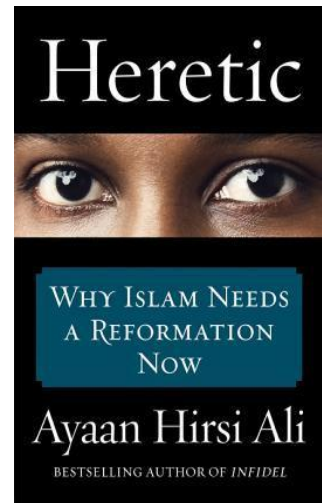


***Heretic:  
Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now***

by Ayaan Hirsi Ali  
Harper: New York  
2015, softcover, 288 pages  
ISBN-13: 978-0062333933

Reviewed by Susan Robinson



**H**ow can Islamic terrorism be addressed if the West does not understand the fundamental basis of the problem; how can they understand the cause of the problem if it refuses to name it and discuss it? These are the questions posed by Ayaan Hirsi Ali in her book *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*. In addition to being informative and topical, her book is challenging and confronting because it moves away from the politically correct discourse of many other publications of this type to speak directly about the issues underpinning the ideology of Islam and the political, cultural and religious norms it dictates. This is a refreshing dialogue because as she bravely analyses her own religion, and analyses its impact on the world, the author goes where many others refuse.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was born in Somalia to a Muslim family and at a young age moved to Mecca, Saudi Arabia with her devout Muslim parents. In the book, she compares the moderate Muslims of Somalia (as they were at the time she lived there) with the strict interpretation of Islam she experienced in Mecca. Through her lived-experience with Islam, she identifies three types of Muslims. The “Mecca Muslims” are, according to her, the more moderate Muslims whereas the “Medina Muslims” are more extreme in their interpretation of the Qur’an. She explains that these are not geographical classifications, but rather refer to ideological differences based on Mohammed’s teachings (the Qur’an) and example (the Hadith).

Hirsi Ali explains that while Mohammed was in Mecca his teachings were gentler and more peaceful but when the people of Mecca refused to accept his new religion Mohammed left Mecca went to Medina where his teachings became more violent. In his Medina writings, he targeted the Jews and Christians, who were referred to as the “people of the book” and “the people who have gone astray,” respectively. The third group Hirsi Ali calls the “Modifying Muslims.” This group, she argues, are dissidents who dare to be critical of Islam and who lead the call for reform.

The author posits that it is difficult for Muslims to be critical of the Qur’an because many do not know what it actually says. Traditionally the Qur’an is written in Arabic and must not be translated into any other language. Very few Muslims are Arabic and therefore rely on the Islamic Clerics to translate and interpret the text for them. It can also be confusing because according to the rules of Islamic doctrine, if there is a clash between verses the later and more violent Medina verses abrogate the more peaceful Mecca verses. According to Hirsi Ali, Muslims who engage in violent jihad against the unbelievers (the Kuffar) are following the Medina teachings and the Medina example of Mohammed.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali knows first-hand the teachings, practices, and punishments inherent within Islam and provides examples throughout the book in illustration. She also understands and articulates the rationale behind the religious imperative of jihad and debunks many of the myths promulgated by Western politicians, academics, and theologians. Perhaps the most poignant aspect of the author’s account is that of her experience as a Muslim woman; from wearing the “oppressive” Burqa and Hijab to arranged child marriages. She describes the way in which every aspect of a Muslim woman’s life is controlled from birth and throughout adulthood.

She articulately describes the fear women live with every day because they are constantly in danger of beatings and worse for the smallest infraction. In many Muslim countries women are unable to leave the house without a male escort and must be fully covered before doing so. She provides examples of the sexual jihad being played out around the world through institutionalised sexual slavery and rape by Islamic groups such as ISIS, Al Qaeda, Al Nusra and Boko Haram, and the honour killings of women and girls who are victims of these rapes. She expresses great disappointment at the lack of interest in protesting these practices

by Western feminist groups which instead advance misguided support for the self determination of the religion and its cultural practices despite its overt misogyny.

This book provides a compelling account of Islam from the inside, and offers a different perspective for understanding global Islamic terrorism other than the usual framework of social disadvantage and/or marginalisation. Ayaan Hirsi Ali places the responsibility for violent jihad at the feet of Islamic Clerics and the teachings of Islam itself. The central message the author conveys is that the only way to successfully deal with Islamic terrorism is a reformation of Islam. She argues that at the very least frank and open conversations about the source of this problem need to be had, and states that to accuse those who seek to do this as Islamophobes, bigots and racists is unhelpful to the overarching aim of stopping Islamic terrorism. This is a respectful, moving, confronting and challenging book that is highly recommended to anyone wishing to better understand Islam and the ever-increasing threat of Islamic terrorism.

#### ABOUT THE REVIEWER

**Dr Susan Robinson** is a criminologist and lecturer with the Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security.

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