

CONVERSATIONS WITH *AYAAN HIRSI ALI*

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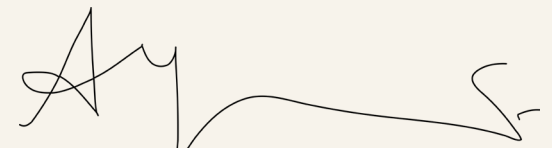


Freedom Women's Rights Restoring the West

Inspired by Ayaan's
Most Influential Essays
and Lectures



If you wonder why I—a woman of color, an African, a former Muslim, a former asylum seeker, and an immigrant—look at the antics of today’s anti-Israel, anti-American protesters with such fear and trembling, allow me to explain.


Ayaan Hirsi Ali

RESTORING THE WEST

“I escaped from tribalism, I left Islamism, and I have avoided authoritarianism and wokeism—so far! Western civilization may not be perfect, but we haven’t seen anything like it anywhere else in human history. Before we heap more opprobrium on it, I would suggest weighing the alternatives carefully. As Churchill said, ‘Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.’”

—Ayaan Hirsi Ali,
Why the West is Best, Spectator World, June 2021



Having spent her formative years in politically unstable, autocratic, and violence-prone societies, Ayaan Hirsi Ali understands better than most that freedom, democracy, and the rule of law are fragile gifts, not historical certainties. When she first arrived in the Netherlands in 1992, she was struck by a society that radiated prosperity and liberty from every corner. However, as she traveled across Europe and eventually moved to the U.S., she witnessed a troubling transformation: the societies she had grown to love were succumbing to internal subversion.

The West that Ayaan experienced in the 1990s and early 2000s has increasingly become her “world of yesterday.” She argues that the foundational strengths of Western civilization are being lost to a combination of socialist ideology, rising tribalism, and a profound decline in traditional family values. In her view, uncontrolled immigration and a growing moral confusion have left the West vulnerable and “demoralized.”

True to her character, Ayaan refused to remain a silent witness to this collapse. In 2024, she placed the “Restoration” of the West at the forefront of her intellectual work. Through this mission, she advocates for a return to national sovereignty and a shared cultural creed. Her work serves as a clarion call to rediscover the Judeo-Christian roots and classical liberal principles that once made the West a beacon of hope, arguing that these values can survive only if they are actively defended within defined borders and a confident national identity.



“When my sister Haweya asked me for photos of myself in 1993, I put on this embroidered loose dress, a *thaub*, and a headscarf to make my family happy.”



Trey: Ayaan, let’s begin with the diagnosis. You have spoken extensively about this ‘subversion’ of the West. But to understand your perspective, I think we need to go back to where your story begins. How did your early life in Somalia shape your understanding of how societies are dismantled?”

Ayaan: I was born in Somalia in 1969. The country had achieved independence nine years before. But less than a month before I was born, on October 21, 1969, a junior member of the brand-new Somali armed forces seized power with the help of the Soviet Union. The first two decades of my life were shaped by the upheaval that followed that coup.

The Somalia that gained its independence was a young, optimistic society full of national pride. We had such hope for growth, political stability, prosperity, and peace. But, in a story sadly familiar to many of my fellow Africans, those hopes were dashed.

What followed was a nightmare.

For me, it is all captured in the earliest memories of my youth: statues of Mohamed Siad Barre, our dictator, sprang up across Mogadishu, flanked by a trio of dark seraphim: Marx, Lenin, and Engels. This particular communist experiment plunged Somalia into bloodshed, mass starvation, and 20 years of suffocating tyranny. I recall my grandmother and mother smuggling food into our house. I also remember the whispering: we felt the state was omnipresent. It could hear everything.

My father was thrown into prison. His friends—those other pioneers in pursuit of a democracy modeled on

America—were either jailed like him or, in many cases, executed.

By the time I was eight, my family knew we needed to escape. We left in 1977. By 1990, the country had descended into a civil war from which it has never fully recovered.

I never stopped longing for the kind of freedom my father had taught me about. And at the age of 22, I fled to the Netherlands in search of it. There—and later, in America—I discovered what we’ve come to call “Western” values.

Trey: You fled the chaos of Somalia, eventually finding refuge in the Netherlands and then America. In your view, what are the specific principles that make the West unique—and why do you feel they are currently imperiled?

