The Controversial Moderate:
Tariq Ramadan’s Vision for Muslim Political Participation in Europe

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Abstract

Tariq Ramadan has been a significant figure in the debate on the presence of Muslim populations in Europe since the 1990’s. His academic writing tackles the themes of integration, belonging and participation of Muslims in the West, and particularly Europe. Ramadan does not advocate for bringing down western secularism, or waging a Jihad against the West, but argues for active Muslim citizenship, claiming that this does not come in contradiction to Islamic values. Tariq Ramadan is a controversial yet ‘moderate’ Muslim voice on the creation of a viable space for European Muslims to participate as full citizens in their society. Ramadan has faced heavy criticism from academics, neo-liberal journalists and the Muslim community, with many claiming that he hides a more seditious form of Islam under a cloak of moderation and tolerance. Political participation is the avenue that Ramadan believes will allow European Muslims to assert their full rights and responsibilities as citizens. There are limitations in Tariq Ramadan’s approach to presenting a viable future for Muslim political participation in Europe. While Ramadan’s views on the significance of Muslim political participation are fundamental to establishing a viable public space for European Muslims, there are inconsistencies in his approach that stymie his efforts to make a substantial contribution. Ramadan’s views have been shaped by both Western and Islamic scholarship, allowing him to occupy an important space in the discussion on political participation. While there is no evidence to suggest Ramadan is a ‘Terrorist in disguise’, academic critics provide important insights on the contradictions within Ramadan’s theoretical approaches to ‘Euro-Islam’. Ramadan’s ability to address the various social, political and legal constraints to citizenship for Muslims in Europe is also limited, due to his risk adverse behaviour in tackling controversial Islamic practices.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the MPhil except where indicated in the preface,

(ii) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) The thesis is less than 50,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies or appendices
Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks must go to both Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh and Professor Abdullah Saeed of the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies (NCEIS) at the University of Melbourne. Without their insight, knowledge and help, this research would not have been possible. Thanks also must go to my friends, fellow students and colleagues at NCEIS who have provided the support and humour required to finish a thesis. Finally I would like to thank my parents Brian and Anne McCarthy for their constant support throughout my time at University, and always reminding me that anything is possible.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research Question

This research will demonstrate that Tariq Ramadan holds an important role as an interlocutor between both Muslim and non-Muslim Europeans. His views on the significance of Muslim political participation within Europe are fundamental to establishing a viable public space for Muslims in Europe, and countering current negative stereotypes that impinge on the civic rights of Muslims. The research will answer the question:

*Does Tariq Ramadan adequately address constraints to the full political participation of Muslims in Europe, and do the criticisms of his approach hinder his effort in proving the compatibility between Islamic and Western values?*

The main research question will be answered through the following sub questions, to demonstrate Ramadan’s important, and often contentious role in the discourse on Muslim communities within Europe.

- What are Tariq Ramadan’s key ideas on Muslim political participation in European society?
- What are the main criticisms of Ramadan’s ideas and from which parts of society do they come from?
- What are the constraints to the realisation of full citizenship rights and responsibilities of European Muslims and how does Ramadan address these constraints?

This research focuses on Tariq Ramadan’s solutions for the future of Muslim political participation in Europe. It will examine his views on voting, and Muslim citizenship in Europe, against his upbringing, political influences, and geopolitical events such as September 11 that have affected his career and thought. It will analyse the main criticisms of Tariq Ramadan’s project for Muslim political participation from neo-
liberal, and academic circles, as well as from parts of the European Muslim community. Finally, it will identify the constraints to the realization of full citizenship rights of European Muslims, and whether Ramadan addresses these constraints effectively.

Islam in Europe – Towards recognition and inclusion

Islam is Europe’s fastest growing religion and has been an important part of the social, political and cultural fabric of Europe for centuries. The current estimated population of Muslims in the European Union is between 15-20 million, with estimates that by 2025 this figure will double.¹ Due to employment opportunities, and already established ethnic and cultural communities, the majority of Europe’s Muslims live in the largest cities, with smaller numbers living in Europe’s towns and villages. Islam’s historical background in Europe is complex, with century-old Islamic legacies that exist in Spain and the Balkans, migration from colonized North Africa, to millions of Muslim refugees who have found a home in Europe’s response to humanitarian crises across the world.

Europe, the geographical focal point of the renaissance, the enlightenment and liberal thought stands now, more than ever as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious continent, struggling to come to a consensus on a set menu of shared values and policies. In the modern era, changes in European society have changed the relationship between Islam and the West, by driving a wedge between itself, and traditional Islamic communities of the east.

European Muslim communities often experience discrimination, social marginalization and violence. This can be seen in the aftermath of the genocide of Muslims in Bosnia, increasing support for right wing political parties in central Europe and Scandinavia, as well as vocal opposition to Turkey becoming a member of the European Union. In Britain, the mainstream media has focused on Islam as the cause of the political and social repercussions of the London bombings, in which ‘home grown’ terrorists blew up a bus and three trains on the London underground on the 7th of July 2005. The media and politicians play a pivotal role in creating an open public space for European Muslims.

