Welcome to What Happens Next – 1.10.2021

Islamic Fanaticism, Presidential Power, the Electoral College, and the Myth of the Entrepreneurial State – Ayaan Hirsi Ali QA

Larry Bernstein:

I want to go on two different paths. One is, I'll call it the Napoleonic creed, and then the second topic will be, I'll call it the Algerian crisis. Now, after the French Revolution, Napoleon took over, he defined what being French was. And he tried to, I guess, separate being a good Catholic from being French and that to be French, you had to follow certain things and freedom of religion or classifying you in a religious type, was something that the French state wasn't going to do. And that's followed to today where they don't seem to, in a census, for example, ask which your religion is. How do you think about in the original creation of the French state, starting with Napoleon, where they believed in what was French and that being a good Muslim or being a good Jew, was sort of irrelevant, is my first question?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali:

And that is really specific to France, and you would almost make an argument that every European country found its path to the particular constitution of the day that they have now. Now, what is unique about the French is that they have this doctrine of citizenship and that is a very radical separation of religion and politics. And I mean, I don't know if we have enough time to get into why France came down that path, but the French revolution, particularly, I would say, egregious experience in the French past with religion of the Catholic past, that all led to the desire for this almost clinical separation of politics and religion. Now you fast forward to the 20th century and the 21st century and in comes the religion, Islam that is, where the conversation about separating the two has barely begun.

And if you are a Muslim and you're very serious about your religion, it's incredibly difficult to separate religious rules from political rules. And that is why it's easy for political Islamists when they organize, to persuade large numbers of Muslims, regardless of whether they live in France or in Egypt, but if they are to be true to their religion, then they have to be political. And in France, it's the exact opposite. And according to French statistics, the number of people that they are recording right now as being Muslim in France is six million. Now not all six million of them are political and many of them have in fact embraced the principles of French society. But yeah, France does have that, I would say in terms of speaking on the level of integration, they have the presence of a large swathe of Muslims who have a political approach to their religion, who now live in France and are being asked to observe the norms and values of French Society. It's very interesting to see what this particular president makes of it.

Larry Bernstein:

In terms of a history of integration, Algeria used to be part of France and they had a plebiscite to separate into its own country and something on the order of seven or eight million French Catholics returned from Algeria to France. But during that civil war, a number of the Algerian
Muslims fought on France's behalf during that civil war and France had an obligation to allow the Algerian Muslims to move to France. I think it was around a million at the time, and this was in the early 1960s. And it's that population, which I would say France failed to integrate, failed to think it through. But can you imagine if Algeria was still part of France, as an alternative, how that would've worked in the context of an integrated Europe. But in any case, this has been going on since the early 1960s, when those million Algerians showed up, why haven't they been able to it figure out, why is it coming to a head now, and what is the solution for this six million?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali:

I think Algeria and the history between France and Algeria is a very interesting one. The Algerians who fought on the side of France have been, in many ways, betrayed on so many different levels. So, when you read that history, it's a very complex history. But right now, I would say the issue of integration and integrating Muslims is and has gone beyond that particular relationship, say between ... and very complicated and very bloody and full of betrayals. I mean, it's fascinating in its own right. But right now, the problem is not just an Algerian French relationship, it's gone beyond that.

I don't want the American audience to think the history of the descendants of Black slaves and those whose civil rights were compromised, but the relationship with Algeria and France is like that, it is not, it's much more complicated than that. And if you look at the presence of those six million Muslims in France, many of them come from Turkey, many of them come from other parts of North Africa, Tunisia, but they also come from West Africa, places like Senegal and Guinea. So, it would be, I think, simplistic to reduce it to a colonial relationship.

Larry Bernstein:

I was just using Algeria as example of, this was the initial large wave to properly integrate, and it didn't work, it hasn't worked.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali:

It did work through, most of the people from say a Muslim majority country, will actually fully integrate. Most of them will be French, not Algerians. In Holland, most of them are from a former colony Indonesia. In Britain, I think you will find a number of former colonies that actually are very well-integrated and that's where contemporary political Islam comes into play. From 1979 onwards, we see an uptick in Islamic activism and it's these Arab countries, Arab Muslim countries, are in fact evicting these radical Muslims, their Imam's and their organizations, and those who are evicted, using the framework of asylum, freedom of religion principles, were able to establish themselves in Paris and in London and in Stockholm and everywhere else. And so that is a separate problem. Yes, it does affect some Algerians, but it affects really most immigrants from Muslim minority countries who came as guest workers, who came through that relationship of after decolonization being former colony, mother country is what they call in the UK, the Commonwealth.
But I think a lot of what we've seen, especially in the Islamic separatist space, that also leads to a manifestation of terrorism, that is Muslims in general. And some of them have nothing to do with colonization, they've been exposed to radicalization in some of these Western countries, European countries, and it's the failure of the European leadership to see it because they were busy trying to squeeze that problem into the left right issue, demonizing each other. I mean, it's really hard in Europe right now to have a conversation about immigration, about integration, about radical Islam, because the two sets of leaders on either side of the spectrum, start accusing one another, in a very childish way, of being evil.

Larry Bernstein:

And just to bring it back to the decapitated school teacher for a second, what we have is, I guess, two different liberal themes. On one hand, we want to allow for the freedom of religion and the freedom of speech, to proselytize your grew. And on the other hand, we have other rights, societal rights, like being able to teach about radical Muslims acts of terror previously, as in this case with the caricatures. But also, as you mentioned before, gay rights or women's rights, which will be inconsistent with some of the other religious views. How is a liberal democratic open society supposed to deal with this radical Muslim population?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali:

So there's a lot that's been written on this. Any society, especially France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, we have these conversations all the time. You have to answer the question, what is it? What are our core values? What is it that makes us distinct from everyone else? Now here's one thing that cannot be blamed on immigration or on Muslims or any other external factors, and that is the conversation that is going on within the west on the level of ideas, the modernist versus the postmodernist. The postmodernist in any of these countries, it's, I think, quite potent in America, who are arguing that there is no such a thing as universal values, there's no such a thing as core values. And they started to get into a relativist, moral relativist mode, that reduces everything into it's all just a matter of perspective, everything is subjective.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali:

That narrative, you cannot blame on Islamists, Muslims, other external factors. But if you then apply that philosophy, in Europe it's called the philosophy of multiculturalism, you apply it to the issue of trying to integrate large numbers of people from Muslim countries, then they are going to say, if all values are equal, if all religions are equal, if everything is subjective, why would you condemn the way I treat women, that my religion tells me to treat women or gay people or to think about blasphemy and democracy? Why would you condemn that as negative? Isn't it just unto you, your principles, unto mine, can I not just have them here? That is a conversation they've been having for a long time in Europe. It looks to me like President Macron wants to break away from it, but within his own country, he can't because there is an intelligentsia that will not let him do that.
Aside from that, there are some very compelling geopolitical reasons he has. You saw once he said he was going to take this on, he was confronted by the President of Turkey. Now, Spain, Italy, Germany, they're not willing to have that confrontation with the President of Turkey that Macron wants to have. It becomes very, very complex and the issues of immigration, integration, and Islam, even though they may appear okay, they're old enough, we should have been mature, we can now, after a lot of analysis, we think we see what is objective and what's not, maybe we could agree on some issues, but it's just not going to happen yet. And we're lurching from crisis to crisis when it comes to immigration, lurching from crisis to crisis when it comes to integration and on the issue of Islam, it looks like each member nation of the European countries seems to be developing its own private relationship. Macron with the UAE, Germany with Turkey and so on. I think this is a problem that's going to go on for a long time.

Larry Bernstein:
Ayaan, thank you.