

# Europe and its Muslims: Building a Common Future (Japan)

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## *Multiple Identities and Muslim Responsibilities*

Moving into the main part of this lecture, I want to begin by highlighting some of the circumstances that require Muslims to be critical – self-critical – and to come with new answers. This is really essential. First, when you come to a continent, there are two things that you have to acknowledge as parts of the society you are living in.

The first is the collective memory and the second is the legal framework. It is really important to do so. The first book I wrote on this issue was *Muslims in Secular Society*. The subtitle of the book was "Responsibilities and Rights," where I deliberately placed responsibilities before rights. Your responsibility, when you are in a society, is really not to forget that you are dealing with a memory, and this memory of the people is shaping an identity and a culture. You cannot just deny this. You cannot just say to yourself "I do not care about this." Of course you have to deal with it because at the end of the day, if you want to be a part of the society, you will be a part of it not only by mastering the language, but also by having a sense of this memory, and of the collective psychology of the society coming from this memory. So it is really important. Your responsibility is also to know the institutions, and the legal framework of the country. You must respect the laws and legislations.

The first central point I want to make here is something which was not always easy to say, but is now quite unanimously acknowledged as a reality. It concerns the respect of the rule of law and the democratic process in the European countries. As the starting point of our discussion, I want to say that when you live in a country, in a democracy, a society based on rule of law, it is part of your duty as a Muslim to respect the legal framework within which you live and to abide by the law. And this is something that is really important. The fundamentals of your religion are respected when you see the two main principles: freedom of conscience and freedom of worship. If you studied all the European constitutions (when there is a constitution) or the legal frameworks in Europe, you will find that all European countries – and other Western countries, such as Canada or Australia – clearly uphold the principles of freedom of worship and freedom of conscience. Freedom of conscience is the individual right; freedom of worship is the collective right. These are two protected rights in our society, and when you are granted

these two fundamental rights, you have to respect the law of the countries you live in. In the second part we come to a discussion about identity. What is your identity? For decades Muslims were asked, "What is your identity? What are you first?" In France, for example, we still get this question. I also got this question three days ago in Italy, and the day before yesterday in Holland. In those places the people are being asked, "Who are you first?" or "What is your first identity?" Many Muslims are saying, "My identity is to be a Muslim before being a European." The way you put a question can make it a tricky one. I think that it is really important to understand this question of identity. This obsession of identity is revealing something I call an "identity crisis." In Europe, we are going through an identity crisis. How do we define our identity? If you look at the discussions you have yourselves as Japanese people in the time of globalization, you are similarly asking yourselves "what is our cultural or religious identity?" This is a global phenomenon.

So we can define ourselves in two ways. One way is to reduce our identity. A person can say he or she is only a Muslim, only a Japanese, or only a European. A person could also say "I am a Muslim first and Swiss second." I think that this way of identifying ourselves is very dangerous. One of the main challenges currently facing the Muslim community is learning how to define ourselves through multiple identities, which is not an easy task. We are however, seeing the beginnings of this process, as the great majority of the Muslims in Europe today are able to say, "I am at the same time fully European and fully Muslim," without any contradiction. At least the two dimensions are accepted. But it is not enough. I think that in the future we have to go further, and this will be a challenge. I was once discussing this in Greece with the Indian Nobel prize winner now teaching at Harvard and Cambridge, Amartya Sen. I was telling him that this question people ask me of whether I am a Muslim first or Swiss first is a stupid one, because it depends upon the context in which they are asking. When I deal with civil politics, I am Swiss, and when I speak about philosophy and the meaning of life, I am a Muslim, but the information on my passport is not related to my ideas on the meaning of life. And he had a very good response to this himself. He said, "I totally agree with that," and said, "Look, if you are a vegetarian and a poet, you can be both at the same time. When you go to eat, it is not the time to say that you are a poet. When you eat you are a vegetarian first. When it comes to a circle of poets, it is not the time to say that you are a vegetarian. At that time, you are a poet." So it depends on what you are doing. You can be something first in one field and something else first in another field.

The first step within Muslim communities is to accept that you are French and you are Muslim, and there is no contradiction. You are British, or you are Danish and there is no contradiction.

You can be both. But we have to nurture this sense of multiple identities. I say, for example when I am asked about my identity, that I am Swiss by nationality, Muslim by religion, European by culture, Egyptian by memory or heritage, universalist by principle, and more than that, I am also Moroccan by adoption. These are six different aspects of my identity. It is really important to understand this because it helps a person to be part of a pluralistic society. Unfortunately, we can reduce this. Accepting that we have multiple identities is a challenge, because we have literalist or traditionalist groups reducing our identity, telling us "you are only this; this is the only culture you have." This was the reaction I got in a discussion I had with a Muslim scholar recently in Istanbul about multiple identities. He said to me, "No, no, no, our only culture is Islam." To which I responded, "No, this is very dangerous." You understand why.

It could be dangerous because it is a reactive identity. It is not a blossoming identity.

