



**Islam In Europe**

**Insult: Fractured States?**

**Part 1: How Did We Get Here?**

**June 9, 2009**

**South Court Auditorium**

**LIVE from the New York Public Library**

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**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** ...Je pense que savoudir that I can begin. It's a real pleasure—I'm sorry that I began in French I'm a linguistic monster, I don't know anymore what my mother tongue is or my father tongue or any tongue—but it's a real pleasure to welcome you tonight to the New York Public Library. My name is Paul Holdengraber I'm the director of Public Programs at the New York Public Library, now known as LIVE from the New York Public Library. Many of you know that my goal is quite simply to make the lions roar, to make a heavy institution dance, and if possible, levitate.

It is a great pleasure to begin Islam in Europe, which is an initiative we took together with the European Union National Institutes of Culture, otherwise known as, and please forgive me but this is their acronym, the EUNICs. So, hopefully, there might be some hope in the future the name may be changed, but we are delighted that we are taking part in this festival. I must say this has been a very very, incredibly challenging, wonderful undertaking. Imagine getting together 20 European countries. My parents live in Belgium, and the Flemish and the Walloons can't get along, but in this particular case, in New York, we got 20 European countries together, so a big round of applause for the European countries. **(applause)** It is now also my great pleasure to start this evening by introducing to you the Senior Project Manager, someone who actually has made my life possible, who has given me hope in this project, and who has brought it all together, Zeyba Rahman.

**ZEYBA RAHMAN:** This program is part of the Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas Festival, which is an integrated platform that includes both the artistic and the discursive. To honor that, we are going to begin the program with a Sufi vocal group from France. They are called the Taybah Ensemble. They are from Avignon, and what they do is channel their faith in Allah—in God—and in the Prophet Muhammad, by chanting melodies in a very evocative way. They are going to be accompanied by a guest artist from Syria, including a whirling Dervish. I'd like for you to join me in welcoming, the Taybah Ensemble. **(applause)**

**(performance by The Taybah Ensemble)**

**GABRIELE BECKER:** Thank you for this wonderful presentation. I think this was a terrific start to begin our series here at the New York Public Library. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to welcome you here to our program, Islam in Europe, here at the Public Library of New York. My name is Gabriele Becker, I am the Executive Director of the Goethe Institut, the German Cultural Center, and I'm currently the President of Unique New York. Unique New York was founded two years ago and is a network of cultural institutes and cultural representatives from more than 20 European countries. Our aim is to promote the understanding of cultural diversity of European Societies, and thus make the idea of the European Union come true. To strengthen international dialogue and cultural cooperation with the United States is the aim of our network here in New York. It is a great opportunity and I'm very happy we were able to organize this series of debates on questions of Islam in present-day Europe in the context of the currently ongoing festival, Muslim Voices.

I thank all the participating European partners. I thank the New York Public Library for being our host and collaborator, and the delegation of the European Commission to the United Nations for their support.

It is my great honor now to introduce Ambassador Valenzuela, the head of the delegation of the European Commission since 2005. He is a senior diplomat from Spain and has served in a number of key posts, among them the position of Special Representative of United Nations Secretary General for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 1999, and before his New York posting, he was the political director in the commission's external relations directorate. Please welcome Ambassador Fernando Valenzuela.

**AMBASSADOR FERNANDO VALENZUELA:** Thank you. And let me start by saying how honored I am to have been asked to participate in this event, and to welcome you here tonight, at this very venerable institution and to this challenging, timely, and exciting series, Islam in Europe. As it was said, I work for the European Commission, and although we represent an ever enlarging Europe, we still do not represent the whole of Europe, and this is an issue—Islam in Europe—which clearly is a relevant and important for the European Union, but it is also relevant and important for Europe at large.

As you know probably, we are mandated in the EU by our EU treaty, in Europe by the Council of Europe conventions, by the UN obligations, and by our national laws to avoid any discrimination, to defend human rights, as well domestically as in our international actions. So on paper there should be no problem, we should have no problem, but actually, we do. To certain degrees in all European countries, there are problems with religious or ethnic, interrelated, discrimination. This conference is in itself I think an acknowledgement of that, but it is also an indication that we are grappling with the issue. We hope that by presenting, observing, and hopefully absorbing different perspectives and points of view we would be in a better position to a successful outcome.

I profit from this opportunity to congratulate the New York Public Library, LIVE, and of course the New York chapter of the European Union National Institutes of Culture and the 19 institutions representing 18 countries for their courage, yes courage I think is the right word, to

organize this program. One which has its controversial and uncomfortable elements, and one that will surely have a dialectical dimension.

I've mentioned that this is a very timely initiative, and there are a number of good reasons for that, not least President Obama's seminal speech last week in Cairo. But now, speaking from an EU perspective, we need to recognize that need to do a better job as far as protecting the fundamental rights is concerned. To address some of these shortcomings, we established 2003 the EU Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia in Vienna. This center has become, subsequently, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. Well, precisely, just on May 28, a few days ago, the agency released for the first time ever the report on discrimination against Muslims in European Union. The survey results serve as an excellent starting point for our symposium here at the New York Public Library.

Just a few headlines if you allow me. On average, one in three Muslim respondents to this pole said that they had been discriminated against in previous 12 months. Eleven percent said they had experienced a racist crime. The highest levels of discrimination occur in employment. In common with other minority groups, most Muslim respondents, 79%, do not report discriminatory incidents in cases of racist crime to any organizations, state-run but also police or NGOs. Young Muslim respondents in particular indicate that they have little faith in the police as a public service.

In this context, not citizens, and those who have lived in the country for the shortest period of time, are less likely to report discrimination than those that are citizens or that have already been

living in the country for a longer period of time. Overall, 59% of Muslim respondents believed that nothing would happen or change by reporting. Thirty-either percent say that it happens all the time, so therefore they don't make the effort to report incidents.

So, with this report we see that we have in Europe on the one hand a gross underreporting of these problems and, on the other hand, a lack of trust in public authorities and organizations devoted to the defense of fundamental rights. This raises of course a number of important questions. I will mention some. Is there a basic acceptance of discrimination as a fact of life? How does this effect social integration and community cohesion? What can be done to increase trust in public authorities and in the police?

Another salient result, and there I will conclude, of those Muslim respondents who experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months, the majority believe this was mainly due to their ethnic background. Only 10% stated that they thought the discrimination they had experienced was based solely on their religion. In fact, wearing traditional or religious clothing does not appear to increase the likelihood of being discriminated against. Further, those with citizenship and longer resident periods experience less discrimination, as I said before. For example, 48% of male Muslim respondents without citizenship indicated that they had experienced discrimination, as opposed to 27% of male Muslims that are citizens of European countries already.

So with these facts, and leaving some questions on the table, I wish you an illuminating debate and to lend a compelling European accent to this Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas festival here in New York. Thank you very much for your attention.

**ZEYBA RAHMAN:** Thank you Ambassador Valenzuela. The Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas festival came about when three years ago when Mustapha Tlili, from NYU's Center for Dialogues, invited Karen Hopkins, the president of BAM, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, to Malaysia to a conference, and very soon Karen and Mustapha, with **Steven Heinz (??)** from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, came up with an idea to actually create this integrated platform, and to launch Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas here in New York.

Mustapha has had a remarkable career. He is the founder-director of New York University's Center for Dialogues. He is a Research Scholar at NYU and a Senior Fellow at its Remarque Institute. He is a former UN official: he served as the Director of Communications Policy in the UN Public Information Department, he has been the Chief of the Namibia Anti-Apartheid Palestine and Decolonization Program, in the same department. He is an established novelist, and he sits on the Advisory Committee for Human Rights Watch.

