

Europe and its Muslims: Building a Common Future 1/3

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Thank you. Thank you once again for your invitation here; for giving us the opportunity to speak about the European reality, and to share views with you in Japan. I think it is really important, not only to come and import some visions about the problems, but also for us Europeans to look at what you are dealing with in Japan and Asia to try to find trends and solutions for our problems. So thank you for this invitation.

I want to thank the translators for the job they are doing because it is always difficult to translate in this way, especially when there are no papers. I am not reading from a paper. I just have notes with me. This morning, I forgot to thank them. I want to thank them before starting. I first want to go through the plan of my talk. I will begin with an introduction consisting of three points about the reality of Europe for Muslims today. This will be followed by the first part discussing the responsibilities of Muslims today when they are looking at living in Europe, and being now, Europeans. The second part will be about the important responsibilities for European societies to tackle the issue, to try to find solutions to problems, and to not promote these fractures that we can have within European society if we continue to be obsessed by the few who are destructive. We have to be aware of the millions of European Muslims who are building their presence, their contribution, and their citizenship. After the second part, there will be a short conclusion about things that we can do together, must undertake together, and try to .promote

European Muslims: Old and New Realities

For my introduction, what I want to say, in the first of the three points I want to make, is that we are dealing with a new reality. But it is in fact a new and old reality at the same time. Very often we speak about the new Muslim presence in Europe, and it is true that after the Second World War what we have seen is the reality of a new presence of Muslims. But this new presence does not preclude the old presence in Europe that dates back to the Middle Ages. It is really important to understand that this presence is a reality, was a reality, within many fields that we are studying: the legal field, the philosophical field, the scientific field. We very often forget that Islam and Muslims, the Islamic tradition, and Muslim philosophers, scientists, and thinkers

were, and are, a part of the building of this European identity we are speaking about. It is really important not to forget that.

My current focus is this new presence of Muslims that emerged between the two World Wars, and more importantly, the new presence of Muslims after the Second World War. So when we speak about immigration, and when we speak about settling in a new continent, we are speaking about a phenomenon that is quite recent, one generation. But we have not only the second generation of European Muslims, but also in some countries (particularly in the United Kingdom and France) the third, fourth and fifth generations. The problem is that it is not perceived as such. It is still as if we are speaking about people coming from abroad in the French discourse. Even in the British discourse after July 7th we were hearing, "British with an immigrant background," or "French with an immigrant background." The problem is really one of perception. If after four generations people still add "with an immigrant background," you have to ask yourself how many generations would it actually take to become a true citizen? At

the end of the day, we are all immigrants in Europe; it is really a continent of migrations. Normally after two generations we would call people citizens of a country. But with North Africans, for example, we still speak about them as being of an immigrant background, which means that their presence in Europe is still perceived as an alien reality; a foreign reality that is not really European. This is why I no longer speak about Muslims in Europe. I wrote a book 14 years ago speaking about European Muslims entitled *To be a European Muslim* that conveyed the idea that it is not proper for us to think of ourselves just as Muslims in Europe, because we are in fact European Muslims. I am a European Muslim, both born and raised in Europe. It is really important to understand this difference. It means that I am a Muslim by religion, European by culture, and Swiss by nationality. This is also the case for millions of other European citizens. In a country like Italy, however, questions about citizenship and identity are new. We can see in Italy now new questions coming from new experiences; experiences that we have already dealt with, for example, 15 or 20 years ago in France. It is new for them because the older societies and countries are not at the same level of integrating or living with this presence.

With this new presence, we have new questions - this is the second point of the introduction. New questions about, for example, living in a secular society, about citizenship, and about the rule of law. Of course in the Muslim experience these new questions pushed the Muslim scholars and Muslim communities to reread the scriptural sources. New questions mean a new reading of the sources. So there is a dialectical process between the context asking you questions and the text to which you want to remain faithful. The text should be reread in order

to come with the answers to new questions, and for every one of us dealing with an Abrahamic religion, it is the same process. It is exactly the same for the Jewish experience and it is exactly the same for the Christian experience. It is now the same for the Muslim experience with new questions, new readings, and new answers in this dialectical process between this double understanding of the text and the context.

In order to first be able to live in a new context, but also to build the future, what should be our future action as Europeans? We have this important process we must go through in the West, which is the same process that people have to go through in Asia. However there is one point we must keep in mind: there is no status quo. Do not take a picture of one specific moment of history and think that within it you will find your answers. No, things are moving very fast. This is why I do not hesitate to speak about the silent revolution in the Muslim European mind. European Muslims are dealing with new questions and they have to come with new answers. It is a silent revolution. Why is it a silent revolution? Because what is seen as the visible revolution is very often led by the people who are destructive. We are obsessed with the few and are not seeing the mainstream, the movement within the Muslim communities in the West, and in Europe in particular, where there are changes and new answers.

The third point – also very important – is that within the mainstream public Muslim discourse, there is something that is clear now: Europe is home. It is not perceived as though we are not at home. This old business of Dar al-harb (the abode of war) and Dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam) is something which is still in some discourse, but those who speak this way are on the margin of Muslim communities. The reality is that the mainstream Muslim leaders, organizations, and even citizens feel at home in Europe, and they recognize and acknowledge the fact that they are French, British, Italian, or Spanish, and that they are Europeans. So Europe is becoming home, and is home, for the great majority of Muslim citizens. What we have to understand is that this is the reality of the great majority, even though we still have waves of new immigrants coming to Europe.

When looking at the case of new immigrants, there can be two attitudes expressed by Europeans. One attitude is to understand that these people, these European Muslims at home in Europe, could help the process of integrating new immigrants. This is the natural positive attitude to have: use your Muslims to welcome the new Muslims coming in as immigrants. But there can be another attitude, one that is sometimes used out of fear. This attitude causes some to use the immigrants to cast suspicion on both residents and citizens. For example, in hospitals in France, Italy, and Switzerland, there were cases of immigrant women who did not want to be received by male doctors. The men in these cases were against this. We used this

to say, "Look, these Muslims, they do not accept our values," because one of our values is that in the case of medical treatment and doctors, one should be open to either a man or a woman. So they were using immigrants to show that Muslims cannot be integrated. It should have been the other way around. Very often we use immigrant stories to shed suspicion on the Muslim presence, whereas we should use the Muslim presence to help a better integration of immigrants. The Muslims who were here first may have another understanding of the religion, but they can help the process. We can rely on the Muslims who are here, and who have an understanding of the society, to help the new immigrants to be more integrated and to understand European culture and customs. So you have a choice of two alternatives and you have to know what you want exactly. One, do you want to build trust or two, to nurture suspicion? This is a political discussion. It is not something that is only done out of naivety or ignorance. Some want to use this to say we have a problem with the Muslim presence. So this third point of my introduction is important to understand. Europe for a great majority of .European Muslims is now home and will remain home