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*Interviewer:* From outside of Europe we hear about Wilders or Theo van Gogh or Ayaan Hirshi Ali or some of the things in Britain, France, whatever. It seems as though Europe is burning and nobody's safe. It seems like a very dramatic situation. Could you give me a sense of what your analysis of what the situation actually is, particularly in the Netherlands, maybe in Europe more generally with regard to the question of the Muslim communities within Europe and their relationship to the broader society?

*Tariq Ramadan:* Yes. There is something that we can say in Holland, but I think it's exactly the same throughout Europe, maybe exactly the same in the States and in Canada. There is what we can call "the national discourse", which is happening in the capitals, in Amsterdam, in the mainstream media. The picture is as though there is no way for the people to live together, there is crisis, and that everything is not working. I think this polarization at the national level is not in fact the truth at the local level. It's completely different. It's completely different in many countries.

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*Tariq Ramadan:* For example, in France, beyond the headscarf and everything that has to do with the suburbs, if you go and look at what the local authorities are doing with Muslim organizations, with citizens, it's much more connected with the realities and it's pragmatic. They are trying to find ways, so they are talking to each other and there is trust. After July the 7<sup>th</sup> in the UK when people were speaking about war against radicalization and extremism, I went to Bradford, and to Birmingham talking to officials at the local level, local authorities, and they were saying, "Look, we are dealing quite well. We are talking much more about social cohesion than against radicalization extremism."

I think that now, in Holland, it's exactly the same. I'm here working in this university but also with the municipality in Rotterdam. I'm also working with people in Amsterdam. At the local level it's really something that I call the "silent revolution" which is the changes within the Muslim mindset with the way they are presuming the surrounding society coming much closer from what other citizens are. Of course there are tensions, but the mainstream movement is quite positive. Millions are showing that it's possible, so we have to be very cautious not to be misled by the media coverage of some crisis. We need to get a better sense of what is deep down within society, which is getting citizenship and being much more in tune with the society, keeping their religion

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because this is a right for some of them. Others are not practicing but still being completely European or Dutch citizens.

*Interviewer:* Having said that, is there something unique about *Muslim* immigration to Europe or to America? Or are the tensions that we're seeing just the normal tensions that you see when you have a large immigrant population?

*Tariq Ramadan:* I think there are things that are similar and things that are quite different. What is similar is through immigrations, it's always the same in that you have the primal migrants arriving in a society, being together, isolating themselves from the surrounding society, trying to protect themselves from the culture or the new culture. It was always like this. Italian, Spanish, Portuguese did that before. So this is completely normal. It's similar to what we experience in the past.

What is also something that is quite important which is also common to everything else, which is the question of time, we need two generations before something good can be really developed as to being a member of the society. With Islam there are at least three factors that are a bit different.

The first one is the transnational dimension of this reality and the number altogether. It's everywhere. It's in the States. It's in Canada. It's in Europe. It's in Australia. I was in New Zealand last month, exactly the same. Everywhere they are here, and we're not talking about one thousand, two thousand, one hundred thousand, we are speaking about millions of people across the board and coming in the West. So, this is very important: numbers and the transnational dimension of the phenomenon.

The second thing that is important is that it's religious and it's cultural. Meaning that in the western psyche, Islam is not a western religion. It's perceived as an alien, foreign religion. That is completely wrong, by the way. If you study history you can understand the values. The principles are there, and we have a selective memory of what the past of Europe or the West was. Still, the psyche, the perception is it's alien. Add to this that immigrants are coming very often with a confusion between what is cultural and what is religious. So, they are coming and they are challenging, not only the relationship with laws in legislation, but the surrounding culture. There is something that is quite sensitive here: anything that has to do with symbols because the symbols are what are going to push you to have the first reaction. This is what we saw in France with the headscarf. This is what we are seeing now in my country, in Switzerland with the minarets and the

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people saying we don't want minarets because it's the symbol of the Muslim silent colonization, and the visibility of the new generation. So, this is something that is symbols of a new presence challenging the old geniality of the society. This is the second factor.

The last one is something which has to do with international scene is that everywhere you see there are crises in the Muslim world, so it's a global phenomenon. There are crises everywhere. The great majority of the Muslim countries are poor and immigration is not going to stop.

