qutb stopped short of calling individual Muslims unbelievers
54 (kafirs): 'Whereas the kafir is a person who intentionally disbelieves in God, the jahili individual
55 sees himself as a believer yet dismisses Islam's prerogative to govern all aspects of life.' J. Calvert,
56 *ibid.*, p. 220
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3 'The Western ways of thought and all the sciences started on the
4 foundation of these poisonous influences with an enmity towards all
5 religions, and in particular with greater hostility towards Islam. This
6 enmity towards Islam is especially pronounced and many times is the
7 result of a well thought out scheme, the object of which is first to
8 shake the foundations of Islamic beliefs and then gradually to
9 demolish the structure of Muslim society.'²⁷
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20 An important contradiction in the thought of Qutb is the conviction that it is
21 possible to have unmediated access to divine teachings. Islam, according to Qutb,
22 is a doctrine that exists outside of human consciousness, as objective truth.
23 Interpretation must be avoided as much as possible, so that human ignorance,
24 individual desire, or group interests won't contaminate the purity of the
25 doctrine. When confronted with an explicit text in the Koran or the Hadith, there
26 is no space for *ijtihad* (personal appraisal), according to Qutb.²⁸ In the case of
27 uncertainty, interpretation only serves to ascertain divine truth. A scenario in
28 which several interpretations come to coexist, a normal situation given the
29 diversity of Islamic jurisprudence, is not deemed to be possible, there is only
30 right and wrong. Since the assessment of clarity already requires human
31 judgement, and in the case of uncertainty, there is no basis for assessing the
32 correctness of an interpretation, that vision is tautological. Ultimately, Qutb's
33 method requires a personal (and political) decision on the interpretation of
34 divine truth, a decision that remains veiled behind the appeal to unmediated
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55 ²⁷ S. Qutb, *Milestones: Ma'alim fi'l-tareeq* (Birmingham: Maktabah, 2006 [1964]), p. 128.

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57 ²⁸ Qutb, *ibid.*, p. 43.
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3 access. However, this approach allows Qutb and the Islamist movement to
4
5 marginalize the traditional Islamic clergy such as the Egyptian Al-Azhar
6
7 University, who traditionally have a monopoly on interpreting the religious texts
8
9 and politically loyal to existing regimes.
10

11
12 Qutb interprets and innovates to an important degree, by introducing new
13
14 concepts, or by giving new meaning to existing terms. Denying the innovative
15
16 aspects of his approach allows Qutb to articulate a political programme in the
17
18 name of Islam, while cementing his vision in an appeal to divine truth. When
19
20 Qutb is released from prison in 1964, members of the Muslim Brotherhood are
21
22 working on the creation of an underground military organisation. Qutb takes
23
24 personal charge of the operation. When the organisation is discovered, the
25
26 Nasser regime decides to round up the Muslim Brotherhood, and to give Qutb
27
28 the death sentence.
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33
34 Qutb would go down in history as a martyr. The Muslim Brotherhood, however,
35
36 distanced itself from the more radical aspects of his legacy, rejecting the
37
38 revolutionary *Jahiliyya* doctrine. The strategy of catastrophic revolution was
39
40 abandoned for reformism and missionary work from the ground up. Only God
41
42 has the authority to judge the veracity of the belief of other Muslims, Hedaybi
43
44 argued, then Brotherhood leader. That continues to be the majority position in
45
46 the Sunni world: failures in practice, be they crimes or omissions of worship, do
47
48 not exclude a person from the community of believers, only the confession of the
49
50 faith matters. Nonetheless, in the following years, Qutbism inspired radicals all
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1
2
3 over the Sunni Islamic world. From that moment on, the Islamist movement is
4
5 seen to be divided between a reformist and a revolutionary pole.²⁹
6
7

8
9 The reformist pole is exemplified by Mohammed Qutb, the brother of Sayyid
10
11 Qutb. He was invited by the Saudi monarchy – and with him many other Muslim
12
13 Brothers –to integrate Islamism with the Saudi tradition of Wahhabism, an ultra
14
15 conservative, fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. At the time, the Saudi
16
17 Monarchy saw the Muslim Brotherhood as an appropriate tool to form an
18
19 international counterweight to the appeal of secular pan-Arabism, and from
20
21 1979 on, revolutionary Shiism from Iran. On a national level, this was inspired by
22
23 strategic concerns to limit the influence of Wahhabi clerics on Saudi society, by
24
25 providing them with a competing doctrine. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia thus
26
27 became a site of refuge for the radical religious opposition movements against
28
29 secular Arab regimes that were often aligned with the Soviet Union. This
30
31 development was actively encouraged by the United States, as part of its Cold
32
33 War strategy. Large amounts of Saudi oil-dollars were invested to facilitate this
34
35 new religious movement. From the convergence of the activist impulse of the
36
37 Muslim Brotherhood and the literalist, strict and puritanical approach of the
38
39 Wahhabi tradition, also described as Salafism, the *Sahwa* (the awakening)
40
41 emerged.³⁰ Both Islamists and Salafists can be described as fundamentalist,
42
43 although they differ in the nature of their fundamentalism, with Islamists more
44
45 prone to challenge the political status quo and Salafists more focused on
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54 ²⁹ Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, op. cit., p. 24.

55 ³⁰ While all Wahhabists are Salafists, not all Salafists are Wahhabists, which is the Saudi current
56
57 in Salafism.
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1
2
3 personal piety. This movement became very prominent in the eighties and would
4
5 take up the young Hirsi Ali in its sweep.³¹
6
7

8 One of the younger Muslim Brothers, and a scion of the Egyptian elite, Ayman al-
9
10 Zawahiri, continued the revolutionary tradition of Islamism, and radicalised the
11
12 ideas of Qutb even further. He became part of the group Islamic Jihad that
13
14 assassinated Sadat in 1981, basing themselves on the revolutionary ideas Qutb
15
16 had formulated. Heavy repression followed, and when Zawahiri was released
17
18 from prison, he continued his activities as part of the Afghan Moedjehadien,
19
20 where he met Bin Laden. Here, Salafist and Islamist radicals successfully
21
22 mingled, as the guerrilla fighters were trying to live their lives (and fight)
23
24 according to a very literal interpretation of scripture. After the success of the
25
26 guerrilla war against the Soviet Union, he took up the plan to take aim, not at the
27
28 corrupt Arabic regimes (the nearby enemy), but directly at the puppet player
29
30 itself: the United States (the faraway enemy). He became the mentor of Bin
31
32 Laden and the second in command of Al Qaeda.
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41 II NEOCONSERVATISM

42
43 Neoconservatism gradually developed out of the anti-Stalinism of the thirties
44
45 and the Cold War liberalism of the fifties and sixties. The beneficial nature of the
46
47 struggle against an external threat has always been central to its worldview.³²
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51 _____
52 ³¹ J. Calvert, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