Ayaan: The West’s inheritance springs from a peculiar confluence of habits and customs that had been practiced for centuries before anyone branded them as “ideas.” But they are principles—radical ones—that have given us the most tolerant, free, and flourishing societies in all of human history.

Among these principles are the rule of law, a tradition of liberty, personal responsibility, a system of representative government, a toleration of difference, and a commitment to pluralism. Each of these ideas might have been extinguished in its infancy but for the grace of God and the force of its appeal.

Perhaps it is because I was born into a part of the world where these principles were nonexistent that I feel a

particular love for them—and an instinct for when they are in danger.

Right now, so many Western nations are under grave threat from the twin forces of cultural Marxism and an expansionist political Islam familiar to me from my youth.

For a time, many refused to believe that anything was actually wrong. The tide of populism, they insisted, was a momentary manifestation of frustration. The decline of each of our institutions was viewed in isolation, as a problem of poorly selected leadership, which could be corrected after the next election or with a changing of the guard. The sense of hopelessness that people felt was explained away as the temporary consequence of the rapid transition away from industrialism and the ushering in of the digital age.

In this light, though there were problems, they were distinct and would be corrected in time.

Can any serious person believe this now?

Trey: The decline you describe is felt by many, yet there is little consensus on its cause. How do you make sense of the confusion—the conflicting explanations—that seem to paralyze our public discourse?

Ayaan: People are encountering our current crisis in different ways, though a compelling explanation, let alone a solution, remains elusive. I am reminded of the Buddhist parable of the blind men and the elephant. The story goes that a group of blind men, who have never encountered an elephant before, hear that one has been brought to their town. They go to touch the elephant to work out what it might look like.

One man touches the elephant’s trunk and thinks it must be like a large snake. Another touches its leg and likens it to a tree. A third who grasps the elephant’s tail says it feels like a rope. A fourth presses its sides, and when it does not budge, compares it to a wall. The fifth touches its tusk and thinks it is like a spear.

Each of the blind men touches the same elephant and comes up with a different interpretation. Although there is truth in each of their assessments, none is able to fully

comprehend the elephant in its totality fully. Those who feel the decline in Western society are like these blind men, encountering the elephant in their own ways and grasping at explanations in the half-light of dusk.

When the omni-breakdown burst forth in 2020 with the crises of the Covid-19 pandemic, the draconian controls that governments imposed, and the George Floyd riots, most of us awoke from our slumbers and behaved like the blind men, ping-ponging around theories with the tremulous (sometimes furious) chatter that heralds the turning of an age.

As one of those blind men—and surely I, too, am encountering only part of the elephant—my perception is that we are a society subverted. By this, I do not mean that we are subverted in the sense that a few spies and saboteurs are conducting covert operations, blowing up a bridge or an airfield. I mean, we are subverted in a more systematic and totalizing way.

Trey: You use a specific term to describe this condition: “subversion.” It’s a word loaded with Cold War connotations. What exactly do you mean by it in the context of the 21st-century West?

Ayaan: Before I explain who might be subverting and why, let me first explain what I mean by ‘subverting.’ The best description comes from Yuri Bezmenov, who says that this form of subversion is very gradual, but ultimately transformational.