### To Feel at Home: Nurturing a Sense of Belonging

Connected to this problem of identity is the question of our feelings of loyalty and belonging. I can say that I feel at home in Europe, but the sense of belonging is not only indicated by respect for the law. It should be nurtured by a real feeling that we are at home. This is the psychological integration, which is as necessary as legal or social integration, and should never be neglected or ignored. Look, for example, at the young people who were involved in terrorist attacks in Britain last July. They were socially integrated, but the problem was their lack of intellectual and psychological integration. They were socially very well integrated, very well educated. They were not ignorant. They were not on the margins of society. However, when you look at what they said in the video for example, you can see where there was a problem. The problem lay in the area of psychological and intimate integration. They did not feel at home, and were saying to their fellow British, "You are killing our brothers," meaning, "I am not a part of you." They framed it as us versus them. So this psychological integration involves

building a sense of belonging so Muslims can be able to say, "this is our society." Integration also involves dealing with education. There is a need for reform in Islamic education in the West. Actually, not only in the West by the way, but everywhere. But in the West, this integration of the culture of the country, integration of the language of the country, and this institutionalization of the Muslim presence, should be manifested in the future Imams raised in Europe in their teaching of European culture, and in their knowing and understanding European institutions. And it is not a question of language alone. In Holland, for example, there was a big debate about Imams speaking Dutch. That is fine for them to do so, but it is not enough. It is more than that. Real integration does not only involve knowing the language. It also involves understanding the psychology. It is to truly be coming from within, not just to

speak Dutch and yet have the mentality of someone coming from outside. I think it is really important. It is one of the challenges.

### Members of the Ummah and Citizens of a Nation: Critical Loyalty as True Loyalty

We also must discuss the question of loyalty. The question concerning loyalty is usually posed as, "Are you loyal to your country or are you loyal to the Islamic ummah?" Here we need very strong discourse arguing that loyalty is to one's principles, and a person should be with her country, when her country is right. A person should be against Muslims when Muslims are wrong. You belong to your principles and it is important for you to internalize this idea to be able to feel free to express loyalty to your country. This, however, must be qualified by the understanding that true loyalty is a critical loyalty, not a blind loyalty. It is not to say to your country, "I am with you right or wrong," or to say to Muslims, "I am with you right or wrong." No, it is to say, "I am with you when you are right, I would be against you when you are wrong." This is true loyalty. And this is the discussion I have with the British today. I am currently working with the British government in the task force against radicalization. We have been discussing the fact that a British citizen who is a Muslim has the right to dissent, and that everyone should understand that this is okay. It is something that is part of true citizenship. Part of belonging to Britain is for a citizen to be able to say to his or her government, "I do not like what you are doing in Iraq." A person's loyalty should not be put into question for this because it is, in fact, a part of loyalty. It is because a person is a British citizen that he or she has the right to say to the government, "I think this is wrong." Critical loyalty is true loyalty. But it is the same with Muslims. You should be able to say to your fellow Muslims, "I do not agree with what you are doing," in the name of critical loyalty. You should also not support Muslims right or wrong, say for example, in the case of suicide bombings or when innocent people are being killed. Say, "No, that is wrong. In the name of my religion, I am able to say that what you are doing is not Islamic. It is anti-Islamic." This critical discourse is something that is really important. One of our challenges is for each of us to have a critical mind, a self-critical mind, and self-critical approach.

### From Integration to Contribution

The fourth point I want to make here is that we must in future move from this obsession of integration, and shift forward to the highest level of integration: contribution. After four generations of hearing people say to Muslims, "You have to be integrated," we now have people in Britain and in France saying, "Look, that is enough now. We are already integrated. This is our country. We are British. We are French. Your obsession to ask us to integrate relates more to your perception, than to our situation. We are integrated, but in your mind we are still not

integrated. You have some difficulties integrating us into your intellectual landscape." And it is true that some are already integrated. However, it is really important for all citizens, including Muslim citizens, to understand that the highest level of integration is contribution. What do you give to your society? I always give one simple example with football. When you give something to your society, people do not ask you where you come from. Look at Zinedine Zidane. No one asks if he is still Algerian. He plays well and makes his team win, which gains him acceptance. You are French because you give. But when you are perceived as a problem, the first question is, "Where do you come from?" A problem is attached to its source. But in the case of a gift, the source could be forgotten because the gift is appreciated for the gift itself. Contribution to our societies is something that is really important, and once again, it is not only a religious contribution. It is a contribution to the richness of society, along with participation in, and commitment to, the society.

I want to point out something about the Muslim community before we move on. I think I have traveled to all of the European countries during the last three years and had the chance to observe the goings-on at the grassroots level because my work is mainly within academia, but at the grassroots level. I can tell you that the mainstream movement is progressing in a certain direction, but of course, it is not the only movement. We have several trends within the Muslim community. We still have people saying, "This is not our country". You have literalists and traditionalists who do not want to be involved in the society. And of course we still have people saying, "Anything European is against the Islamic tradition". But the mainstream, made up of those who feel at home in Europe, is a big part of the European reality. Once again we have to be careful in defining what is mainstream. In the mainstream, you have the practicing Muslims, you have the not-so-practicing Muslims, and you have people who are Muslims by culture. For some who live here, when you listen to what they are saying you realize that they are just building their identity within this society as citizens and not as practicing Muslims. And they too are a part of the process. They do not rely on Islam to define themselves, which is a part of the reality. In fact, it is a majority trend among the Muslims. However, care should be taken when calling others practicing Muslims or not, because it depends on what you use to measure someone's commitment to Islam. If you look at the daily prayers, you will find between 10 to 12% of Muslims praying. When it comes to Ramadan, there can be up to 60 to 70% of people fasting. Can you tell whether it is a religious commitment, family commitment, or cultural commitment? It is difficult to say, but there is a commitment. There is still a connection to .religion, even though it may be cultural or through family