It's been a remarkable journey for Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas, and Mustapha and I have worked in close proximity to each other to bring the festival to this point with our colleagues, and I now would like to turn this over to Mustapha.

**MUSTAPHA TLILI:** Thank you Zeyba. Your effort in this project should be recognized by all—you worked tirelessly to make it happen. Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, excellencies, I am happy to be here with you to open this series of conversations on Islam and Europe at the New York Public Library. There are, as I am sure you know, these conversations part of the Muslim Voices festival as it was mentioned by Zeyba. Muslim Voices festival was launched by my partners Vishakha Desai, President of the Asia Society, and Karen Hopkins, President of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. We started it Friday night. The NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY is one of associated partners in this program, and there I should like to thank Paul for tireless energy and effort and congratulate him for this program. May I also mention to you that those among you in the audience who have not yet visited the website of Muslim Voices—[www.muslimvoicesfestival.org](http://www.muslimvoicesfestival.org)—you will find a wealth of information about what is happening in New York, both at BAM every night for two weeks, and at Asia Society. Wonderful programs, artistic performances, from all over the Muslim world. You have seen some of it here today.

As part of Muslim Voices my institution, the New York University Center for Dialogues, convened a two-day conference on the theme, *Bridging the Divide Between the US and the Muslim World: Possibilities and Limitations* this past weekend. In my opening statement I said that we were lucky to be poised to engage in such a debate exactly two days after President Obama delivered his historic speech in Cairo calling for a “new beginning”—and I use his expression. I am happy to report that the president’s call framed our exchanges from the first to the last hour. You will realize how lucky we were if I tell you, and as Zeyba told you, that we started planning for the festival and the conference three years ago, when the tensions between the two sides were at the highest point. President Obama also recognized that Islam as part of the American identity. This is a very important element of the speech. Europe being, if one may say,



the mother of American, the distant mother now, it is fitting that tonight we consider the case of the continent, and reflect on the various issues subsumed under the title of this series of conversations at the New York Public Library, Islam in Europe.

I will organize my brief remarks under four subheadings: history, identity, the present, and the future. Now, I can only evoke history in brushstrokes—the contours of the grand narrative if you wish. Before there was Europe, there was Christianity and Christendom. From the time of Muhammad’s prophecy, Islam found itself in constant interaction with Christianity, with which it shared a strong kinship. However, the ambitions of the new kid on the block, the block being the Abrahamic faiths, created tension between the three faiths, and led to territorial expansion by the prophet’s successors—caliphs and dynastic rulers, the Ummayyads, the Abbasids, and the Ottomans. Except for a short interruption, represented by the battle of Poitiers in 732, most of the lands of the Roman empire, in both its geographically western and eastern versions, gradually fell under authority of Islam until the failed siege of Vienna in 1683.

And so we have to ask ourselves, how did this affect the development of European identity? Europe, and this is recognized today by serious historians, developed as a self-conscious identity throughout the continent in the late Dark Ages. Until then there had been no single identity unifying the tribes of the lands ruled by Islam since 712. When Muslim soldiers first landed on the shores of Iberia, for the Muslims of Andalus. Therefore, European identity was born out of confrontation and interaction with the new dominant power and its civilization, Islam. A shared history of short battles and protracted wars, including the crusades, a shared history of commerce, diplomatic relations, cultural exchanges, marriages, slowly shaped this new European

identity and provided the ingredients in science, in philosophy, in literature, in poetry, in architecture and music, in fashion and cuisine, that sparked the European Renaissance and the explorations of distant lands, including this country, the United States.

And so we have to ask ourselves, what is going to be the future of this shared identity? And here I would like to refer you to three marvelous books: *The Ornament of the World: how Muslims, Jews and Christians created the Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* by Maria Rosa Menocal, *Lost History: the Enduring Legacy of Muslim Scientists, Thinkers, and Artists* by Michael Hamilton Morgan, and *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570-1215* by NYU Colleague David Levering Lewis.

Where are we today? Well today Islam is in Europe, again. There are 25 million Muslims—Muslim Europeans, who consider themselves Muslims *of* Europe, not Muslims *in* Europe. This is a very important distinction. They contribute, significantly, to the economic welfare and cultural vitality of the continent. They are, by any measure, a critical asset of Europe's success in a highly competitive center. Europe needs its Muslim citizens today. It will need them even more tomorrow, to satisfy its demands in terms of labor, population growth, and to respond to the challenges of the future.

Yet, yet, these Muslims of Europe live at a distance from the mainstream of the non-Muslim European citizens. Recent social statistics attest that these European Muslim communities remain at regrettable political, economic, and social distance from the mainstream. In addition, today European Muslims find themselves facing the challenges of, quote unquote, "integration," into

the only society they know, Europe. Meanwhile, no one—and this is a challenge to all of you, and to the panelists—no one, from European Union to the popular media, has been able to define what constitutes integration, what we mean by integration, with any degree of precision or clarity. Therefore, and this is the question I address to you, isn't it time? Isn't it time for Europe to change the terms of the debate? Isn't it time to offer a new paradigm that clarifies the public rights of new rights and obligations of every European, Muslim and non-Muslim alike?

What Europe needs today is a citizenship pact linking the individual to the state and to his community without interference in personal beliefs, values, and all the aspects of personal identity. The experience of the United States in this regard has proven that citizenship is the bedrock of common destiny. In order to prevent alienation that frequently leads to radicalization and sometimes violence, all those concerned—governments, cultural associations, employers, educational institutions, faith leaders, and others—should band together to develop what I have called a new citizenship pact that would reassure European Muslims of their rights in their private beliefs, and the integrity of their private beliefs and values, as long as their public behavior is in accordance with the legal systems and civic cultures of their new country. As full citizens of Europe, European Muslims could become an inspiration to the larger Muslim world, as it struggles to strike a balance between faith, tradition, and modernity. This could in turn lead to a more peaceful and productive relationship between the Muslim world and the west, and you will find if you wish more thoughts on these issues in the report of the conference that we organized two years ago in Salzburg precisely on this matter, Muslim communities in the west, with a special emphasis on youth and women. I think the report has been made available to you here.

Before I leave you with these thoughts, I would like to introduce one of the speakers of this panel, Tahar Ben Jelloun, a friend. He is the Moroccan novelist and poet. Tahar is precisely one of those creative minds in the Muslim world who, through their artistic interaction with Europe, are today redefining European identity. In Tahar's case, colonial history determined this itinerary by large measure, for he belongs to a generation of North African writers who are of two worlds: the Muslim Maghribian world and the colonial French world. He is, in other words, a border artist, coming at the French language and literary imaginations from the margins. As befits artists from the margins, he offers up to the center the truest mirror, in which it can look at itself, trembling and doubting.

For his splendid magician tricks, Tahar Ben Jelloun won the Prix Goncourt, the highest French literary award, the equivalent, if you wish, of the National Book Award in this country. And since last year he has been inducted as a member of the Academy Goncourt, which awards precisely the Goncourt award.

Now, using the title of one of Tahar's books, *Le Period de Solitud*, let's hope that despite this recognition by the center's establishment, Tahar will remain a man of the margins and its owed solitude. Thank you very much.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** Hi I'm David Brancaccio, PBS NOW, Friday night show. I'll be your moderator this evening. I'd like to start by welcoming our panel. I'll start the introductions right now. In addition to the great poet and writer, literary and social critic Tahar Ben Jelloun just in

from France, just in from just down Fifth Avenue we have Benjamin Barber, political theorist, Distinguished Senior Fellow at Demos, and runs the NGO that's called CivWorld at Demos, these are the people who brought you "Inter-dependence Day," which we may mention during the course of this. He is also the Walt Whitman Emeritus Professor at Rutgers. He is a passionate promoter of the idea of civil society. He's an advisor to senior politicians and author of the bestseller—I myself have a first edition—*Jihad vs McWorld*. The night of September 11, when it happened that night, I was on the air nationally, and to help us bring meaning to this shock, we had Professor Barber on, and I listened back to that show not too long ago, and it really does stand the test of time.