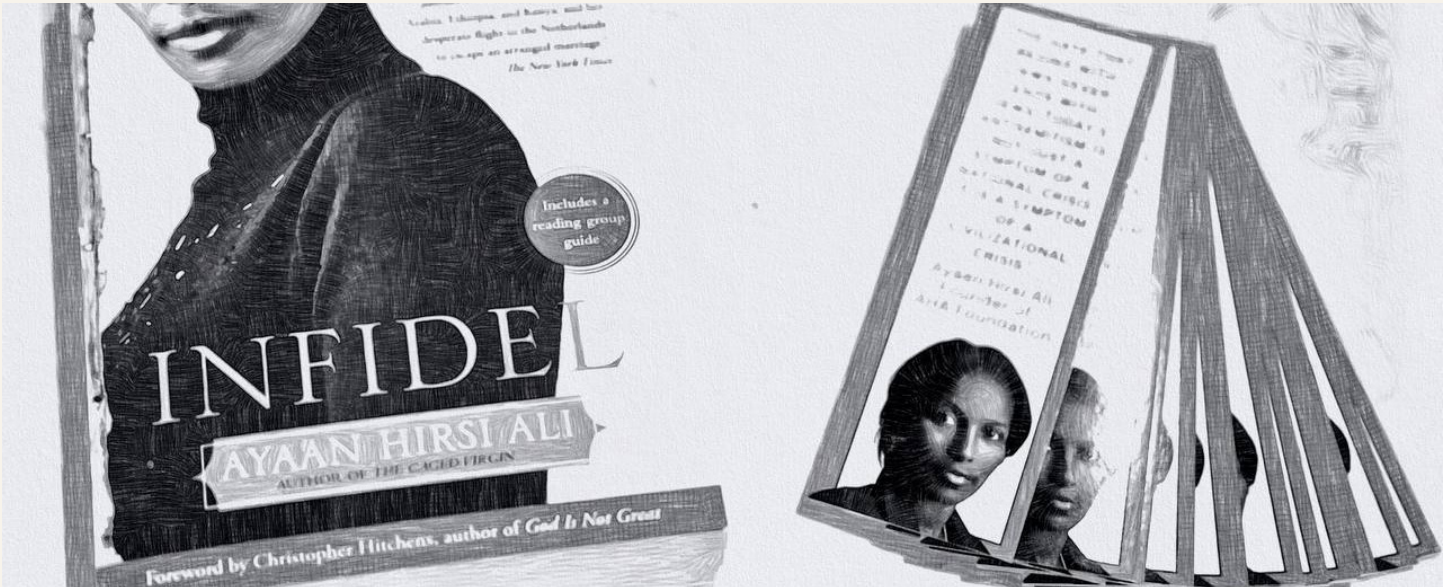
Bezmenov had been a KGB agent promoting foreign subversion when he grew disillusioned with the Soviet system. In 1970, he defected to the West—to Greece, then Canada. The rest of his life was dedicated to exposing the secret Soviet apparatus of subversion in the West.

In 1983, while living in the West, Bezmenov gave a lecture titled “Psychological Warfare, Subversion, and the Control of Society.” It begins:

Subversion refers to a process by which the values and principles of an established system are contradicted or reversed in an attempt to sabotage the existing social order and its structures of power, authority, tradition, hierarchy, and social norms. It involves a systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government or political system, often carried out by persons working secretly from within.

Subversion is used as a tool to achieve political goals because it generally carries less risk, cost, and difficulty as opposed to open belligerency. The act of subversion can lead to the destruction or damage of an established system or government. In the context of ideological subversion, it aims to gradually change a society’s perceptions and values, ultimately undermining its existing systems and beliefs.

This kind of subversion is familiar to me because of my background. Somalia wasn’t the only African country subverted by the USSR. And those that were warped by



Soviet infiltration—such as Ethiopia and Angola—bear the scars to this day.

One of the key insights Bezmenov expresses about a subverted society is that, for a while, there is only a passing sense that something is wrong. It’s a mood—a vibe.

The pressure makes society rumble like a volcano, quiet one minute and flaring the next. Then, finally—and seemingly suddenly—the revolution bursts into view.

When I looked at the protests that erupted in the aftermath of October 7th [the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war] at Columbia or Yale or UCLA or Harvard or Stanford—students tearing down American flags and raising Palestinian ones; or chanting in Arabic “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”—it was hard not to see the fruit of this long process. I heard the same when, week after week, the streets of London, Amsterdam,

“Too many of the institutions that once defended Western civilization have failed or been captured. The task of restoration falls to us—to those who understand what’s at stake and refuse to surrender what generations before us built and bled for.”

Brussels, and Hamburg ring with cries of “intifada” or open demands for a caliphate or Sharia law in the heart of Europe.

Trey: You describe this not as a sudden event, but a gradual psychological process. How exactly does this mechanism of subversion unfold? What are the stages?

Ayaan: Bezmenov described the subversion process as a complex model with four successive stages. These are, in order: **demoralization, destabilization, crisis**, and finally, **normalization**.

Demoralization is the first stage and requires the subverters’ greatest investment of time and resources. Bezmenov claims the process of demoralization can take between 10 and 30 years, because that is the amount of time it takes to educate a new generation.

The demoralization process targets three areas of society: ideas, structures, and social institutions. The targeted institutions include religion, education, media, and culture. In each realm,, the old ways of thinking and the old heroes are discredited. Those who believed in them come to doubt themselves and their ability to discern reality itself.

Think of the cynicism and selective truth-telling young Americans encounter in most classrooms. You know Jefferson owned slaves, right? You know, Columbus killed millions? Again, never mind that Jefferson set us on the path to emancipation, or that Columbus knew nothing about epidemiology. A little learning, as the saying goes, is a dangerous thing.