53 ³² J. Vaisse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard
54
55 University Press, 2010); P. Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men who are Changing America's*
56
57 *Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).
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1
2
3 Neoconservatives have championed an image of the world as divided by a
4
5 dramatic conflict of starkly contrasted forces of good and evil. They have
6
7 stressed the benevolent nature of America's dominant role in the world, as a
8
9 harbinger of democracy and human rights. The philosophy of Leo Strauss has
10
11 provided an important theoretical reference point. Strauss, a Jewish refugee
12
13 from the Nazi regime, rose to prominence at the University of Chicago in the
14
15 fifties, and would spawn a Straussian school of philosophy. Amongst the
16
17 Straussians were many neoconservatives who would later acquire positions of
18
19 power in government, in military and foreign policy circles, and in
20
21 neoconservative thinktanks.³³ Elaborating on the thesis of the German Nazi-
22
23 jurist Carl Schmitt that friend-enemy distinctions form the essence of politics,
24
25 Strauss saw the struggle against an enemy – portrayed as an absolute moral evil
26
27 – as a necessary condition for the construction and maintenance of a healthy and
28
29 hierarchical political order.³⁴ In a personal letter to Schmitt, Strauss expressed
30
31 this philosophy thusly:
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38 'The ultimate foundation of the Right is the principle of the natural
39
40 evil of man; because man is by nature evil, he therefore needs
41
42 *dominion*. But dominion can be established, that is man can be unified,
43
44 only in a unity *against* – against other man. Every association of men
45
46 is *necessarily* a separation from other men. The *tendency* to separate
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54 ³³ A. Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*, (New Haven: Yale University Press,
55
56 2004).

57
58 ³⁴ S. Drury, *The political ideas of Leo Strauss*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988).
59
60

(and therewith the grouping of humanity into friends and enemies) is given with human nature; it is in this sense destiny, period.'³⁵

At first, communism served this function. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many in the U.S. establishment were convinced that a new rationale for conflict - and therefore a new enemy - needed to be identified. The initial impetus in that effort was given by the Princeton-based Orientalist Bernard Lewis.³⁶ In 1990, a month after the beginning of the First Gulf War, Lewis published the essay *The Roots of Muslim Rage* in *The Atlantic*. Its message immediately caused controversy: 'This is no less than a clash of civilizations - the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.'³⁷ It wasn't Western intervention in Muslim countries, or Western support for dictatorial regimes that lead to virulent anti-Americanism in the Middle East. The hatred of Muslims against the West, Lewis wrote, 'goes beyond hostility to specific interests or actions or policies or even countries and becomes a rejection of Western civilization as such, not only what it does but what it is, and the principles and values that it practices and professes. These are indeed seen as innate evil, and those who promote them or accept them as the "enemies of God".'³⁸ The author came to this startling conclusion by presenting Islamic fundamentalism as an authentic

³⁵ Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The hidden dialogue*. (Chicago: 1995), p. 125.

³⁶ Emran Qureshi, and Michael Sells eds., *The New Crusades: constructing the Muslim Enemy*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

³⁷ Bernard Lewis, 'The Roots of Muslim Rage,' *The Atlantic Monthly* 266/3 (1990), pp. 47-60, p.

48.

³⁸ Lewis, *ibid.*, p. 48

1
2
3 return to 'the classic Islamic view'. Lewis tactically embraced the fundamentalist
4 definition of Islam and turned it against the Islamic religion as a whole. By thus
5 projecting enmity on the entire religion of Islam, Lewis employed a friend-enemy
6 distinction of his own. The hawks in the U.S. foreign policy establishment soon
7 embraced Lewis' thesis as a notion that could serve as a guide for future conflict.
8 After 9/11, Bernard Lewis (together with the Lebanese scholar and 'native
9 informant' Fouad Ajami) became the Bush administration's preferred academic
10 expert on the Middle East, visiting Washington six times in the weeks after
11 9/11.³⁹ It is not surprising then, that Lewis' thesis became an important mantra
12 of the Bush administration after 9/11: 'Why do they hate us? [...] They hate our
13 freedoms'.⁴⁰

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29 In 1993, Huntington took up the thesis of Lewis in a groundbreaking essay titled
30 *The Clash of Civilizations?*, published in the journal of the U.S. diplomatic and
31 military establishment, *Foreign Affairs*.⁴¹ In 1996, Huntington expanded on the
32 essay in his famous book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World*
33 *Order*. Controversially, Huntington defined Islam (and secondarily China, or the
34 Confucianist civilization) as the primary source of civilizational conflict for the
35 West. The 'centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is
36 unlikely to decline. It could become more virulent,' Huntington suggested. As
37 Gilles Kepel pointed out, 'Huntington's clash of civilizations theory facilitated the
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³⁹ See Nicholas Lemann's extended profile of the Bush foreign policy team for the *New Yorker*: N. Lemann, 'The Next World Order', *The New Yorker*, April 1, 2002.

⁴⁰ Speech of George W. Bush, September 20, 2001. Reprinted in *The Washington Post*, September 20, 2001.

⁴¹ S. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?' *Foreign Affairs*, 72/3 (1993), pp. 22-49.

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2
3 transfer to the Muslim world of a strategic hostility the West had inherited from
4 decades of Cold War. [...] The neoconservative movement played a crucial role in
5
6
7 bringing about this rhetorical and theoretical permutation.⁴²
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9