To his right just in from Britain, Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid, Chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony in the United Kingdom, he is deep into his fourth decade working towards peace and justice in Britain and the rest of the world. He has been active in promoting dialogue among people from different faiths, he is widely published, widely quoted, and widely respected, the Imam of Brighton England Islamic Mission, let's welcome all our panelists, starting with Imam Dr Sajid, Benjamin Barber, Tahar Ben Jelloun.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** Not too long ago, a while back, I was on the other coast of the United States, I was in California, and I got it into my head that I would write an essay arguing for the secession of California from the United States of America. I would try to argue in this essay that California, with its attitudes towards social democracy, and other things, it might be more appropriate for the state to apply for European Union membership. Think about it, California with its attitudes towards sustainability and the environment—a lot of things would recommend

California for membership in the EU, if we set aside for just a moment that pesky European single currency. People thought the essay was a bit far fetched, it never did reach proper print, however, as proof of my argument, who is now the head of state in California? *Quod erat demonstrandum*, a man who was born in what is now an EU country.

Now, the reason I bring this up is, there is another feature of California that would make it, in a sense, at home in modern Europe, which is the fact California is home, just behind New York, California is the number one place in America for Muslim Americans. It has the largest Muslim community. As we will explore, population figures—how many Muslims are in which state, how many Muslims are in which European country—this is a fraught area, up for debate. But, it is estimated 3.4% of the California population is of Islamic faith. That would put it right in around Italy, I think, in terms of the size of the Muslim population. It's actually ahead of the UK, percentage wise. California, as you know, is still part of the United States, this is essentially just a thought experiment.

Just before we go on, I need to know something about you. Show of hands, I'm trying to gauge your knowledge of European affairs. How many people here are card carrying Europeans? If you don't mind raising your hand. **(hands raise)** There's a chunk, wow. A third, maybe more. How many people here have read the *International Herald Tribune* more than ten times? Ah, one of these audiences. *Le Monde*, regularly? *Corriere della Sera*? *The Guardian*? Don't want to leave the Brits out of this. Okay, we don't have to reinvent the wheel here. We have people who are hitting the ground running.

Let me tell you sometime quickly as we transition to the topic at hand. There is a difference between California's Muslim population—in fact, the US Muslim American population—and Europe's. As diverse as Europe's Muslim population is, there is a difference. There is a Pew Research study of Muslim Americans from just a couple of years ago, and it shows that Muslim Americans are not richer or poorer than the American population at large. That generally isn't true if you take a look at the statistics for Europe, where many Muslims are unfortunately part of an economic underclass, which is one of the issues that we're going to deal with. It's quite dramatic that Muslim Americans are so, at some level, so well integrated economically with the population at large.

We're not going to go through the 27 countries of the EU and talk about their Muslim population, let's just pick a couple big countries. We'll start with, if we could, Imam Sajid. You've spent a lot of time in Britain. Give me a sense of any particular history that brought so many Muslims to the UK.

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** Two basic reasons. First of all, the United Kingdom has a commonwealth. The United Kingdom was a country where the sun never set in its golden days. And that was the time when the United Kingdom kept inviting people of its formal colonies, including Pakistan, India, America, and many many other places. And that's where, after the Second World War, a special invitation went from the king at that time to bring the people in, for mineworker, for textile worker, for railways, for post office, for NHS—which means our National Health Service. So a third of the population of this whole workforce comes from these minorities, either from Muslim countries, or from those countries where menial workers were

found—or where experienced workers were found—who actually are running our country even until today. And that's where these people have come from. Most people are invited. They haven't come as an economic migrant, as sometime you hear the headlines of *Mail* or *Express* or *Telegraph*. They only come because our Queen had invited them, for doing certain work. And that's what we are there for.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** Capitalism had a need to fill, and people brought the skills, and it was essentially also inexpensive labor. People in Britain who are Muslims tend to be from where, the Indian subcontinent?

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** Eighty percent have come from the Indian subcontinent, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and that part of the world. Then 10% come from the Middle Eastern countries, and 10% from all over the world. Depending on who is speaking, Muslims will say we are nearly three million, official figures that have come out last month say 2.2 million, and the last census of 2001 says 1.6 million. But three million, as you said, very much diverse. As diverse as Europe is diverse: linguistically, culturally, also religiously and politically.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** We all need to remind ourselves that it is in fact very diverse throughout Europe. If we go to another very large European country, Germany, a lot of the Muslims in Germany immigrated from for instance, Turkey. But I wanted to ask Monsieur Ben Jelloun about France. Tell me about the Muslim community there. They are not necessarily from the Indian subcontinent, but from a different part of the world.



**(TAHAR BEN JELLOUN spoke in French. His comments were translated into English by Translator ISABELLE DUPUIS)**

**TAHAR BEN JELLOUN:** To properly understand the situation of Muslims in France, you must link it to the history of colonization. And immigration is a consequence of that colonization. In France, immigration is not a happy walk in the park or picnic. It's a quite difficult thing, that often takes place with a lot of drama, and as opposed to the United Kingdom and Germany, which are differentialist countries, France is an integrationist country, meaning it wants to integrate that community. They were able to integrate immigrants from Spain, Portugal, Italy and eastern Europe, without any hardship or suffering, because they were Christian or Jewish. But it doesn't go so easily with Islam. And immigration from Muslim countries doesn't go through.

So all this to say that at the current time, immigrants from a previous generation are not at all concerned with the question of integration, and paradoxically, those who are preoccupied with this issue of integration are French young people whose parents are immigrants, who are confused with immigrants. For instance in October 2005 there were riots in the Paris suburbs, and the press had headlines that said "it's the revolt of the immigrants." It was a professional mistake for journalists. Professional mistake because these were French people who were revolting because they weren't recognized, they were despised, they were not respected. And that explains that in certain cases, the seduction of fanaticism, and that they fall in the hands of recruiters for terrorism—that some of them fall into the hands of terrorist recruiters. This kind of cultural and identity void that they are a victim of has served fanaticism that presented itself in these suburbs that France had completely neglected for so many years.

So Islam has become an identity. Whereas we intellectuals were struggling for a separation of religion and state, because we are in a secular country. Hence that notorious law banning the wearing of the veil, because the veil was an ideological and political symbol. A young girl who goes to school wearing a veil does not mean that she is only hiding her hair, it means she's not going to take the biology classes where people are studying Darwin's theory of evolution. She's not going to be able to take physical education classes because she would have to wear skin-tight clothes, it means she's not going to take musical classes because she has been told that music is a form of deprivation, and so on. So when the secularists rejected wearing the veil they were rejecting a vision of the veil—they were rejecting the form of exclusion that it symbolizes.

And curiously enough France had the greatest Orientalists, who understood Islam the best of all in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Regis Blachere who translated the Quran, Louis Massignon, who worked on Al Hallaj, Maxime Rodinson, Jacques Berque, Rodrigues, Andre Michael, and so forth. It's a generation that no longer exists today, and at the time the Islam they spoke of was not in the streets. Today Islam is in the streets but no one is studying it in a proper way.

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** I find a difficulty in talking about Islam while we are discussing Muslims. Because Islam, as has been mentioned, is a religion based on text and related to context, and this text needs interpretation. Interpretation will vary from place to place and person to person and expert to expert. Islam does not have a monolithic body to tell us what Islam is. We don't have a synod, we don't have a Pope, we don't have any person to dictate that this is Islam. It is up to me and also my friends and individuals who will define what actually Islam means to them in their situation and where they are.