Once inside, it is very difficult to escape the mosh pit of civilizational self-loathing. Maybe you can climb to the top for a while by being the white person who hates white people most loudly, or the straight person who goes to the most debauched parades. But most people give up.

The ultimate intended outcome is that the afflicted willingly embrace self-destructive behaviors and ideas. Thus, all moral constraints can be eschewed in the pursuit of “just” and “virtuous” causes.

“As a consequence, citizens lose confidence in the administration of justice, paving the way for untold social disorders, including legal nihilism, where people disregard the law en masse.”

In America in 2019, 14 unarmed black men were shot by police—most, apparently, in self-defense. And yet, when polled, most Americans who described themselves as “very liberal” estimated the number at 1,000 or more. A fifth thought 10,000 or more. Were the Black Lives Matter riots, then, any surprise?

To be sure, this isn’t just a progressive problem. Republicans also demonized the Justice Department, the FBI, and members of the judiciary when it suited them. Conservatives have also lost their confidence in law enforcement, in part because of what they see as the lax enforcement of the law as applied toward groups like antifa, Black Lives Matter, and pro-Hamas demonstrators.

The subversion here appears to be working, with both sides agreeing: there is a two-tiered police and justice system—one set of rules for me, and another for thee.

Trey: We have discussed ideas and legal structures. But Bezmenov identified a third, perhaps more intimate target: the sphere of ‘life.’ How is the process of demoralization reshaping the American family?

Ayaan: The third area—which Bezmenov called “life”—includes core social institutions such as family, health, race, population, and labor. Demoralization of the family is probably a familiar concept to us all. It involves promoting ideas that weaken family bonds, favoring narcissistic individualism over family unity, creating financial stressors that discourage family formation, fostering acrimony between the sexes, and replacing parental authority with the state.

Thus, the retrograde practice of polygamy is rebranded as polyamory. The natural human urge to create and nurture new human life is treated derisively by “DINKS” with slightly more latte money, or, more seriously, as an irresponsible and selfish choice to make because of climate change. Meantime, parents are told at every turn that they don’t know what they’re doing—and that they should defer to the experts instead.

The result is that not only do individuals feel less attachment to family, the fundamental unit of a healthy civilization, but they even end up detached from society itself. As we now know, the breakdown of the family is strongly correlated with the epidemic of mental health crisis and the explosive rise in violent crime: 85 percent of American youth in prison come from fatherless homes.

The goal of demoralization is to gradually degrade the foundations of a healthy society across all domains by erasing moral lines and exploiting preexisting discontents. What a society used to call abnormal and pathological, subversion normalizes. Just consider, for example, our culture’s attitude toward pedophiles, now rebranded as “minor-attracted persons.” By hijacking the legacy and language of the civil rights movement, nearly any “marginalized” group has a vehicle to try to “mainstream” deviant behavior. Consider the fact that across civilized societies, it is not just “wrong” to say that a man

cannot become a woman. It is thought to be cruel. So cruel that the Scots have made it illegal.

What’s striking about the demoralization process is that the law doesn’t typically change—at least not initially. Subversion abuses the tolerance of an open culture, forcing the host society to accomplish its aims like a virus attaches to a host.

Trey: How do these “subverters” actually embed themselves within institutions like U.S. universities?

Ayaan: In the Soviet case, according to Bezmenov, a successful subverter could come to be employed by a major university and teach a class on communism. When professors, donors, and students raise eyebrows, they get labeled as cranks or retrograde. The subverter responds: “Who are you to decide what can’t be taught?” Meanwhile, the subverter works to indoctrinate more young, impressionable minds and secure positions for allies or useful ideologues. If you oppose this, you are asked: “What do you have against intellectual diversity?” Or “Do you oppose free thinking?” Thus, dissenters are silenced.

Over time, as the subverters come to dominate an institution, they apply institutional pressure. Curbs on academic freedom, the curriculum, and alterations to the hiring process inevitably follow. Think of the novel instruments to enforce uniformity of thought among academics: DEI statements, which became a requirement at universities across America in the 2010s.

Even in the cases where subversive activity is clearly illegal, such as with destruction and violence during the 2020 riots and at many anti-Israel protests today, crimes committed in service of some larger goal—like “decolonization”—are presented as righteous. Decolonization is a word that’s become as common these days as social justice. But what does it mean?