10 11 12 III THE DUTCH RECEPTION OF NEOCONSERVATISM 13

14
15 When Ayaan Hirsi Ali was catapulted in the public limelight, to become one of the
16 most influential and controversial political figures of the decade, her appearance
17 formed part of a larger emergence of a Dutch neoconservative movement. In
18 February 2001, a much-discussed essay appeared in the Dutch newspaper of
19 note, NRC. It boldly declared that 'the conservative moment' had come. Referring
20 to U.S. neoconservatism, the essay proposed its propagation in the Netherlands:
21 'In the past 25 years, conservative thought in the Western world has witnessed a
22 veritable revolution. Now is the time for conservatives in the Netherlands to
23 attempt to reap its benefits.'⁴³ The author was Joshua Livestro, at that moment
24 the speechwriter of Frits Bolkestein, then European Commissioner and former
25 leader of the right-wing liberal party VVD. Two months earlier, together with the
26 neoconservative thinker Bart Jan Spruyt, VVD-intellectual Andreas Kinneging
27 and the lawyer Michiel Visser, Livestro had founded an influential conservative
28 think-tank, the Edmund Burke foundation. Also Paul Cliteur, former teacher of
29 Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a law professor in the Dutch city of Leiden and former director of
30 the VVD thinktank, became part of the foundation, together with his colleague,
31 the Iranian *émigré* Afshin Ellian. Cliteur had written his PhD on U.S.
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55 ⁴² Kepel, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.
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57 ⁴³ Joshua Livestro, 'Het Conservatieve Moment is Gekomen,' *NRC Handelsblad*, February 3, 2001.
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2
3 neoconservatism in 1989 and - together with Bolkestein - debated
4
5 neoconservative ideas with members of the VVD in the nineties.⁴⁴ Afshin Ellian
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7 had been part of the communist Tudeh party in Iran, but had to flee after the
8
9 Iranian Revolution, in fear of the Islamic regime. In the Netherlands he turned to
10
11 neoconservatism, aligned himself with the Right, and became one of the most
12
13 vocal critics of Islam. He served as an inspiration for Hirsi Ali, who saw him as a
14
15 Dutch counterpart to Salman Rushdie.⁴⁵
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19
20 The polarized aftermath of 9/11 provided the ideal environment for
21
22 neoconservatives to come out of the closet. While the political culture in the
23
24 Netherlands is traditionally consensual, moderate and uneventful, this soon
25
26 changed. The right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn, himself inspired to an
27
28 important degree by neoconservative ideas, declared a 'cold war against Islam' a
29
30 little more than two weeks before 9/11. 'The role of communism' in serving as a
31
32 threat to Western norms and values, according to Fortuyn, had been 'taken over
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39 ⁴⁴ See Paul Cliteur: 'When I wrote an article in 1987 on Irving Kristol, I didn't think there was
40
41 anyone in the Netherlands that seriously studied his work. But who compares the book of Kristol
42
43 with the ideas of the aforementioned thinkers (VVD-intellectuals such as Bolkestein, Kinneging
44
45 and Van der List, MO) will find significant similarities... The ideologues of the VVD have gone
46
47 through a trajectory from Rawls to Hayek, and from Hayek to Kristol, or so it seems.' P. Cliteur,
48
49 'Neo-conservatisme en religie: Irving Kristol als nieuwe beschermheer van het liberale denken?,'
50
51 *Civis Mundi* 35, October 1996, pp. 119-124, p. 121.

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53 ⁴⁵ 'Very few Muslims are actually capable of looking at their faith critically. Critical minds like
54
55 those of Afshin Ellian in the Netherlands and Salman Rushdie in England are exceptions.' A. Hirsi
56
57 Ali, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*, (New York: Free
58
59 Press, 2006), p. 32.
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1
2
3 by Islam'.⁴⁶ After the attacks, Fortuyn's electoral fortunes took flight and he
4
5 successfully campaigned on a platform to forcefully assimilate Muslim
6
7 immigrants. In May 2002 an animal rights activist assassinated Fortuyn, causing
8
9 a national outcry and leading to a landslide election victory for his now
10
11 leaderless party. When in 2004, the filmmaker, columnist and Islam critic Theo
12
13 Van Gogh was brutally assassinated on the street by a Dutch-Moroccan jihadist
14
15 because of his work with Hirsi Ali on the film *Submission*, the Netherlands came
16
17 to perceive itself as a frontline in the global War on Terror. In this context, the
18
19 neoconservative message of an epic struggle against a civilizational enemy could
20
21 count on a warm reception. Bart-Jan Spruyt wrote on Carl Schmitt's friend-
22
23 enemy distinction and argued that these political murders had shown that
24
25 'Western civilization now had an enemy' in the Schmittian sense. Through
26
27 confrontation with that enemy, Spruyt wrote, 'we could come to rediscover our
28
29 own identity'.⁴⁷ In the years after 9/11, the Edmund Burke foundation
30
31 revolutionized the Dutch debate and became the successful propagator of a -
32
33 hitherto unknown and arguably never fully understood - neoconservative
34
35 philosophy in the Netherlands.
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42 Neoconservatism also had influential adherents in the Dutch press. From 2001
43
44 till 2006, journalists Jaffe Vink and Chris Rutenfrans used a weekly review-
45
46 section of the national newspaper *Trouw* to promote what they called 'the
47
48 neoconservative revolution'. Vink described the neoconservatives as 'the
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53 ⁴⁶ P. Fortuyn, 'Koude oorlog met Islam', *Elsevier*, August 25, 2001.

54
55 ⁴⁷ B. Spruyt, *De Toekomst van de Stad: Over Geschiedenis en Politiek* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij
56
57 Boekencentrum, 2005), p. 63.
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2
3 revolutionaries of our time' who 'want to make the world safe for democracy'.⁴⁸
4
5 In their opinion section, they ardently supported the Iraq war and proposed to
6
7 spread Western values in a 'civilizing mission' in the Middle East. In November
8
9 2001, Vink and Rutenfrans organized a debate with the appropriate Manichean
10
11 title 'The West or Islam: who needs a Voltaire?' in Amsterdam cultural centre *De*
12
13 *Balie*. In *Infidel*, Ayaan Hirsi Ali describes her attendance and how she intervened
14
15 from the stand exclaiming: 'Allow us a Voltaire, because we are truly living in the
16
17 Dark Ages'.⁴⁹ At this occasion Hirsi Ali met Ellian, Vink and Rutenfrans, who
18
19 invited her to write her first opinion piece on the theme of her intervention.
20
21 From that point on, Jaffe Vink claimed Hirsi Ali as his discovery and protégé, and
22
23 published several of Hirsi Ali's opinion pieces in *Trouw*.⁵⁰ Rutenfrans and Vink
24
25 were the editors of Hirsi Ali's first book, *De Zoontjesfabriek*.⁵¹
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31 In 2004, Bart Jan Spruyt became the ideologue of Geert Wilders, a popular right-
32
33 wing populist politician following in the anti-Islamic footsteps of Pim Fortuyn.
34
35 Spruyt accompanied Wilders on a visit to neoconservative thinktanks in the U.S,
36
37 and subsequently wrote the program of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party, PVV,
38
39 which unsurprisingly has strong neoconservative overtones.⁵² When Hirsi Ali
40
41 switched from the PvdA to the VVD, and entered parliament in January 2003
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47 ⁴⁸ Jaffe Vink, 'De Neoconservative Revolutie', *Trouw*, February 12, 2006.

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49 ⁴⁹ Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, op. cit., p. 275.

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51 ⁵⁰ See: 'Paniek en Roem', NRC Handelsblad October 12, 2002

52
53 ⁵¹ A. Hirsi Ali, *De Zoontjesfabriek. Over Vrouwen, Islam en Integratie* (Amsterdam: Augustus,
54
55 2002).

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57 ⁵² G. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid* (Den Haag: PVV, 2006); Koen Vossen, 'Classifying Wilders: The
58
59 Ideological Development of Geert Wilders and His Party for Freedom', *Politics* 31/3 (2011), pp.
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179-189.