There are three confusions here which is absolutely right. That one third of young people born in Europe, including France, and Germany and Britain, on these countries I can talk with some authority, are lost, are confused. About their dual or multiple identities. For example, I am a British Muslim of Pakistani origin, and European, and of course male. All identities differ with someone and create issues there. So we must not confuse Islam as a religion with a Muslim as we are, because Muslims are free to do whatever they like.

Second issue is about the Sharia, like the hijab—headscarf—issue that has come up. Sharia is not a divine code. It is a human interpretation of a sacred text. Sharia is evolving, changing developing, as in the past 1,500 years we have seen it, from different times and different processes. Unfortunately in the countries like us and in America and Europe, these terms are confused with some medieval practices, and also is confused with some people advocating it, saying that we need Sharia law and they think that chopping the hands, and so forth. That's why a lot of problems come up with headlines, and that's why we are dealing with it.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** I want to bring Professor Barber into all of this. The grand European experiment that's going on right now is about persuading this vast area known as Europe that they share a market, that goods should flow freely, but in order to make that pitch you also have to persuade Europeans that they share something, a common culture of sorts, and there are some people, in Europe and elsewhere, who worry that Muslims do not share that basic set of cultural values. You've thought a lot about these very issues.

**BENJAMIN BARBER:** Thanks David. Let me just start by a quick comment, because my friend Imam Sajid is so polite and so delicate in his articulation of the problems. You asked about the origin of these issues and the simple word is, imperialism. Colonialism. Predatory capitalism. Europe tried to take the world and today the world has come to take Europe, and Europe doesn't know quite how to deal with that reality. In simple terms, that's the problem we face.

But it's also true that we live increasingly in a world of interdependence where capital, labor, ideas, and ideology cross borders, so it's harder and harder to talk either about borders within Europe or borders between Europe and the world, and I think every country is having that experience, if you've been following what's been going on in, say, Turkey with the Kurds and the Armenians. If you look at the number of Armenians who live in Syria, if you look at the variety of cultures who live in Lebanon—one sees a picture of diversity and plurality in every country in the world, and Europe has that in spades which gives it its special problem. Your question is exactly the right one in a sense: before we talk about can Europe assimilate, integrate, deal with Muslims, is there a Europe that can assimilate, integrate Europe? And make sense out of its own multicultural identities? Increasingly the answer is, it looks pretty tough.

The recent elections just last week suggest that the right-wing parties that want to redraw the boundaries, put up the walls again, define France in terms of the French, German in terms of the German, in some ancient form are becoming more and more prominent. That makes difficulties that make it even more difficult for those who are Muslims, and in many cases, as both Tahar

and Imam Sajid have said very clearly, we need to constantly remember that Muslims in Europe are not immigrants, they are Europeans.

I sat with Tariq Ramadan in Istanbul last week, and someone said, “As an immigrant in Switzerland,” and Ramadan said, “I’m sorry, my family has been two generations in Switzerland, I hold a Swiss passport.” By the way Tariq is not allowed to come to the United States still. He is still barred from the United States, but he is an extraordinary thinker. He is a Swiss European now teaching at Oxford. We must always remember that much of the issue here is not about Muslim immigrants, but about Europeans, Germans, French, who are Muslim.

But that said, I want to come to what I think is at the heart of this debate. And maybe the hardest question—and you might wonder, as I do, what am I doing up here? I’m an American, this is a discussion of Islam in Europe. But, aside from the fact that Americans are sometimes blunter than Europeans and that can be a virtue, I think part of the reason an American presence is useful here is to think about the framing of multiculturalism in the American and European setting. Because I would argue that ultimately, despite the difficult past and despite the painful present that Tahar described, the problem in Europe has been the absence of a frame that allows us to think effectively and efficiently about what it might mean for Muslims, or for that matter for Jews, or for that matter for Italians in Germany or for Greeks in Turkey, to understand that relationship. The United States has had many failures, but our greatest success—I believe, partly because the only native people here were basically destroyed by those who came here—but everybody else who came here came from somewhere else. We are all immigrants. That in effect is a great strength. The only immigrant group that had a special and unusual history was those

who were brought as immigrants here in bonds, in servitude, in slavery. And that's been our toughest problem, how to deal with the immigrants who came here involuntarily rather than voluntarily. And we've seen recently in an election to the presidency an outcome that few would have dared hope for. In a sense not that we are finished with that problem, but that we are beginning finally to deal with that problem.

But the fact is the hyphenated American—the ability to think of yourself as a Polish-American, a Catholic American, a Jewish American, a Muslim American, has been a kind of easy identity here. And made it much easier on that side to deal with issues of identity than the Europeans. But because the Europeans have had a deeply essentialist view of their own identity—a German identity, a French identity, a British identity—mythic as that essentialism is, because the French identity is also invented—before Jean D'Arc there was no France, there were a lot of French provinces. We know from reading Shakespeare and the War of the Roses that England was a patch of provinces run by an anarchic aristocracy, that England was forged as a nation out of a kind of invention of myth. So the European nations themselves are invented nations. But the invention now has taken on the luster of ancient history, of permanent identity and roots that make newcomers feel not as they do here, just like the latest Americans, and if you're in American for what, six months or two years, you're an American. Whereas if you're in Switzerland for 60 years you're scarcely Swiss at all. And in France if you speak with anything like the accent that I speak with when I speak French, you're never French no matter how long you've been there. I don't pass.

So the fact is that the identity question for Europe is a difficult and a powerful one. I know you want to go to discussion but let me put one more feature on the table as we talk about it. Our host said in his opening remarks so eloquently, he talked about private belief and public citizenship. I want to suggest that's part of the problem. Belief is not private. There is no Jew, there is no Christian, there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim who holds their deep religious and ethical principles as private preferences. Me, I like the color red, I like to drive an Audi, and I'm a Methodist. Those are my choices. Or, I like to live in France, I like good wine, and, despite that, I am a Muslim. Those are not a set of choices. Our religious convictions run deep and are necessarily public, and that's where the problem begins. Religion is public in character: we belong to religious communities, with religious principles, and that compels us as members of a religious community to have a public stance.

And that's what has been so difficult in Europe I think. Because in the United States the thing we have said is that religion is public. You can be in the public square as long as you're not in city hall. But civil society, which is public, includes religion. Whereas I think in Europe the notion is somehow religion must be kept private. Laïcité in France is an attempt to privatize religion in order to keep it out of the state. And that has led to the kind of difficulties we have seen in France and Holland and elsewhere.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** Mr. Ben Jelloun, do you have any thoughts about how, if Professor Barber is correct that the solution is not to keep your deeply held religious beliefs private, how a Muslim in France could remain a Muslim, but also be a full Frenchman, and a full European?

**TAHAR BEN JELLOUN:** Well I think that for Islam Europe is an opportunity, it's a chance. And Islam is a chance, an opportunity for Europe. Because Islam enabled people from different backgrounds to meet and get to know one another. And one can think that Islam can exist and is possible within a democratic system. The fact that many Muslim countries are unfortunately not at all democratic, I'm not saying all, but many, means that some have confused Muslim religion with people who refuse to give democracy to the ones they govern.

So I think that Islam is a culture that you can have in your heart without exhibiting it in an ostentatious manner. And those who interpret the Quranic text in a literal manner refuse to understand that it is a text that was revealed in a very specific moment, in a very specific context, and is not fixed in time. I have to mention Mahmoud Hussein's book, *Penser le Coran, To Think the Quran*, which is a revolution nowadays, because he demonstrates how—two Egyptian intellectuals who worked on the life of the prophet demonstrated how certain verses were revealed in very specific historical contexts, and that's very important. All of this contradicts the simplistic vision, a vision that is completely foreign to the spirit of Islam that is pretty common nowadays—what we call Wahhabism, Khomeinism. Because we are all talking about this Islamic nation, the ummah, which is a hypothesis. It is a utopia, it doesn't really exist. Because Islam could be a unifying force, but that is not the case nowadays.