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*Tariq Ramadan:*

So, there is something that is tricky for the West that is that on economic ground, they need immigrants. They need them. They need them in the States, in Europe, everywhere, and there is a cultural resistance, so there is a tension between economic needs and cultural resistance. So, these three factors make the situation quite unique, in fact, and this is where we have shared responsibilities for the Muslims from within, to understand whole dimensions of the discussion. For the West, as well, to understand Islam is a western religion first, immigration is going to continue, so you have to take it for the reality of the future. So you have the white, homogenous society of the past, this is over. Then the third dimension is really to be able to build something that is consistent with our values when it comes to citizenship and being members of the society and not to use the symbols to undermine the legal dimension of us being citizens, and this is what it happening today.

If you don't get the symbols, your citizenship is questioned, and I think of myself, I'm a Swiss citizen. I've been questioned about my true loyalty to the country because I'm too much a Muslim. So I should show more to prove my citizenship. It's as if there's something out there called an informal citizenship that I should get to prove my formal citizenship that I got already, and I think this is problematic.

*Interviewer:*

Isn't there a fourth dimension? A lot of what your work focuses on, which is also not just to explain to the Europeans that Islam is a western religion, but also to explain to the Muslims that there's no contradiction between being Muslim and Europeans, that Islam is compatible with European life?

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*Tariq Ramadan:*

So, this is something else. It's not at the same level as what we were talking about. Here, from within the Muslim communities living in the West, there is a great deal of work to be done and challenges to address because what we should do here is get a better understanding of what Islam is all about, and here there is a difference between what is happening in the States and what is happening in Europe because of the characteristics and the features of what the Muslim communities are because mainly the people who went to the States were more educated, highest level of understanding. Still, it didn't mean at the beginning they had a clear understanding what is cultural and what is religious. But it was a fast process, which, here, is quite slow and difficult.

But yet, to understand what is religious and to be able to say that religious principles are not in contradiction with the western societies, then you have to distinguish between new cultures of origin and the cultures that you are finding in the West: that you can be at the same time Muslim by religion, European by culture or anything else, that your identities are multiple identities. All this is a discourse and what I have been trying to do from within. It takes time. It means changing the mentality, and we have to push and to push.

You know, I was working for almost 20 years on the field of law and jurisprudence. Now, I'm reaching something that is the source, the fundamentals of jurisprudence, and the next book is called *Radical Reform*. We have to push and push on this not to betray our principles, but to come to the source of the principles to be able to deal with the contemporary challenges. I think this is an intellectual revolution that is needed here for the Muslims, but they can succeed on that field from within if, and only if, the surrounding society's understanding that it should be done from within. You can ask questions. You can help the process to accrue, but you cannot impose it. You cannot just impose the people to be Muslims the way you want them to be Muslims. It's really something that has to do with multi-religious, cultural societies, and this means something. It means that you have to de-center yourself from your own points of reference, that you have to listen to the people, that you have to not only have political diversity, but cultural diversity. It's not easy, but this is the only way forward.

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*Interviewer:*

And how much resistance is there within the Muslim community to some of these ideas?

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*Tariq Ramadan:* It's paradoxical because, as I can see out of my work, it's very attractive. I've got lots of people following me, and the people are speaking about my work saying, "He has lots of followers." This is the case everywhere I go. But at the same time, there are two contradictory things where you have literally groups saying this is not Islam, this is westernized Islam, a "light" Islam, so it's outside. So you have groups like this, and these people get some echoes around, and they are attracting people. For one thing, at the same time I'm saying this, what we got from the surrounding society is suspicion, marginalization.

Some people I cannot come to your country, I cannot go there, and some people are saying, "If you don't want him, who do you want? Which kind of Muslims do you want? Someone who is not going to be critical towards your foreign policies? Someone who is going to be a blind supporter of your policy, which means less a citizen because a true citizen is always critical in the positive as well as in the negative. So, this is the problem that I'm facing. I'm facing sometimes something which is quite interesting is that some Muslims are telling me you are dreaming. In fact, they don't want this. They don't want us to be involved in society. In fact, the people who are winning today are the people who are polarizing the debate. It's from the War on Terror between two world too the far-right parties saying, "These Muslims cannot integrate. They are unintegratable. They are outside the picture." So you are building bridges on both sides. That is to day, you have people not helping you, and this is why I'm also saying to the citizens and Muslims and then Muslims. It's not a business of two or three years, it's two generations. It's going to be difficult. We are going to face tensions, but anything that we can do is really the choice of trust. Really, in times of mistrust, choice of trust. It's really to be committed to this ideals at the grassroots level as well as at the in the local level.

