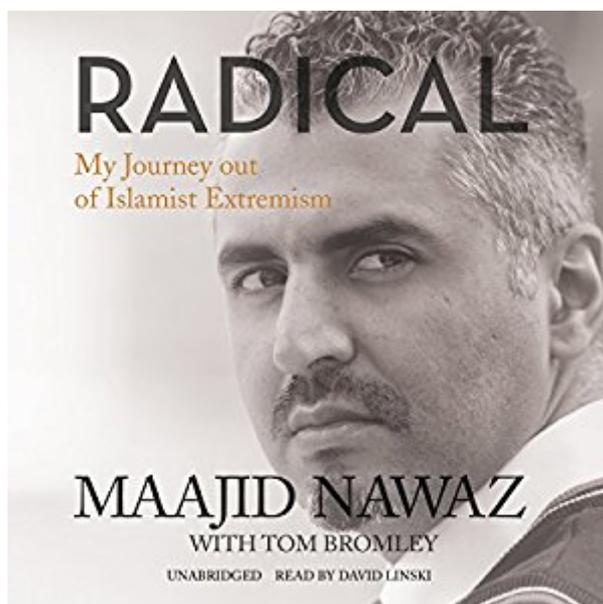


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Radical: My Journey Out Of Islamist Extremism



Synopsis

An insightful account of one man's drastic evolution from religious fervor to enlightened peace. Maajid Nawaz spent his teenage years listening to American hip-hop and learning about the radical Islamist movement spreading throughout Europe and Asia in the 1980s and '90s. At 16, he was already a ranking member in Hizb ut-Tahrir, a London-based Islamist group. He quickly rose through the ranks to become a top recruiter, a charismatic spokesman for the cause of uniting Islam's political power across the world. Nawaz was setting up satellite groups in Pakistan, Denmark, and Egypt when he was rounded up in the aftermath of 9/11 along with many other radical Muslims. He was sent to an Egyptian prison where he was, fortuitously, jailed along with the assassins of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. Twenty years in prison had changed the assassins' views on Islam and violence; Maajid went into prison preaching to them about the Islamist cause, but the lessons ended up going the other way. He came out of prison four years later completely changed, convinced that his entire belief system had been wrong and determined to do something about it. He met with activists and heads of state, built a network, and started a foundation, Quilliam, to combat the rising Islamist tide in Europe and elsewhere, using his intimate knowledge of recruitment tactics in order to reverse extremism and persuade Muslims that the narrative used to recruit them - that the West is evil and the cause of all Muslim suffering - is false. Radical is a fascinating and important look into one man's journey out of extremism and into something else entirely.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'm glad I read this book. It's invaluable to have the kind of insight that Nawaz provides here. His account of how he found himself so deeply entrenched in Hizb ut-Tahrir was compelling. It even occasionally called to mind for me other personal stories shared by former members of Scientology. I think his story serves as a healthy warning for anyone who may be eagerly searching for a deep meaning and purpose to life, and how "ripe for the picking" people can appear to those pushing a particular ideology (whether it be religious, political, or both). This is not to suggest that the author was a weak-minded individual. The opposite appears to be true. My guess is the confidence with which he expresses himself is largely responsible for other reviewers claiming that he comes across as self-glorifying and/or conceited. He does also, as others have mentioned, do a great deal of name dropping. If he were merely a celebrity hound reporting on every empty encounter with famous people, I could understand the objection. But such name dropping never came across as pointless or gratuitous. There are some passages where run-ins with adversaries seem potentially embellished, but since I'm neither psychic nor was I ever a fly on the wall during these alleged encounters, I can only speculate, and it did not in any way subtract from my reading experience.

The author is to be applauded for admitting that his previous ideology about Islamism was drastically mistaken and feckless. It took him five years in an Egyptian prison to realize this intellectual myopia. As a human being, admitting our mistaken notions can be difficult to do. So, props to Mr. Nawaz for having the courage to be open-minded in that regard. The underlying contention of the author's opus is that there is a profound distinction between Islam (the religion) and Islamism (the imposition of Islam upon society in general). The author contends that Islam is primarily a religion of peace whereas Islamism is a "perversion" or "hijacking" of Islam itself. It is disappointing that Mr. Nawaz offers no argumentative support for this point of view. Nor does he discuss the root causes of extremism. Because Islam does not have a central authority such as a pope or governing body to clarify "official" dogma, Islam is subject to a variety of interpretations by local imams and by individual practitioners of the faith. So, two diametrically opposed sides in a conflict, for example, can be absolutely convinced that they are implements of Allah's will, even as they are waging war against one another. Mr. Nawaz makes no effort to link "jihad thinking" with the Qur'an or the life and hadith (prophetic utterances) of Mohammed. It will be up to the reader to investigate this independently. To his credit, Mr. Nawaz criticizes both conservative and liberal spokespeople as to the nature of the conflict. His belief is that conservative rhetoric fuels the "persecution complex" that many Muslims feel, while liberal views are woefully naive and are fully exploited by terrorists for their advantage.

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