I'm going to talk about politics now, and tell you why Salman Rushdie was the victim of a fatwa from Iran. It's for a very specific reason. First of all, Salman Rushdie wrote a work of fiction, it's not an essay about Islam or the Islamic world. Because before Salman Rushdie, Maxime Rodinson published in 1957 or 1960 a book entitled *Mohammed: the Armed Prophet*. It says



terrible things about the prophet. But Maxime Rodinson was never under the law of a fatwa. So what is the difference between Maxime Rodinson and Salman Rushdie? Salman Rushdie belongs to the Muslim community. He is in the Islamic ummah, whether he wants it or not. So he is a child who had the audacity to go out of the house, and for that he must be punished with death. And that is why the spirit of intolerance comes from way in which ideology and politics make use of religion. Salman Rushdie, he is a creator, he can do whatever. But as a Muslim, he is guilty, according to the Ayatollah, he is guilty for what he does. If he was not Muslim no one would have paid attention to his book. This concept of Islam removes from the Muslim intellectual any critical mind. Any critical freedom. However, an intellectual who does not criticize is an intellectual who is not worth anything, who is not doing his job as an intellectual.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** Imam Sajid you disagree?

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** Yes of course, I disagree in three issues. First of all, freedom of expression is paramount, not only in Europe but in the whole world, that's why it's a central issue in our world that we should be free to express our wish, but there is no freedom to insult, no freedom to demonize. There is no freedom to make not only the religion, but the personality of the Prophet as an issue in which you are going to make all Muslims offended. That's what the issue was all about when the cartoon issue came up.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** The cartoon issue in Denmark, yes.

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** And the Rushdie issue. I had a debate with Rushdie myself on TV and radio in its time in '88 and '89. Actually I read the book before it was published, and not only me, but six other authors suggested this book should not be published—not because he was Muslim. He claimed he had never been Muslim. He was born in a Muslim family up to the age of 12 when he came to England, and he never practiced Islam. But when Khomeini's infamous fatwa came up, he wanted to get out of it and it was suggested to him, if you come and repent, and say your shahadah and become Muslim, you maybe are forgiven. And that issue came up before the British government started hiding him, and all those things. He accepted that advice, came in the Central Mosque, and declared his faith in public, and so became a Muslim. But what we call extreme Muslims never accepted that as a genuine faith and also he mentioned in his paper, *The Guardian*, as well, why I have become Muslim, there was a big story about it, and he made it absolutely clear, I only wanted to get out of the death sentence, not for anything else.

But the issue is not about the sentence of death, which is not an Islamic law, as Tariq Ramadan whose name has been mentioned, I with him, have issued a lot of papers in various websites, that this law of apostasy is not really law at all. It is a cultural issue. It has been the norm in various places. We need to review *all* of these Islamic Sharia laws, as has been mentioned earlier by my friend, we need to review these things according to our time.

The bigger issue in the European context, is actually our commonality, which brings us together on the issue of the rule of law, and the issue of freedom, and the issue of our citizenship.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** You are talking about all Europeans, including Muslims.

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** All Europeans because they are diverse, and unity through diversity is the issue. If we have become like the United States of America, where religion plays a part, not laïcité plays a part, then things would have been different there.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** Laïcité is the French approach.

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** Yes, it is the French approach of secularism, where you keep your private faith and the public atmosphere separate. That really is the issue over there. But my saying is—and Tariq Ramadan also says this—that we are European citizens, including those who are believers and those who have no faith. Citizenship will portray our commonality within our cities, our country, and we need to work together for bringing the rule of law into our lives. And that's what the issue is all about.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** A quick thing on that point, about enforcing commonalities. Just because you are here, and I found out about this—I hadn't realized that a couple of years ago, Dutch Authorities in the Netherlands came up with this policy which would be new Muslim leaders coming in from the Muslim world, new Imams coming in from the Netherlands would have to take this big six month course to acculturate them into the ways of the Netherlands, the ways of Europe. Not just language, but those rules. What did you think of doing that to incoming Imams?

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** Thirty years ago I advocated that. I wrote a paper in 1978, given to Merlyn Rees, then the Home Secretary of Britain. We suggested it for four reasons: because our new-coming imams must know about the law that you cannot beat children. The Children Act of 1995 comes in. They must know about the Law of Charities. They must also understand how they can deal with social services, and so on and so forth. If they are not aware about British culture or British norms or British laws, then it's difficult for them to adjust in a society where they are going to be leaders. And now it's being accepted after 9/11, that's a norm. And that's the law in every country, not only language, but also the training course to be taken.

In Britain this training course will be of two years, and then refresher courses of all Imams. We have just set up a new mission called IMAB—Imam and Mosque Advisory Board—which is going to supervise the training of all existing Imams as well as all new-coming Imams, not only in the language text, but also the law of the land so that the process of integration must come quicker and faster.

**BENJAMIN BARBER:** Let me make some comments because it relates to things being discussed here about secularism, because a lot of this discussion about religion and Islam in Europe are related to secularism. The heavy hand of the Enlightenment—once a very light hand, but now a heavy hand—rests with great weight on the European soul.

Pope Benedict—formerly Cardinal Ratzinger—recently said that it would be nice if Europe were Christian and we could defend Christianity, but increasingly Christianity, Catholicism, is dead in Europe. The fact is Europe is a deeply secular place, far more so than the United States.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** For instance in the Netherlands I thought the number two religion was Islam, number one being Christian. It turns out the number one religion in the Netherlands is no religion, 40% people say none.

**BENJAMIN BARBER:** As I wrote a while ago, the number one religion in Europe is McWorld. Unfortunately that's increasingly so, but secularism becomes a context for a lot of these things. Mr. Ben Jelloun, you spoke about democracy and religion in developing countries, but what's interesting actually is that in many Muslim countries Muslim street movements are democratic, and the state is secular authoritarian. Where President Obama gave his speech in Cairo, we have a secularist regime in effect, and the Muslim Brotherhood, whether or not they mean it, acts as a kind of in the street, radical, democratic movement. In Iraq, Mr. Hussein, the Baathists, were secularists. As we know now the Shia are coming out now in a much more religious way. In Syria today the Baathists are still in power and it's a secular regime. If you want to go to someplace that is *really* afraid of Islam, go to Damascus, because there the ruling party is deathly afraid of Islam in the street. And even we know in Palestine, the difference between the more secular PLO and Hamas is in part a democratically elected Hamas, which however looks Islamicist or fundamentalist to a lot of the secularists who worry about it. So one of the ironies is that in many parts of the Islamic world, secularism is the voice of authoritarianism and authoritarian modernization. And religion is the voice of democracy—whether real or not we have to still find out. So that's one complication.

The second complication—in France, *laïcité*. Something like 20% of the enrollment of Catholic private schools in France is made up of Muslims. And they go there because they are allowed to wear the veil, they can wear the scarf, because in private catholic schools you can wear whatever symbols. Jews can also wear the star of David and the yarmulke and so on. Catholic schools recognize that, and thus Catholic schools ironically become the place of public multiculturalism, whereas the state, through *laïcité*, denies anybody's multiculturalism, including that of Jews by the way, because Jews can no more wear their symbols than Muslims can wear their symbols to state schools. So this is another strange inversion where secularism becomes a kind of authoritarian, repressive religion, and religion becomes a place of multicultural tolerance and acceptance.