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2
3 with a huge preferential vote, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders campaigned
4
5 together against the perceived Islamic threat.
6
7

8 Besides obvious similarities and explicit affiliations, there are also some marked
9
10 differences between the American and Dutch strands of neoconservative
11
12 thinking. The particularity of the Dutch context has marked Hirsi Ali's position,
13
14 and given her difficulties in integrating in the American political context. These
15
16 differences can be summarized in three points:
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19
20 While U.S. neoconservatism is a secular ideology, it considers religion to be an
21
22 indispensable addition to liberalism and an important instrument for the spread
23
24 of conservative values. A natural consequence is that neoconservatives formed a
25
26 coalition with the religious Right, and defended conservative sexual morality in
27
28 the culture wars. The Netherlands is to an overwhelming degree a secular
29
30 context, with a largely progressive sexual morality. Dutch neoconservatives
31
32 therefore chose to occupy a different position and defended progressive
33
34 achievements - Enlightenment values, secularism, gay rights and women's
35
36 emancipation - against the perceived threat of Islam, in what has been called
37
38 'sexual nationalism'.⁵³ It is in this context that Hirsi Ali could claim to speak as a
39
40 progressive feminist, receiving considerable support from leading Dutch liberal
41
42 feminists such as Cisca Dresselhuys and Social Democrat intellectuals such as
43
44 Paul Scheffer and Joost Zwagerman. This defence of progressive values by Dutch
45
46 conservatives is at the root of Hirsi Ali's paradoxical description by Saba
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55 ⁵³ See: P. Mepschen, J. W. Duyvendak, and E. Tonkens, 'Sexual Politics, Orientalism and
56 Multicultural Citizenship in the Netherlands', *Sociology* 44: 1 (2010), pp. 962-979; M.
57 Oudenampsen, 'Post-Progressive Politics, The Conservative Embrace of Progressive Values',
58 Paper presented at the conference of the European Sociological Association, Prague, 2015.
59
60

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2
3 Mahmood as a 'doyen of "conservative left criticism"'.⁵⁴ The most prominent
4
5 Dutch neoconservatives, such as Cliteur, Ellian and Hirsi Ali were New Atheists,
6
7 opposing religion as such. It is significant that Hirsi Ali has reconsidered her
8
9 position on the role of Christianity since her arrival in the U.S.
10

11
12 The focus of U.S. neoconservative efforts, from the seventies on, was foreign
13
14 policy, and the fight with foreign 'enemies'. With regard to Islam, the U.S.
15
16 domestic context has been a less significant theme. For U.S. neoconservatives, the
17
18 superiority of Western civilization and the universalism of Western values or
19
20 human rights served as an argument legitimizing foreign intervention.⁵⁵ For
21
22 Dutch neoconservatives, the primary concern was domestic policy, namely the
23
24 issue of Muslim immigrants. Neoconservative arguments concerning the
25
26 superiority of western values were primarily used to argue for the forceful
27
28 assimilation of immigrants. It was then VVD-leader Frits Bolkestein who in the
29
30 nineties first pointed towards the incompatibility of Western and Muslim values,
31
32 starting off the debates on immigration and multiculturalism that transformed
33
34 Dutch politics in the wake of Fortuyn.⁵⁶ This theme of superior and incompatible
35
36 civilizational values, was subsequently taken up by Fortuyn, Cliteur, Spruyt and
37
38 Hirsi Ali.
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45 Finally, while the currency of choice of U.S. neoconservatives largely consists of
46
47 hard power, most famously through military intervention in Iraq, Dutch
48
49 neoconservatives have been focused on combating Islam largely through soft
50
51 power, or rhetoric. A choice that is likely informed by the absence of a significant
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56 ⁵⁴ Mahmood, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

57 ⁵⁵ Vaisse, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

58 ⁵⁶ Prins, *op. cit.*, pp. 363-379
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2
3 Dutch military or foreign policy. Consequently, freedom of speech became one of
4
5 the most important banners of the Dutch neoconservatives. While Huntington
6
7 couched the clash of civilizations in military terms, the Dutch neoconservatives
8
9 presented it as a predominantly rhetorical battle for the hearts and minds of the
10
11 Western Muslim population, even though the target audience of this anti-
12
13 immigrant discourse was the white Dutch majority.⁵⁷ Only after her arrival in the
14
15 U.S., did Hirsi Ali begin to couch her opposition to Islam in military terms,
16
17 pleading to defeat Islam militarily in a controversial interview published in
18
19 *Reason*.⁵⁸
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30 IV DECONSTRUCTING AYAAN 31

32
33 A commonly held opinion is that Hirsi Ali's views have developed and radicalized
34
35 gradually over time, in reaction to real life occurrences such as 9/11, the death
36
37 threats she received, her switch to the VVD, or the brutal assassination of her
38
39 collaborator on the film *Submission*, Theo van Gogh. Retrospectively, Hirsi Ali
40
41 also presented her trajectory in *Infidel* as a response to 9/11, identified by her as
42
43 a moment of political awakening: 'the little shutter at the back of my mind, where
44
45 I pushed all my dissonant thoughts, snapped open after the 9/11 attacks, and it
46
47 refused to close again.'⁵⁹ She describes herself in the weeks after the attacks as a
48
49 deeply confused Muslim:
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54 ⁵⁷ I. Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007).

55 ⁵⁸ 'The Trouble is the West: Ayaan Hirsi Ali on Islam, Immigration, Civil Liberties, and the fate of
56 the West.' Interview of Ayaan Hirsi Ali by Rogier van Bakel. *Reason*, November 2007.

57 ⁵⁹ Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, op. cit., p. 272.
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5 War had been declared in the name of Islam, my religion, and now I
6
7 had to make a choice. Which side was I on? I found I couldn't avoid
8
9 the question. Was this really Islam? Did Islam permit, even call for,
10
11 this kind of slaughter? Did I, as a Muslim, approve of the attack? And if
12
13 I didn't, where did I stand on Islam? I walked around with these
14
15 questions for weeks; I couldn't get them out of my head. (Hirsi Ali
16
17
18
19 2007: 269)
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22

23
24 None of that confusion is apparent, however, in those very same first weeks after
25
26 9/11, when Hirsi Ali's first published article appears in the monthly journal of
27
28 the social democrat thinktank where she then worked as a researcher, bearing
29
30 the title *In Between Confrontation and Reconciliation: The Netherlands and*
31
32 *Islam*.⁶⁰ The text analyzes the Dutch debate on Islam in the wake of 9/11, a
33
34 discussion between those proposing a more confrontational approach and those
35
36 advocating tolerance. After some deliberation, Hirsi Ali sides with those opting
37
38 for a more confrontational approach, in order to 'force Muslims to debate
39
40 Islam'.⁶¹ That force is necessary because 'in the perception of a Muslim, the
41
42 Quran contains the truth and this truth is of all times and places. That makes it
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48 ⁶⁰ The article originally appeared in the journal of the Dutch social democrat thinktank WBS. A.
49
50 Hirsi Ali, 'Tussen Confrontatie en Verzoening: Nederland en de Islam', *Socialisme & Democratie*,
51
52 58/10 (2001), pp. 446-451. It was published on October 10, 2001, and included in *De*
53
54 *Zoontjesfabriek*, Hirsi Ali's first book from 2002, but it has not been translated and published in
55
56 *The Caged Virgin*.