*Interviewer:* And in terms of what governments can do - you can't legislate acceptance, you can't legislate understanding. What can a government do?

*Tariq Ramadan:* You know, I just released for the municipality here something, which is the first pillar, which is education. It's about the process of speaking about citizenship identity and sense of belonging. At the end of the day, it's not a legal issue. The legal issue, you know, the great majority of the Muslims are law abiding. They don't have a problem with laws and legislation. At the end of the day, it's a question of a sense of belonging. It's a question of living together and building together the future of the society.

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So, the third thing that is important is something that I call a duty of consistencies. Of course, it's difficult to be consistent at the international level. How are you going to explain to people we offer democracy when you go and you kill innocent Iraqi people? But at least within the society you should be consistent with citizenship, meaning equal rights and responsibilities, and you should promote this everywhere, not only in your discourse. At the local level it's really important: consistencies. Not one citizenship for the white people and less second-class citizenship.

You know, when I was in the States and dealing with African-Americans this is what they were telling me. Don't talk to us about citizenship. We are citizens of the country, but the problem is not religious. The problem is cultural. The problem is socio-economic, and I think that this is really important, first, consistency and not to confuse the fields. When you are dealing with social economic problems, deal with them on the socio-economic ground and not culturalize them, Islamize them, put everything in the same just because you don't have policies to combat politics. So this is something that is quite important.

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*Tariq Ramadan:*

Then the second dimension is really national a movement of local initiatives. It's really at the local level that we need local authorities to be involved with the people and not only to come to your citizens in times of crisis, but to build with them and to promote a sense of belonging, and a sense of belonging is in schools, in the curriculum. Say something positive on the people who are building this country the way you speak about history, the way you speak about legacy, the way you speak about our common roots and common values. So, an official discourse at the local and national level.

Then also something which has to do with projects and developing networks at the local level between citizens to break this intellectual, cultural and religious ghettos, and not only the black ghettos, but also the white ghettos that we have. "Ghettos" means you are closing your world. So, I think this is something that is quite important, and this is what we can expect from local authorities as national authorities. The last thing is really to decide, and it's a political decision: we need to have strategies promoting trust, and this is something that is really important. The main problem is mistrust. It's not legal. It's a problem of perception, so how could you promote something that is to trust the people, to trust your citizens? It means to talk to embassies when you talk to your citizens. They are Dutch citizens. They are not in

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touch with the local authority, and the local authority is going through the embassies to talk to them. How come? It's completely inconsistent, and you cannot get trust in that way. I think this is the main problem: that in these three dimensions I think the governments could do better.

*Interviewer:* Again, going back to the responsibility of the Muslim community, is it up to them to go and vote, to be political?

*Tariq Ramadan:* Yes, completely. Yes.

*Tariq Ramadan:* I think that there are things that we have to do from within. People are talking to us and telling us you have to integrate, and I'm saying to the Muslims this is over now. You have to integrate the society and its values. This is part of you. Everything that is good is yours; so when you find a good idea, take it for yourself. So you have a good idea, it's mine. You have a bad one, keep it for yourself. But this principle of integration is something that is the first assertive presence. Add to these two things that you have to avoid.

First one is the minority mindset. You are, yes, on the religious ground you are a minority, but we are defining you now as citizens, and there is no minority citizenship. Be part of the society as a majority and talk and speak and be committed. The second thing that we have to avoid is the victim mentality. They are victims, but we don't have to nurture the victim mentality. Yes, they are people of discrimination and marginalization. That's true, but with this you have to say, "Okay, fight for your rights. Be part of the society and just show you are here and you are not letting the people speak against you or break the laws with you not doing anything." So it's really a commitment to principles, values and rule of law.

So, with assertiveness, there's no mindset of victimhood or victim mentality. All of this is part of a presence based on this, and I would say to the Muslims, stop talking about integration. Just let the people understand. I'm advocating a past integration discourse because what I'm saying to the people, the success of integration is to stop talking about integration. As you are telling me I have to integrate, you are putting me outside. An integrated one is no longer using the concept of integration, and after four generation you are going to say to my kids, "You are a citizen with an immigrant background" the difference between the indigenous people and me is just a question of time. The indigenous are older

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immigrants.