I think the reality of secularism in Europe, which had grown tired of Christianity, tired of religion, in part one of the real issues today is not Muslims against Christian Europe, but *religious* Muslims against *secular* Europe, and that Europe is finding the presence of any religion at all disturbing and difficult to deal with. That's a very different question than, can Christian Catholic Europe deal with Muslims coming in across the border, or the Muslim population in their midst?

Again, problematizing and making much more complex the question. If anything comes out of our conversation, I hope what will come is a sense of the deep complexity of these issues we face.

Just one last short point. Forty years ago Clifford Geertz, a wonderful Anthropologist and Sociologist at the Institute for Advanced Study, wrote a remarkable book about the two Islams. He wrote a book in which he compared Islam in Morocco and Islam in Indonesia. He said never have two societies, both Muslim, been so profoundly different, in the way that religion itself inflects the society. So to say Indonesia and Morocco are both Muslim countries, as against Christian or Hindu or other kinds of countries, really doesn't help us begin to understand either what they share, or how distinctive and deeply different they are, in part as a result in the differences in Islamic culture in those two countries. Variety, again, is part of the lesson I think we need to teach here.

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** I think Benjamin has said the absolutely right thing, but we have to add two more points to it. One is that it is the western secular democracies who have to accommodate the believers in their midst. Secularism is running the show in almost all European countries, and especially all the Muslim world, he is absolutely right, but the fact is, unless you accommodate the believers—forty years ago the Bishop of Oxford told me, thanks to Muslims for having brought the topic of religious education to the top of the agenda. Because we Christians have lost the battle in the hands of the secularists since the '60s revolution and religious education went behind the scene until you brought it.

And the bigger issue also—what Kofi Anan, the former United Nations Secretary General in this historic city, 7<sup>th</sup> of December, 2004, opening the seminar in Islamophobia, in my presence said, it's not Islam that is the problem. It is religious extremism that is the problem. We need to see both things from both sides: the civil society and our secular governments have to recognize, as

has been mentioned by our host, that discrimination against Muslims is real. In the law it has been outlawed, but in practice still exists. Including my own children, born and brought up in Britain, having the highest degree from the London School of Economics, could not get a job in the United Kingdom, even for five years. Writing 80 applications with her own handwriting, because as a Solicitor, they have to write applications in their own handwriting, couldn't get it. They ended up working somewhere else, in the Singapore government, and doing very well there.

It is the brain drain from our own country, where millions of pounds have been spent on their education, but they cannot give it back to their community. That's the situation. A number of places, and you are absolutely right sir, saying that discrimination exists in employment. A person whom I know, whose real name is Shahid, but he has been writing as "Richard" in every application. Every time his application has been rejected, and he goes to the tribunal and gets 4,000 pounds as a prize off those employers who did not short list him, even though when he wrote as "Richard," every time he was short listed. When his name was Shahid, he has never been short listed. So clear discrimination, because of the name and because of the issue.

I agree that a lot of people don't report these crimes, for two reasons. First, it's a waste of time, because it's not going to be acted upon for three reasons: there are no resources, neither police or anyone else to deal with this; nor is there training of the officers in how to deal with it; nor is there any agency where one can report it. Thanks to the European Union at least the European Monitoring Center exists, but this Center does not work on a country basis everywhere. If there's



27 countries in the European Union, and the wider European, probably the discrimination issue could be addressed more.

**TAHAR BEN JELLOUN:** I think it's time for European countries to create a reciprocal pedagogy education between Islam and Europe. Meaning that education must be given to children—they must be taught what is Islam, and new-coming immigrants must also be given a certain number of information about the country in which they are coming to work, what are their rights and duties. And to put an end to prejudice. Because Islam is becoming a pretext for discrimination. That's why the use of Islam by one side or the other must stop.

And Islam must remain in the hearts of each. And as you, Imam Sajid, mentioned earlier, there is no hierarchy in Islam. There is the individual and God, there is no intermediary. There is no Pope, no priest, there is none of that. So it's perfectly normal for faith and religion to remain in the hearts of men, not in streets, not in administration, not in the schools. Secularism is not the negation of religion, but the respect of religion. Your beliefs, your prayers, you make them for you and for your god. You're not making them to appear on the outside. So this form of secularism, which is the respect of all religions—

So in Morocco, for instance, we are getting a bit closer to this form of secularism, very very slowly, in a sort of homeopathic way, because the king has forbidden the creation of political parties in the name of religion. Of course there are parties named “the party of the world, of flying saucers, of whatever” and behind it there happens to be a religious ideology, no one is a

fool to that. But the king said, religion is not there to serve ideologies. You have to respect religion.

And I remember when there was the terrible story about the Danish caricature, I was asked, are you hurt? And I said no, I really don't feel concerned. Because for me, Muhammad, the Prophet, you can't represent him. He's a spirit. It's a superior spirit, you can't put a mustache, a beard, a turban, it's ridiculous. They can do what they want, it has no concern for me.

And to end, I go to a lot of schools, in France, Morocco, wherever I go. And the other day I was in Casablanca in a high school. At one point one of the students got up and said, "Sir do you believe in God?" I said, "It's none of your business." It's a private question. He said, "Why, you are not Muslim?" I said, "It's not your problem." It's like you are asking if I made love to my wife yesterday or the day before. It's private. I will not tell you whether I believe in God or not, it's not your problem. I made a point of it because I want each person to respect the other. I wanted young people to know that if they believe, that they must believe for themselves and not for society, and they shouldn't be burned because they have convictions. It's through education and schools that you can bring this. You can't make a 40-year-old man change his point of view. You have to impact an openness of mind on youth.

What we're asking for in France is that the history of Islam, the story of Islam, be taught in schools, as well as Judaism and so forth, from an objective point of view. And afterwards the children can do what they want. They can believe or not, but they must be given information, that's important. And that we don't have yet.

I went to state high schools in Amsterdam, public high schools, they were completely Islamic. Every little girl was having a veil, the teacher had a veil, the boys on one side the girls on another. So I said, this is a private school? They said no, this is a state school. What is this? Then I was told, oh, but there are a few Catholics. And there are also some Jewish schools. So the state should stay aside.

**BENJAMIN BARBER:** But here I think we do have a disagreement, because the role of the state and the role of secularism is to provide precisely the neutral context in which private and public belief can be expressed. I think, actually, that you owe an answer to the child who asks are you a Muslim, or are you a Catholic, but the answer goes like this: I am a Catholic who is gay. Or, I am a Muslim who is a member of the union, or I am a Jew who is married, and as any one of those I have a right to vote, I have a right to a job, I have a right to every one of the impertinences of the secular state. The job of the secular state is to make sure that any identity, not just confessed but *professed*, promulgated, will not be the basis of discrimination. Not that I'm going to conceal it or I have to conceal it, there's no reason to conceal it if you don't want to, but you should be able to say it and know that it won't count against you.

The role the state plays and that secularism plays is to play that trump role, to make sure that nobody's identity becomes the basis of a claim to rights that others don't have, or the denial of somebody else's rights. That's a very special and important role.

One of the big issues we haven't talked about in Europe today and in England is so called legal pluralism: can the rule of Sharia or of other religious law have a place in a legal system? Can some disputes be turned over to, in effect, private religious courts? Again, I'm not a legal pluralist. I don't believe that Jewish law, Muslim law, are the equivalent of state law. But I am a legal federalist. That is to say, I believe under the trump of secular law, as long as individual religious codes do not violate that law, individual religious communities have a right to adjudicate their own disputes inside those laws. That's a kind of legalist federalism in which you allow at the state level, at the local community level religious people to do this.