Gal Beckerman of The Atlantic has written about the Marxist origins of this concept and its chief proponent, Frantz Fanon. Fanon, Beckerman writes, is “the patron saint of political violence,” and his “concepts have provided intellectual ballast and moral justification for actions that most people would simply describe as terror.” Listen to Fanon himself: “whatever may be the headings

used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon.”

When young people say “resistance is justified,” many—if not most—of them believe they are simply standing up for the downtrodden. But the deeper implications of that statement are about justifying the morally reprehensible. How else to explain that at our most prestigious college campuses, students can be found glorifying Hamas terrorists and openly praising North Korea?

Trey: We have discussed the method. Now let’s discuss the architects. Beyond the historical Soviet example, who are the specific forces trying to unravel America and the West today?

Ayaan: Again, I am feeling only my part of the elephant, but I can discern at least three forces.

The first: **American Marxists.** This category includes old card-carrying communists, red-diaper baby socialists, antifa anarchists, and many of whom we now call woke. Though the Soviet Union collapsed decades ago, the Soviet worldview has found familiar proponents: young



Americans and their professors. They are no longer advancing their cause merely through class struggle, but through the fusion of racial, class, and anticolonial struggles. Theirs is now a cultural communism; they lead subversion through the institutions with the ultimate aim of overthrowing the West.

The thundering socialists of the past (think of poor Bernie) seemed to care about the working class earnestly. Perhaps they did so naively, but at least they loved the poor. Does AOC? Rashida Tlaib? My former country-woman, Ilhan Omar?

The second force is the **radical Islamists**, who are riding the coattails of the communists to power. A good example is the Muslim Brotherhood and its many tentacles. Of these tentacles, some are openly religious, like the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Muslim Students Association, each with chapters in nearly every American university. Other organizations don a secular mask, like the so-called Students for Justice in Palestine. These groups have become increasingly confident in the aftermath of the October 7th attack.

The third force is the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)**. The most obvious avenues through which the CCP has spread subversion in America are through its numerous Confucius Institutes. These organizations have been vehicles for Chinese espionage within major American academic institutions. What unites the enemies of the West, you might ask? On the surface, they have little in common. We all know what happens to “Queers for Palestine” in the Palestinian territories. Or Muslims in China. We all know what CCP mandarins think of Black Lives Matter activists. Or rather, what they would think, if they deigned to do so.

But they have wisely chosen the same common enemy: the West.

I am not saying that Bezmenov’s formulation explains all that we are seeing. It clearly does not address all the West’s problems. But once I immersed myself in his formulation, many of the topsy-turvy developments in our institutions fell into place.

The widespread acquisition of useless, aggressively ideological degrees in gender and race, or the claims of the possibility of an unlimited number of genders, or the total racialization and “decolonization” of our political

discourse, or the demands to defund the police, the toppling of statues, the defacing of art, the “spontaneous” protests to dismantle our structures, and much else, I now understand as acts of subversion rather than mere expressions of discontent or youthful energy run amok.

It’s important to note that not all activism is subversive. My life would not be possible without the righteous activism of those who fought for women’s rights and civil rights.

Trey: With so many movements competing for attention, distinguishing between genuine advocacy and destructive subversion can be difficult. How can the average citizen tell the difference?

Ayaan: I regret to tell you that there is no easy way. One thing to pay attention to is your gut. Another is your mind: be discerning and skeptical of people recruiting you to their cause. Does their cause ask for tolerance of you or require compelled speech? Are you being recruited to fight for a cause you know nothing about? Is that cause maximalist and uncompromising; does it glorify violence?

Regardless of whether you agree with my interpretation of events, subversion is a risk to all open societies. As Bezmenov says, subversion is a two-way street. A closed society is immune to subversion because it simply tells potential subverters to leave. Free and open societies cannot rely on this defense.

During the Cold War, the U.S. was able to forestall subversion because its institutions and people had the necessary antibodies to stave off subversive ideas. Doing so is easier when you have a visible peer as an enemy. But when the Cold War came to an end, and we declared victory, we mistakenly thought our enemies had laid down their arms, and that history had ended—so we let our guard down.

Orwell said that “To see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle.” Everyone with eyes to see is now scrambling to do just that.

What is at stake in our ability to see plainly? Everything. What is at stake is nothing less than the preservation of our way of life.