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58 ⁶¹ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 451
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1
2
3 impossible for moderate Muslims to express doubts about the religion.’
4
5 Especially regarding three Islamic dogmas there is no substantive discussion
6
7 possible, not between Muslims, nor between Muslims and non-Muslims:
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11
12 First, in Islam, ‘the individual and the community are inextricably bound up with
13
14 each other. The will of Allah, as revealed in the Quran, determines ideology,
15
16 politics, law, individual identity and his relation to the community.’ Secondly, ‘the
17
18 loyalty of a Muslim to other Muslims is obligatory: in a conflict between Muslims
19
20 and non-Muslims, sympathy and support will always go to Muslims first. Who
21
22 violates this rule is a traitor and, according to the Quran, worse than
23
24 unbelievers.’ The demand towards Muslims to ‘clearly distance themselves from
25
26 acts of terror and radical Islam again and again faces the opposition of this
27
28 loyalty principle.’ ‘Finally, there is the significance of the hereafter. Live on earth
29
30 only counts as a passage towards eternal life after death [...] When one doubts
31
32 the unity of God or his words in the Koran, then you spoil your chances on a
33
34 place in the hereafter.’⁶² Muslims are not allowed to doubt or ask questions
35
36 concerning their faith, Hirsi Ali concludes.
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44 To be clear, these aren’t empirical observations about Muslim life, they are
45
46 statements that primarily serve a political purpose. To take only the most
47
48 obvious example: in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the attacks were widely
49
50 and explicitly denounced by leading Muslim organisations around the world,
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57 ⁶² Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, pp. 450-551.
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2
3 including Islamist organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.⁶³
4
5 The logical consequence of Hirsi Ali's propositions on Islam is that of effectively
6
7 binding together Al Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks with the whole of Islam, seeing
8
9 that all Muslims are divinely ordained to be loyal to one another. She thus
10
11 divides the world in two monolithic blocs, Islam versus the West, and questions
12
13 the loyalty of Muslim immigrants in the West, who are pressed to choose sides -
14
15 as individuals - against their own communities. In a typical case of textual
16
17 determinism, Hirsi Ali reduces the everyday reality of contemporary Muslim life
18
19 to the Quran, depicted as a body of closed norms, beyond discussion. Olivier Roy
20
21 aptly characterised this type of Western criticism of Islam:
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28 [T]o define Islam as a body of closed norms and Muslims as making
29
30 up a community excluding membership in any other group is
31
32 precisely to adopt the fundamentalists' definition of Islam. This is a
33
34 reference to an imaginary Islam, not to the real Muslim world, and the
35
36 fundamentalists are made into authentic representatives of Islam,
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44 ⁶³ For example, on the 14th of September 2001, a communiqué was published condemning the
45
46 9/11 attacks as 'against all human and Islamic norms'. It's signatories included leaders of the
47
48 Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Sudan, Syria and Jordan, Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami, Palestine's
49
50 Hamas movement, Tunisia's Nahda movement, Malaysia's PAS, Indonesia's PKS, Morocco's PJD,
51
52 and scholars from Al-Azhar University. Statement published in the London-based *Al-Quds Al-*
53
54 *Arabi* newspaper, September 14, 2001. For the full text, see:
55
56 [http://nceis.unimelb.edu.au/about/projects/national_imams_consultative_forum/fatwa_and_ruli](http://nceis.unimelb.edu.au/about/projects/national_imams_consultative_forum/fatwa_and_rulings_against_terrorism_in_islam/sept11)
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58 [ngs_against_terrorism_in_islam/sept11](http://nceis.unimelb.edu.au/about/projects/national_imams_consultative_forum/fatwa_and_rulings_against_terrorism_in_islam/sept11)
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3 even if this means speaking with benevolent condescension about the
4
5 poor [Muslim] liberals who cannot make themselves heard.⁶⁴
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10 In that very first article, she writes how 'moderate, benevolent Muslims' are
11
12 hopelessly uninformed about the true nature of their religion. The goal of the
13
14 Western 'dialogue' with moderate Muslim immigrants, of forcing them to debate
15
16 Islam, is to make Muslims more informed about the inherent radicalism and
17
18 violence of their religion.⁶⁵ This involves 'civilizing' and converting Muslims to
19
20 what Hirsi Ali calls 'Enlightenment' or 'reason', as she wrote in the essay *Why*
21
22 *can't we take a critical look at ourselves?*, published in the neoconservative
23
24 opinion section of newspaper *Trouw* in March 2002. Only by secularizing their
25
26 faith – accepting scripture as man-made and Mohammed as a human, fallible
27
28 figure – only by extracting themselves from their communities can Muslims
29
30 become acceptable to the West. This is the binary vision of Enlightenment and
31
32 Islam that Ayaan Hirsi Ali started out with, and that she would consistently
33
34 continue to defend right up to her latest book, *Heretic*, in which the ideas of
35
36 Bernard Lewis again figure prominently.⁶⁶ Hirsi Ali's writing, from the very start,
37
38 is a well thought-out version of the clash of civilizations theory, drawing on
39
40 Dutch New Atheists inspired by neoconservatism, such as Paul Cliteur and
41
42 Herman Philipse on the one hand, and Orientalist authors such as Bernard Lewis
43
44 and Lewis Pryce-Jones on the other. Put differently, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's views on
45
46 Islam are of decidedly Western extraction, and these ideas are - at times - in open
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54 ⁶⁴ Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*, op. cit., p. 42.

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56 ⁶⁵ Hirsi Ali, 'Tussen Confrontatie en Verzoening', op. cit., p. 451.