But the fact is we worry about Sharia in Europe. I have a house in Massachusetts. Try to buy a beer on Sunday in Massachusetts. That's Puritan Sharia and we've still got it in many parts of the United States. A lot of places close the stores on Sunday. Every society has the echoes, the imprints, the hints of religious things.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** It does come up a lot because, for instance, Islamic Sharia courts can sometime adjudicate divorce, but then the question is, once the judgment is made, will the civil society back up that judgment?

**BENJAMIN BARBER:** Exactly right David, and here the question of women I think we haven't talked about. There isn't a woman on this panel and there should be, because the question of women and Islam is a very large question. At the panel in Turkey I just came away from a number of Turkish feminists were angry at Americans who didn't seem to recognize what they thought was patriarchal character of Islam. And my response was, your issue is with

patriarchy, not Islam. Whether it's patriarchal Christianity, patriarchal Judaism, patriarchal Hinduism, or patriarchal Islam, patriarchy is everywhere. It's still in the United States. There are also powerful secular forms of patriarchy. But to associate it with a particular religion, then you must associate it with every religion.

We need to separate issues again, and say that women have the same rights as citizens qua women, as anybody else, regardless of the religion they belong to, and regardless of whether the religion still has patriarchal tendencies. Pulling those things apart and understanding that it's not about religion, but patriarchy, discriminating against women with whatever textual basis really is the issue. And once you pull those things apart you don't get into thinking that Islam has a special problem with women, that somehow Christianity and Judaism and other religions or indeed secular societies don't have.

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** I think respecting the law is paramount, but as theology, and some would argue with my friend, saying, that when the Quran says “you must declare your faith in public,” that's why the Jewish or Muslim identity—by the beard or the hijab or the cap—are sometimes for the general practitioner very important. And that's why love of the Prophet as a second article of faith after the love of God is so paramount that the majority of Muslims will not tolerate and insult to the Prophet, though it may be symbolic, it may be a historical figure, but that's part of the article of faith.

We need to understand where Muslims are coming from. The respect is very much important. Mutual respect is very important. I do agree that law should be the one—state should be secular

and should not have any faith, but the state must recognize people of faith, and also people of no faith, without any discrimination. So law should not discriminate against anybody, as long as they obey the law.

**BEN JELLOUN:** Well I refuse the fact that religion is an identity. I know in certain countries religion was stamped on the passports and it ended up in civil war. Religion is about the spirit and consciousness of each. It must not become a refuge for identity.

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** For some people it's their belonging.

**BEN JELLOUN:** Then if you have to speak out to declare everything you should say, I don't believe in God, I'm agnostic, I'm nothing. People can say it. Whereas today it's impossible to speak that way in a Muslim country. People are living in hypocrisy. People don't have the right to say I don't believe.

I think a person's freedom stems from the ability to say such a thing. Whereas in Muslim countries the individual was never recognized. It's about the tribe, about the clan. As long as the individual is not recognized, it's the woman who pays the high price, because the state of the woman's condition tells us the state of progress or regression in a society. If you want to know if a society functions well, look at the situation of women in it.

The essential problem for fanatics—I'm not speaking of mainstream Muslims—is sex. They are obsessed by the woman's sex. It's sort of, don't touch my wife, don't touch my sister, don't

touch my mother, don't touch my neighbor. They have such a problem, such a fear of women that they want to cover her, lock her up, put her underground. As long as they have not resolved this psychological problem, everything will turn around the women. The Jewish and Christian religions were also very wary of women. They were always perceived as source of absolute evil. We must have the intelligence to have religious convictions, or to not have them, but to make a distinction between the rights of individuals and the belief that stems from faith or the irrational, that must not be inscribed in a constitution.

**BENJAMIN BARBER:** The problem women have is not with religion, it's with men.

**(audience laughs, applauds)**

It doesn't matter what particular religion they are. Just one quick statistic. The number of wife beatings and wife murders that happen on Superbowl Sunday accelerate a lot. Football is an American religion perhaps, but the fact is if you attribute the oppression of women or discrimination against women to any particular religion, or even to a fundamentalist form of a religion, is to forget that the problem is universal and can be found in many many different forms.

I believe the danger is—of course you're right, fundamentalist religion has that problem, but it becomes another form of slander against religion by those who don't really care about women. It always surprises me that some of the most piggish American men I know suddenly get very concerned about the fate of women when it comes to Islam. We don't want to have it become an excuse for another slander against religion.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** I'd love to continue this thread but I also believe in democracy, so let's democratize this discussion. If you could, stand up, and also tell us your name. Also, shorter questions are easier because I might have to repeat them. And I'm not as good as our translator.

**Q:** I'm Denis Low. Several people brought up Tariq Ramadan. We get our biases or prejudices either from direct experience, or from media. So taking his as an example—I know that in this country much of the media is pro-Israel, and therefore much of our perception of the Arab world and Muslim world is biased by that. What is the role of pro-Israel feeling and media in Europe to bias for or against how Muslims are accepted in Europe?

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** I speak for myself, and I say that the existence of Israel is a must, and all the Muslim world must accept it. But is Israel willing to accept a Palestinian state? If yes, when and where? I told Tony Blair myself, saying, you must raise your finger to the President, or Prime Minister, or Foreign Minister of Israel saying sir, you have accepted resolution 232 [**he meant to refer to Resolution 242**], and when are you going to vacate the occupied land of 6 June 1967? Unless Muslims or Palestinians hear from your voice, they will say, Tony, your hand is full of Palestinian blood. That's why they're not going to listen to you as a Quartet representative. There has to be balance between these two.

When President Obama said the word “no more settlements,” you have seen the reaction in the Jewish press and the whole Jewish world. Sensation has occurred. Emails have come up in my email, about 100 a day about this issue from my Jewish friends, because I have been working with a Jewish friend for the past forty plus years.



**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** What do they tell you?

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** They're saying it's not right. Nobody can dictate. We have every right to do whatever we like. It's up to us, and we don't want an extremist or violent next to us which threaten our life. And they have a genuine fear. That's the fear that exists with Europe about Muslims.

The problem is, how can we address the fear and build trust and confidence? It will come up as a Catch-22. Mutuality, and working together, as we are doing in Interdependence Day, starting to work not with negativity, but with positivity about our future. That's the issue.

**BENJAMIN BARBER:** I don't know if we want to put the Palestinian-Israeli question on the table, particularly since the questioner was questioning about the media. While the media may be distorted in respect to Israel, it's distorted in respect to an awful lot of other things as well. I think the simple answer to your question is that in every way I know, the media here distort the portrait of Islam, of Muslims, most Americans have no idea that only 250 million out of 1.3 billion Muslims live in the Arab world, and the rest live somewhere else. They have no idea of the diversity we spoke about in Muslim nations. They have no idea that much of the problem in the Muslim world is not the irreconcilability of Islam and democracy, but the fact that there are authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, which are secular, and Baathist, and so on. So getting a more informed media is crucial.

At five o'clock on Thursday in this room there is going to be a marvelous panel. Queen Noor of Jordan is going to be here to talk about media and these questions. For those who care about that I think it's a very good and important question, aside from the biases. So come back for that discussion when we'll be able to answer your question fully.

**Q:** Ahmet Kuru, from Columbia University. My question is to Mr. Ben Jelloun. You seem to embrace and even advise the assertive secular French notion and discourse. I want to ask how you explain the gap between French assertive secular discourse and practice, because 80% of the French Catholic school budgets come from public money. Half of the French state schools have Catholic chaplains. Six of 11 French holidays are Catholic holidays. And in Alsace-Lorraine there is no secular law. The priest appointed by the President, and Catholicism, Judaism and Protestantism are recognized by the state, but, the headscarf ban is imposed in Alsace-Lorraine, despite the lack of secular law in that region. How could you explain such contradictions in the French case?