So, these things are very important to nurture a sense of confidence. Self-confidence is the really important thing. I'm always saying to the Muslims you need four Cs. The first C is confidence. The second one is critical mind, meaning consistency, to be consistent or critical with Islam is great, not all the Muslims are great, and so you have to be critical. The third one is communication, talking to the people and to connect, to have channels of communication with the people. The fourth one is contribution, is that you have to contribute from integration to contribution. Really important here to make this happen. The fifth one is creativity. Creativity means come with new ideas, new things for the society, and the last one is contest. You have also the right to contest, and there are things that are good promote, and there are things that you find wrong, contest. This is a right, and this is human dignity as well.

*Interviewer:* But all of those are presupposed that you already have a sense of belonging -- I live here, I belong here?

*Tariq Ramadan:* Yes. It's a virtuous circle. You have to come with all these together, to avoid victim mentality. So you nurture a sense of being here to promote this. As I told you, at the same time, I'm saying this, but I have other forces at the grassroots level pushing the people to feel it's not working. "We tried our best. We went to the local authority. We talk to them, and they don't trust us. They don't want us." I'm telling the people, "Look, it's not one week. It's not two months. It's going to be long. It's your generation and the next one."

*Interviewer:* Presumably you have other forces maybe within the Muslim community who are scared of assimilation, who are scared of whether, like you said, it's the European Islam, it's a "light" Islam. How do you find the line between assimilation and integration?

*Tariq Ramadan:* I think it's to show that you are able, at the same time, to remain faithful to your religious principles and you are committed to this. At the same time you take from the surrounding culture everything that is good. This is the balance that you need to find, and it's happening now. You have millions of Muslims doing this, but some people have the wrong idea of what is religious. So, when they lose their culture they think they are losing their religion. Mainly the primal migrants and the fathers and the mothers who came with a very superficial understanding of what Islam is all

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about and some others who are having a literalist understanding of Islam. So you have culturalists who are projecting and literalists who are reducing. We are between reduction and projection.

In between you have to find your way, and this is not easy because myself, by trying to do this, I'm not choosing the easiest way. The easiest way is to live in your world and close the door and say, "That's fine. I'm protecting myself" or to lose everything and live as the others are living. To be in between means that every single step that you are trying to promote you need to have a critical mind to assess what you are doing. It's to be open, and at the same time, to be assertive. Open and assertive, meaning by this humble and ambitious, humble as to your spiritual journey and ambitious as to your social commitment. This is what I would say is my way, but from the very beginning I always said to all the people no one though this was going to be say. But I think walking in the light is never easy.

*Interviewer:* And that participating in the political system is affecting change...

*Tariq Ramadan:* Yes. That this is where we have to be. Once again, don't confuse the politics with the people. You are surrounded by people, Muslims and non-Muslims, who want the best for their society. They are committed, they have ideals, they have hopes, and they have shared values. Just find the right people to build the future and don't be misled by the wrong people who are attracting media because they are destroying while you don't attract the media because you are building. You need time to build. They don't need time to destroy. This is where you should be, and this is I think a very difficult message to be heard, but I think it's the only one.

*Interviewer:* You talked at the conference this morning about radicalization. Is radicalization a problem amongst Muslim youth in Holland, and what do you think the best way to either respond to it or prevent it?

*Tariq Ramadan:* What I was saying to the social workers this morning is that radicalization is really something that is on the margin of the Muslim communities, it's very few people. It has really nothing to do with the communities. Now, you have a gray area where some young Muslims could be attracted, and we have to ask ourselves, what are the causes? I mentioned three main causes: religious misunderstanding, political involvement in a very radical way with a very superficial understanding of what politics is all about, and the sense of belonging. If you feel that you have a sense of belonging you don't turn towards your own society saying, "You are killing our brothers who are going to kill you" because these

are your brothers. This is your society."

So, I think here we have to work on three dimensions, and I was saying to the social workers, when you deal with young people in your society you can't adjust because you don't like religion or it's not important for you. You cannot adjust just like this. You have to learn. You have to understand different trends, different understandings. So you have to show respect for this, and I was saying three main words are important: to understand what is happening, to have values, and to show respect to what the people are thinking, because in that way you can get trust with the people and then use what they have as their values to build their future. Not to use religion or to push them to understand that religion is a liability because the media coverage is picking that way, but you have, in your religion, assets and principles. Use them to be better and to be open towards the people. So, it's to understand, to value and to use in the positive way and not to stigmatize and marginalize and alienate this dimension of who they are, because at the end of the day, if they don't feel good, they will express themselves their own way.

*\*This transcript has been edited for clarity.\**