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58 ⁶⁶ A. Hirsi Ali, *Heretic: Why Islam Needs A Reformation Now* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014).
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1
2
3 contradiction with Hirsi Ali's own life story, as we shall soon see.
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6
7 The role of Orientalist authors in forming Hirsi Ali's view of Islam can be
8 deduced from her first more elaborate and theoretical text, published in the
9 yearbook of the social democrat think-tank in the autumn of 2002 and translated
10 and reprinted in *The Caged Virgin*. In the article, titled *What went wrong? A*
11 *modern clash of cultures* after the well-known book by Bernard Lewis⁶⁷, Hirsi Ali
12 lays out her ideas on Islamic culture. Basing herself on Lewis and Pryce Jones,
13 Hirsi Ali argues that 'the religious-cultural identity' of Muslims is characterised
14 by:
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- 25 - 'A hierarchical-authoritarian mentality: 'The boss is almighty; others
26 can only obey.'
27
- 28 - Group identity: 'The group always comes before the individual'; if you
29 do not belong to the clan/tribe you will be treated with suspicion or, at
30 best, not be taken seriously.
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- 32 - A patriarchal mentality and a culture of shame: The woman has a
33 reproductive function and must obey the male members of her family;
34 failure to do so brings shame on the family.'⁶⁸
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48 This is the classic Orientalist theme of timelessness, abstraction and uniformity.

49 From the skyscrapers in Istanbul and Teheran, to the villages in rural Pakistan

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54 ⁶⁷ Bernard Lewis, *What went wrong? Western impact and Middle Eastern response* (New York:
55 Oxford University Press, 2002).

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57 ⁶⁸ Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin*, op. cit.
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3 and Somalia, from the Indonesian archipelago to Muslim immigrants on the
4
5 European mainland: there is a single, unchanging Islamic 'religious-cultural
6
7 identity' that can be known in the abstract. 'The Islamic identity (view of
8
9 mankind and the world)', Ayaan Hirsi Ali writes, 'is based on groups, and its
10
11 central concepts are honor and disgrace, or shame'.⁶⁹

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16 Borrowing from Pryce-Jones, Hirsi Ali's reasoning concerning the inherent
17
18 'backwardness' and traditionalism of Islam revolves around its connection with
19
20 tribal norms. The argument is as follows: the Quran consists of a set of rules that
21
22 are adopted from tribal customs, specifically designed to organize the tribes in a
23
24 coherent tribal system. Warring tribes were convinced to accept laws assuaging
25
26 them to direct their animosity to unbelievers, leading to Islam's inherently
27
28 expansionist character and its hostility to the West. Tribal values are thus
29
30 ingrained in the Quran, reproducing premodern practices, even in modern urban
31
32 societies: 'the ideas and traditions of Muhammed's tribal society are adopted
33
34 straight into the industrial and urban society of today'.⁷⁰

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41 Is there any way out of this vicious circle for Muslims? Hirsi Ali wavers between
42
43 Lewis and Pryce-Jones. She is appreciative of Lewis' argument that either the
44
45 lack of secularism or the patriarchal nature of Arab societies is responsible for
46
47 their backwardness. Muslims can undertake the painful process of
48
49 modernisation once they 'relinquish their most substantial values'.⁷¹ Whereas

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⁶⁹ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 47

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⁷⁰ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 52

⁷¹ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, pp. 52-53

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3 Pryce-Jones believes that secularism and other Western developments can't be
4 truly understood by people living in what is essentially a tribal society. Ayaan
5 Hirsi Ali chose Lewis' vision, critiquing the Islamist idea of emancipation and
6 equating emancipation with the escape from community:
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14 'emancipation doesn't mean the liberation of the community of the
15 faithful or its safeguarding from the power of evil outside forces, such
16 as colonialism, capitalism, the Jews and the Americans. It means the
17 liberation of the individual from that same community of the
18 faithful.'⁷²
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28 Finally, she concludes her article in the yearbook by proposing to 'interpret the
29 concept of 'integration' as a process of civilization for groups of Muslim
30 immigrants living within the Western society into which they have been
31 received,' and so 'render superfluous the pseudodebate about the equality of
32 cultures'.⁷³ Here, the old colonial 'civilizing mission' is turned inwardly, towards
33 the immigrants in the West. Considering integration to be a process of
34 civilization is also good for the immigrants themselves since it allows them to
35 'develop an awareness of their level of achievement in relation to others', and to
36 'see that in order to progress they need to behave according to the values and
37 standards of their newly adopted home country'.⁷⁴ In other words: making
38 immigrants aware of their backwardness will make them happier to adjust.
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⁷² Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 32

55 ⁷³ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 56

56 ⁷⁴ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 56
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5 Tactically choosing to adopt the Western Orientalist imaginary of Islam, instead
6
7 of describing modern-day Muslim reality, Ayaan Hirsi Ali has had to work around
8
9 a set of large contradictions from the outset. If power and authority are absolute
10
11 and unassailable for the 'primitive' minds of Muslims, as Hirsi Ali has argued
12
13 before, then what explains the revolt of Islamic fundamentalism against the
14
15 Islamic status quo, sidelining the clerics, killing Sadat and denouncing the Saudi
16
17 monarchy? And how can contemporary Muslim life be determined by the Quran,
18
19 when the average Muslim 'does little with his faith', and 'knows little of the
20
21 Quran'?⁷⁵ According to Hirsi Ali 'most Muslims never delve into theology', and
22
23 'rarely read the Quran'; 'it is taught in Arabic, which most Muslims can't speak'.⁷⁶
24
25 Here, Hirsi Ali wrestles with what Said has described as the second dogma of
26
27 Orientalism: the notion that abstractions about the orient based on ancient texts,
28
29 are preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern realities. She resolves that
30
31 problem by introducing a tautology: 'for many non-practicing Muslims, the
32
33 essence of their identity and the system of values and morals by which they live
34
35 remain Islamic'.⁷⁷ Moroccan and Turkish immigrants have assimilated the 7th
36
37 century tribal values embedded in the Quran, which are 'adopted straight into
38
39 the industrial and urban society of today', without having understood or read the
40
41 text itself.
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49 These contradictions come to a head in *Infidel*, where Hirsi Ali's personal
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53 ⁷⁵ Hirsi Ali, 'Tussen Confrontatie en Verzoening', op. cit., p. 450

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55 ⁷⁶ Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, op. cit., p. 272

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57 ⁷⁷ Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin*, op. cit., p. 44.
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3 experiences openly contradict the views she adopted from Bernard Lewis. The
4
5 paradoxical nature of fundamentalist Islam, as described by Roy, a modernizing
6
7 break with tradition that represents itself as a return to tradition, is also to be
8
9 found in Hirsi Ali's autobiography:
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14 'A new kind of Islam was on the march. It was much deeper, much
15
16 clearer and stronger — much closer to the source of the religion —
17
18 than the old kind of Islam my grandmother believed in, along with her
19
20 spirit ancestors and djinns. It was not like the Islam in the mosques,
21
22 where imams mostly recited by memory old sermons written by long-
23
24 dead scholars, in an Arabic that barely anyone could understand. It
25
26 was not a passive, mostly ignorant, acceptance of the rules: Insh'Allah,
27
28 'God wills it.' It was about studying the Quran, really learning about it,
29
30 getting to the heart of the nature of the Prophet's message. It was a
31
32 huge evangelical sect backed massively by Saudi Arabian oil wealth
33
34 and Iranian martyr propaganda. It was militant, and it was growing.
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39 And I was becoming a very small part of it' ⁷⁸

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44 Of course, the very notion of a 'new' kind of Islam, contradicts the earlier
45
46 statement that Islam is 'an unchanging, fossilized culture'.⁷⁹ In *Infidel*, Hirsi Ali
47
48 inadvertently stresses the innovative aspects of fundamentalist Islam, the break
49
50 with old traditions and existing forms of religiosity: 'Traditional ways of
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56 ⁷⁸ Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, op. cit., p. 88.