**TAHAR BEN JELLOUN:** It's true there are many contradictions. From time to time the media protests to find out that a concession was given to such and such a religion for political opportunist reasons, and that secularism doesn't exist 100%. But the most important thing is that there is a public school, and that public school should shield from all religions. As well as administrations and hospitals.

Cause there was a problem in French hospitals when a Muslim woman would come in the emergency services for whatever problem, if she was accompanied by her husband, the husband

refused to have her examined by male doctor. For instance, on Sunday at midnight a woman had to examine her. Sometimes the woman could die as a result of not being examined. That's why there were reactions from medical practitioners saying, we're doctors first, not men or women, and when we see a patient it's not a sexual person. It's important because a woman died in the emergency services because the doctors refused to have her examined.

I'm saying there are contradictions in practice, but there are attempts. I'm not representing the French state. There are attempts to salvage secularism.

**Q:** Ayisha al-Adawia, I'm the President of a Muslim women's human rights organization here in New York, Women in Islam. My first observation is that a panel on Islam in Europe, I'm wondering, is there a significant enough presence of sub-Saharan African Muslims in this European Islamic community that would merit their representation and participation at this kind of forum? Also, we've been meeting with many of your counterparts here in New York after 9/11, talking about what a good example we have here in New York and in the United States, and how can we help your governments develop a similar kind of atmosphere of freedom and tolerance in Europe, despite the difficulties that we obviously have here. To what extent have those conversations come back to you, and how are you using the information that we've been sharing here, post 9/11 with law enforcement agencies, and what kind of results are you getting from that?

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** The European Union is one example, who held a series of conferences with OSCE, the Office of Security and Cooperative Europe, in many places. I have

been actively engaged since 2002 until 2008 in various meetings. Sub-Saharan representation is there, not only from Kenya and Malawi but many other places, and women's voices are there. My wife spoke in a Mexican university and a number of other places on women's rights and other issues, on those five different verses of the Quran which need explanation, and so on and so forth.

So dialogue is continuing. Actually, the bigger issue is acceptance and respect not only in the law, but also practice. Practice takes some time. Two or three generations to translate the law into practice.

If we would have had a United States of Europe, probably the situation would have been different, because our constitution has not been agreed upon, and Article 51, which has a role for religion in it, has not been 100% agreed upon. You all know that faith communities have resources, the people, and the buildings. Also, these are assets: spiritual assets, and social assets. And that cannot be ignored anymore. They have to be included not only in consultation, but in participation, and in engagement.

**BENJAMIN BARBER:** Just to spell out an implication of your question that I think is very important, again with respect to variety, sub-Saharan, black Africa has a significant and vibrant Muslim community. And often when people think about Muslims in Europe or elsewhere, they simply don't see that, that's invisible. And you're reminding us that that too—go to Kanu, Nigeria and you find an extraordinary Muslim city in the middle of black Africa. These are also

points about the variety of Islam around the world that we need to keep in the forefront of our minds.

**Q:** I'm Dr. Lynn Perry Bodinger, I'm a Differential Cardiologist with my own private practice at Columbia Presbyterian. Also, there are growing vibrant Catholic communities in sub-Saharan Africa. I'm Catholic American so that's one reason I'll mention that. Returning to economics, perhaps this discussion is a little too cerebral for me as a doctor, but I just want to point out what Mr. Brancaccio said, that the Muslim American community of this country is economically on par with the average American, whereas in Europe they are part of an underclass. How can we change that?

You have all given brilliant suggestions, but I would say that instead of bashing the media we should incorporate the media with the state. My impression of Europe is that Europe depends too much on the state. It may be worth while to incorporate private enterprise, including the media, in educating all children about Islam in Europe. Because you can write as many laws against discrimination as you want, as we've done in this country, and nothing really changed until private enterprise took the step to hire African-Americans, to accept African-Americans into Ivy League universities.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** A great last question. What should we do?

**IMAM ABDULJALIL SAJID:** Well she has also answered her own question with her own suggestion. But, we have plenty to add. First of all, like the Pew survey which has been

mentioned, the Gallop has surveyed one million Muslims in the world and has come up with the solution that in European countries they are the most law abiding than any other local citizens, but having said that, they are underachievers because they are not really reaching their potential.

So what is needed? There has to be participation, there has to be engagement, there has to be recognition, and there has to be acceptance of Muslims in all levels of society, so that they are not only visibly seen but also so that their contributions are valued. Economic contributions, especially in Britain, how they are contributing economically in making Britain better, and ourselves much more prosperous because of these menial workers who are there.

Gordon Brown, when he was our Minister of Exchequer—money—he made the law in 2003 that Islamic banking is a legal system in the UK, and that brought 32 million pounds per year for profit in assets in the UK from the Muslim world. That participation is mutual, and that's what needs to be accepted—where there is a benefit to certain laws, we need to accommodate, as long as they don't disobey the law of the land.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** So some important suggestions for how to lift up people from an underclass from Imam Sajid. Any other suggestions as final thought as to how to get at the economic challenges of so many Europeans?

**TAHAR BEN JELLOUN:** For me, my challenge is education. I'm betting everything on education, based on primary schools. Children must be raised in the spirit of openness, diversity, tolerance, acceptance of others if they are different, whether they are from a different religion or

language, and that can only happen in the schools, beginning with six years of age. It's not when they are 20 or 30 years old that you are going to change people. You change them by teaching them something when they are young.

When I was mentioning secularism and *laïcité* before, I was saying you have to teach children about the main religions. To teach them about the history and tell them, all religions find each other on one point—human values. What is important is not money, or selfishness. It's humanity. Religion is humanity at its best and most noble, and if children are not taught this they will be turned into little monsters, and we will send the world into more and more crisis like the ones we are experiencing at the moment. We have to go back to human values.

**(applause)**

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** Is McWorld going to come riding to the rescue?

**BENJAMIN BARBER:** Well of course economics is important, but the Muslim community in the United States is middle class not because they all came as entrepreneurs. It was because of a social fabric, a way of identity that allowed them to feel like Americans and then race to fulfill the American dream. Education, of course, is vital and important, but if you go see a movie that's around now called *The Class*, about an attempt by French educators to educate people in the banlieus [**impoverished French suburbs**], and the utter failure of French education system trying to do exactly this, really make the French aware. That failure suggests how education by

itself can't succeed in the presence of a social fabric and identity that refuses to recognize who people are.

I'm afraid it does come back in the end to identity, and politics. Switzerland today is run, or will be run, by a minority party becoming the majority that's a right wing party and they want to outlaw building mosques anywhere in Switzerland. Recently a Labour minister in England, **Robin Cook**, said, I won't talk to woman wearing a burqa because I just don't feel I can see her and understand her. With attitudes like that taking power now in European local elections, that see Islam as threat to European identity—and the man who murdered Van Gogh could become a primary leader in Holland. If those parties come to power, and they insist on seeing the identity of Muslims as a threat to the meaning of Europe, the no economics, no education is going to make a difference.

We have to come back to that central question that animates this conference: what it means to be Muslim, what it means to have an identity, and how you do and maintain a free and democratic society where everyone, regardless of that identity, has an opportunity.

**(applause)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Before thanking everyone on the panel, I want to thank our audience for being so attentive for two hours. I would like to invite all of you to the reception in the Trustees' Room, so you can continue the conversation with our distinguished panelists. I will say there is one woman on stage here. We had invited a few others but they couldn't make it



tonight. There will be many women in our four different remaining conferences, I would like you to come to all of them.

I would like to very warmly thank David Brancaccio.

**DAVID BRANCACCIO:** I collect proverbs. One of my favorites from North Africa is this: One must come out of one's house to begin learning. You did on a rainy night, and I thank you for it.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Thank you very much.