Now is the time for all of us blind seekers to come together. To restore what we have lost will be the work of our lifetimes. Can there be a more important project?

Trey: You have argued that the subversion of the West isn’t just external—it is happening from within. A critical place where Western civilization is being undermined is on our university campuses. Why do you believe this concept is being so ruthlessly castigated by academics today, and what are the consequences of ignoring its achievements?

Ayaan: In a university setting, students hone their critical thinking skills so that they can discern what is true from what is false; what is of value from what is trivial; and what is moral from what is immoral.

All of this knowledge is built on a specific national heritage embedded in Western culture and civilization, distinct from those of other nations, cultures, and civilizations. Ideas do not arise in a vacuum; ideas form in a certain context and have a genealogy, a history.

The concepts that university students should cherish—respect for the individual and his autonomy, the abolition of slavery, equality of citizens under the law, equality of men and women under the law, freedom of expression, religious tolerance, the separation between religious and political power—all of these are the products of Western civilization.

Some of these concepts were ideas that were forcefully argued with the written and spoken word, sometimes based on Christian scripture; others, such as the secularization of international relations, were the result of protracted military conflicts (in the case of the Treaties of Westphalia, the settlement of the Thirty Years’ War).

Some of these concepts arose to a certain degree in non-Western civilizations, but not as successfully and not as enduringly.

Today, in a turbulent and chaotic world, students need a solid background in the attributes of Western civilization to place events and ideas in context. Yet at a time when a rigorous formation is needed the most, the American campus today seems beset by a protracted intellectual

malaise. The very term “Western civilization” is ruthlessly castigated without careful study and analysis. In ignoring the many achievements and complexities of Western civilization, we do our college students a grave disservice.

In defending free inquiry, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni has played an indispensable role. Its hard work will, I fear, be increasingly necessary in the years ahead.

In 2016, a group of Stanford students proposed a non-binding resolution to create a “Western civilization” course requirement, something that had been abolished at the university more than 50 years ago. Alas, the proposal was overwhelmingly defeated in a student vote. The arguments of the resolution’s opponents were revealing. In the run-up to the vote, one Stanford student wrote in the Stanford Daily that “a Western Civ requirement would necessitate that our education be centered on upholding white supremacy, capitalism and colonialism, and all other oppressive systems that flow from Western civilizations.”

By reducing Western civilization to the worst excesses of its history, and by leaving out the best it has brought forth—to repeat: women’s equality; the abolition of slavery; individual freedom; religious tolerance; freedom of expression—the Stanford student who wrote those words makes a common mistake. Sadly, however, this lopsided view is shared by a growing number of students and professors.

One cannot dismiss the total of Western civilization without losing one’s moral compass. And one cannot participate in the battle of ideas raging in the world today by dismissing the value of Western civilization as a whole.

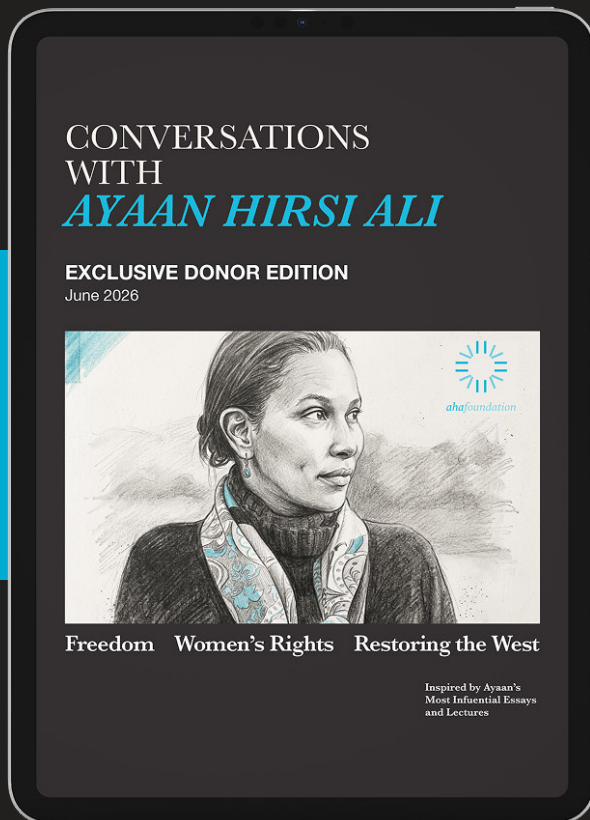
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