57 ⁷⁹ Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin*, op. cit., p. 153.
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2
3 practicing Islam had become corrupted, diluted with ancient beliefs that should
4 no longer have currency'.⁸⁰ Fundamentalist Islam represents a break with the
5 quietist passivity of mainstream Islam: 'We were not like the passive old school,
6 for whom Islam meant a few rules and more or less devoutly observed rituals,
7 and who interlaced their Quran with tribal customs and magical beliefs in
8 amulets and spirits. We were God's shock troops.'⁸¹
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19 She writes about her immersion in political Islam:

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23 'We read Hasan al-Banna, who set up the Society of Muslim Brothers
24 to oppose the rise of Western ideas in the lands of Islam and promote
25 a return to the Islam of the Prophet. We read Sayyid Qutb, another
26 Egyptian, who said preaching was not enough, that we must stage a
27 catastrophic revolution to establish the kingdom of God on Earth. We
28 thrilled to new movements called Akhwan (Brotherhood) and
29 Tawheed (the Straight Path); they were small groups of true
30 believers, as we felt ourselves to be. This was the True Islam, this
31 harking back to the purity of the Prophet'⁸²
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45 Many of Olivier's Roy observations concerning the modern character – in the
46 sociological sense – of political Islam, can also be found in Hirsi Ali's writing. The
47 we-form that Ayaan Hirsi Ali employs in the quotations above, refers to an
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53 ⁸⁰ Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, op. cit., p. 215.

54 ⁸¹ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 220.

55 ⁸² Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 108.

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3 Islamic debating group in a local neighbourhood centre in Nairobi that Hirsi Ali
4 joins in her late teens. The group consists mostly of highly educated urban
5 Pakistani and Somalian youth, dressed in western clothing. They were
6
7
8
9
10 'dissatisfied with the intellectual level of the teaching at the madrassahs', and
11
12 Hirsi Ali portrays them as 'very bright, deeply committed older students'.⁸³
13
14 Whereas in the mosque, sermons were often just a recitation of old texts in
15
16 Arabic, here the debates were in English, they 'were lively, and often clever, as
17
18 well as much more relevant to our lives than the mosque'.⁸⁴ An image that raises
19
20 questions about Hirsi Ali's earlier claim that Muslims are not allowed to debate
21
22 their religion. It corresponds with how Roy describes the religious revival in the
23
24 seventies and eighties, the emergence of which is a consequence of the
25
26 disembedding of Islam from the local, traditional culture.⁸⁵ Hirsi Ali writes
27
28 disparagingly of the local Islamic traditions of believers who 'interlaced their
29
30 Quran with tribal customs' and points to the 'universal character' of the
31
32 Brotherhood: 'In contrast to the clan warfare of Somalia, the Brotherhood
33
34 seemed to have a more universal character because it included people of every
35
36 clan.'⁸⁶ Here the Brotherhood's Islamism seems to work against the very clan
37
38 culture that Hirsi Ali has argued to be quintessential to Islam. It is in line with
39
40 Roy's argument, that Islamist radicals are westernized youth who now see the
41
42 Islam as a universal and global phenomenon, decoupled from local traditions.
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52 ⁸³ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 108.

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54 ⁸⁴ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 108.

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56 ⁸⁵ Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam, op. cit.*, p. vi.

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60 ⁸⁶ Hirsi Ali, *Infidel, op. cit.*, p. 136.

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2
3 The loss of cultural identity – ‘the old Islam my grandmother believed in’, in the
4 words of Hirsi Ali – is the condition for the rise of new forms of fundamentalism.
5
6

7
8 The modern aspects – on an intellectual level – of the Islamism of Sayyid Qutb
9 and the Moslim Brotherhood are also present in the writing of Ayaan Hirsi Ali.
10 There is the dismissal of the authority of the mosques and existing Islamic
11 jurisprudence (fiqh), described as ‘old sermons written by long-dead scholars’.
12 There is the aversion to Arabic and the idea of studying the Koran independently
13 in modern languages: ‘I bought my own English edition of the Quran and read it
14 so I could understand it better.’⁸⁷ There is the notion of ‘a catastrophic
15 revolution’, alien to the Islamic tradition, and closer to Lenin than Mohammed.
16 There is the ideal of Islam as a universal government, to be realised not by God,
17 but by the movement itself: ‘Our goal was a global Islamic government, for
18 everyone’.⁸⁸ There is the idea of a revolutionary vanguard, which we see
19 expressed in terms like ‘small groups of true believers’ and ‘God’s shock troops’,
20 and finally there’s the distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ Muslims and the
21 ‘true’ and ‘untrue’ faith, when she describes their intention ‘to awaken passive
22 Muslims to the call of the true, pure belief’.⁸⁹
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45 At the same time, Hirsi Ali stays true to the theme of the return to the source, the
46 notion of a pure Islam. In her autobiography, Sister Aziza tells the teenager Hirsi
47 Ali that it is ‘not permitted for one second to imagine that perhaps the Quran’s
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53 ⁸⁷ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 104.

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55 ⁸⁸ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 109

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57 ⁸⁹ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 109
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2
3 words could be adapted to a modern era. The Quran had been written by God,
4
5 not by men.⁹⁰ Surprisingly, Hirsi Ali seems to agree with this statement. At times,
6
7 a more sceptical tone is present in the text. When Hirsi Ali for example writes
8
9 how 'the Muslim Brotherhood believed that there was a pure, original Islam to
10
11 which we all should return'.⁹¹ Or when she describes how 'the Islam that we
12
13 were imbibing stemmed from the hard, essentialist beliefs of thinkers seeking to
14
15 revive the original Islam of the Prophet Muhammad and His disciples in the
16
17 seventh century.'⁹² Her scepticism is even more explicit in *The Caged Virgin*,
18
19 where she writes of 'a return to a largely imaginary past as occurred in the
20
21 Iranian Revolution and in other fundamentalist movements and regimes in
22
23 Muslim countries.'⁹³ In these passages, Hirsi Ali seems to be conscious of the fact
24
25 that the appeal to a return to a true, pure Islam, needs be taken with a few grains
26
27 of salt.
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32
33 Nothing of that scepticism remains, however, when Ayaan Hirsi Ali writes about
34
35 her response to 9/11 in a later chapter of *Infidel*. It is the assault on the Twin
36
37 Towers, we learn, that gave the decisive impetus for her break with her belief.
38
39 The attacks on the World Trade Center take place in the period that Hirsi Ali
40
41 worked at the Wiarda Beckman Foundation, the thinktank of the Dutch social
42
43 democrat party (PvdA). She recounts how she exits the train, on the morning of
44
45 the attacks, heading for the office. En route, she encounters Ruud Koole, then
46
47 party chairman, who asks her why everybody seems to connect Islam with the
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52 ⁹⁰ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 105.

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54 ⁹¹ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 105.

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56 ⁹² Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 108.

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58 ⁹³ Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
59
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3 attacks, when it is nothing but a 'lunatic fringe'.⁹⁴ Ayaan Hirsi Ali answers: 'This
4 is Islam' and recounts her thoughts, walking into the office as having 'to wake
5 these people up'.⁹⁵ When she describes the letter from Mohammed Atta with the
6 instructions to the hijackers, how they are to die as good Muslims, she recognises
7 it as originating in the fundamentalist movement she herself had been part of.
8 She concludes: 'This was not just Islam, this was the core of Islam.'⁹⁶
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Hirsi Ali ties the attacks to fundamentalist Islam, and proceeds to present that as 'genuine' Islam: 'Every devout Muslim who aspired to practice genuine Islam — the Muslim Brotherhood Islam, the Islam of the Medina Quran schools — even if they didn't actively support the attacks, they must at least have approved of them.'⁹⁷ The former is not only untrue, for someone like Hirsi Ali, familiar with the Muslim Brotherhood, it should be easy to corroborate.

Then Hirsi Ali goes even further: it is scripture and not Bin Laden that is responsible for the attacks: 'The Prophet Muhammad was the moral guide, not Bin Laden, and it was the Prophet's guidance that should be evaluated.'⁹⁸ In her biography she seems convinced that quotations from the Koran can be taken literally: 'All these statements that Bin Laden and his people quote from the Quran to justify the attacks — I looked them up; they are there. If the Quran is timeless, then it applies to every Muslim today.'⁹⁹ 'Did the 9/11 attacks stem

⁹⁴ Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, op cit., p. 268.

⁹⁵ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 268.

⁹⁶ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 269.

⁹⁷ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 270.

⁹⁸ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 271

⁹⁹ Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, op. cit., p. 273.

1
2
3 from true belief in true Islam?', Hirsi Ali asks rhetorically.¹⁰⁰ The answer is
4 clearly confirmative. In other parts of her writing, however, she criticizes the
5 people who 'interpret the holy texts' in a 'literal vein', blaming the amount of
6 Islamic 'word-nazis' for the sad state of women in Islam,¹⁰¹ and associating the
7 literalist reading with fundamentalist Islam.¹⁰²

8
9
10 The recurring essentialist qualifications in the passages above and in the
11 biography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali – true Islam, the core of Islam, pure Islam, genuine
12 Islam, timeless Islam, the source of the Islam, the essence of Islam, the real Islam
13 – are deeply significant. Take the following passage:

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25 'I first encountered the *full strength* of Islam as a young child in Saudi
26 Arabia. It was very different from the *diluted* religion of my
27 grandmother, which was mixed with magical practices and pre-
28 Islamic beliefs. Saudi Arabia is the *source* of Islam and its *quintessence*.
29 It is the place where the Muslim religion is practiced in its *purest*
30 form, and it is the *origin* of much of the fundamentalist vision that has,
31 in my lifetime, spread far beyond its borders.'¹⁰³

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Hirsi Ali is aware that these fundamentalist views originate from the *Sahwa*
mentioned before, the religious revival in the seventies and eighties that she
became part of, stemming from a combination of Islamism and Wahhabism. She
presents the fundamentalist perspective as the timeless essence of the entire

¹⁰⁰ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 271

¹⁰¹ Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin*, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

¹⁰² Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 171

¹⁰³ Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, *op. cit.*, pp. 675-676.

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2
3 Islamic religion. Here it is useful to return to Olivier Roy's remark that Islamic
4
5 fundamentalism is a movement that denies its own historicity. Hirsi Ali uses that
6
7 myth of timelessness as a weapon against her former religion.
8
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11 'But I could no longer avoid seeing the totalitarianism, the pure moral
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13 framework that is Islam. It regulates every detail of life and
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15 subjugates free will. True Islam, as a rigid belief system and a moral
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17 framework, leads to cruelty. The inhuman act of those nineteen
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19 hijackers was the logical outcome of this detailed system for
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21 regulating human behavior. Their world is divided between 'Us' and
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23 'Them' — if you don't accept Islam you should perish.'¹⁰⁴
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27 Following in the footsteps of Bernard Lewis, by describing the friend-enemy
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29 logic employed by jihadists, and by subsequently equating Islamic jihadism with
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31 scripture as such, Hirsi Ali makes the whole of Islam into an enemy that needs to
32
33 be vanquished. 'The greatest advantage of Huntington's civilizational model of
34
35 international relations is that it reflects the world as it is – not as we wish it to
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37 be', Hirsi Ali wrote in 2010 in an opinion piece in *The Wall Street Journal*.¹⁰⁵ 'It
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39 allows us to distinguish friends from enemies', she added, closely mirroring the
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41 worldview of the 9/11 hijackers she had described in *Infidel*.
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49 CONCLUSION

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51 Hirsi Ali has described her life as a journey along the clash of civilizations. That
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53 journey is both physical and intellectual. There is a dramatized, staged quality to
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56 ¹⁰⁴ Hirsi Ali, *ibid.*, p. 272.

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58 ¹⁰⁵ A. Hirsi Ali, 'How to Win the Clash of Civilizations', *The Wall Street Journal*, August 18, 2010.
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3 her life story, presented to us in stark contrasts between the modern,
4 enlightened West and traditional, backward Islam. Her perspective on Islam
5 rests on views adopted from the tradition of Western Orientalism, which leads to
6 contradictions with her own life story as recounted in *Infidel*. The profound
7 similarities between the Western Orientalist and the Islamic fundamentalist
8 perspective on Islam, has allowed her to present the latter as the validation of
9 the former. Using the work of scholars such as Olivier Roy allows us to extract a
10 markedly different perspective from Hirsi Ali's biography, in which the
11 modernity Islam supposedly lacks, is exactly the precondition for the rise of
12 fundamentalist movements. Finally, Hirsi Ali's politics are shaped by the
13 concerns of neoconservatism, and her writing can be seen as a biographical
14 variant of Huntington's clash of civilizations theory, relying on a Schmittian
15 friend-enemy distinction. Since Hirsi Ali's work is predicated on a necessarily
16 hostile - and incompatible - relation between the West and Islam, she has little to
17 offer in terms of solutions.
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