For many conservative politicians, the increasing presence of Muslims in Europe tests the principles of secularism and western values. This view is often tied to an understanding that the Quran compels Muslims not only to live under Sharia Law in western societies, but to impose Sharia on the societies they live in. The reality is that European Muslim communities are diverse, holding a wide range of views on the Quran and its application to living outside the Muslim world. Politicians of the European right, such as Dutch Member of Parliament Geert Wilders believe that ‘Islam is not compatible with our Western way of life. Islam is a threat to Western values’. Although their views are still in the minority opinion, politicians such as Wilders are gaining increasing support across Europe by making such declarations as ‘Our Western culture is far superior to the Islamic culture. Don't be afraid to say it. You are not a racist when you say that our own culture is better.’ Statements such as these, although still confined the periphery, do not provide optimism for the engagement or further integration of Muslims in Europe. It is therefore fundamental to explore what European Muslim communities themselves propose as practical steps for their full political participation.

Gilles Kepel describes the two sides that argue against the ability of Muslims to be true citizens of Europe as ‘the neoconservatives – hopeless dismissal, and the Islamists’ hopeful conquest’. The increase in support for far right xenophobic political parties across Europe can be compared with the views of Islamist groups, such as Hizb ut Tahrir (HT), as hurdles to the realization of full political participation. HT, although describing themselves as a political party, oppose European Muslims participating in domestic politics. This is based on the objective of ‘bringing the Muslims back to living an Islamic was of life in Dar al-Islam and in an Islamic society such that all of lifes affairs in society are administered according to the Sharia rules.’ HT has gained notoriety in the media, even though they represent a minority voice of Muslims living in Europe.

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The politics of multiculturalism are heavily contested by Right wing politicians and Islamist groups alike. Conservatives see multicultural policies to ghettoize ethnic communities, while Islamists see these policies as forms of intervention and surveillance by western governments. In Europe, the 90’s heralded a prominent focus on the policies of multicultural citizenship. Some nations, such as the United Kingdom instituted indirect policies in an attempt to ensure the rights of cultural and ethnic minorities, such as entrenching policies of multiculturalism into education. In post WWII Europe, a shift towards a human rights based approach to integrating minorities saw basic civil and political rights given to all individuals. But, as Kymlicka asserts since the end of the Cold War, ethno-cultural conflicts have become an increasing source of political violence and contention across the world. In Europe for example, between 1992 and 1995 the Bosnian war saw the murder of over 200,000 people, most of whom were Muslim. Across the globe there have also been cases of ethnic and religious division in the conflicts of Rwanda, Sudan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. In the West also, internal struggles to accommodate and integrate ethnic and religious minorities appears to be a continuing dilemma. Britain, as a country whose economic growth depended on unskilled migrant labour from commonwealth countries, continues to struggle generations later, to implement policies that befit its multicultural and multi-religious society, against the traditional religious side of British identity, particularly when it comes to its’ own Muslim communities.

The secular values of European liberalism and the ideas of critical rationality, humanism and science are challenged by the ‘new visibility’ of European Muslim communities, and questions are raised as to how secular political systems will cope with the perceived lack of distinction between public and private religion that Islam imposes. As Bhikhu Parekh notes, there is also the fear that other religious groups will pose the same risks that will see the disintegration of liberal political structures. Christianity has shaped many mechanisms within European political and social institutions, and continues to do so. Modood and Kastoyano assert that the accommodation of Muslims

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in Europe rests upon ‘pluralistic institutional integration/assimilation, rather than an appeal to a radical public/private separation in the name of secularism’.10

According to Tariq Ramadan, the ‘new visibility’ of Muslims in Europe is challenging these views of traditional European and national identity. 11 Muslim communities within Europe have begun to realize their rights and responsibilities as citizens over the past few decades while their profiles have become more public, causing fear among some sectors of society. Visible religious symbols such as the burqa or the niqab, as well as building of Islamic centres and Mosques are the most obvious signs of this new visibility, and have caused controversy in Europe and the United States. The ‘banning of the Burqa’ in France, and a national referendum to stop the building of minarets in Switzerland are just two examples of the ways in which European countries are attempting to stop visible symbols which have the potential to alter traditional fixed notions of European and national culture.

There are many views on the practical steps Muslims should take to reconcile their religious and cultural values with that of European society, in an attempt to stifle the notion that Islam and European values are inherently incompatible. While leaders such as Tariq Ramadan strive to promote the universality of the religion, the prevailing assumptions perpetuated in mainstream media are that Islam is not compatible with a functioning liberal nation state, that Muslims do not attempt to integrate into their host society, or that Muslims living in the west would prefer to live under Sharia Law. With the future of secularism and integration of ethnic minorities in Europe looking challenging, it is important to analyse the critical voices from within European Muslim communities, such as Tariq Ramadan, who strive to promote the ability for Muslims to be recognized and integrated.

Literature Review

This section will act as an assessment of the literature on political participation of Muslims in Europe, and will set the background for the research. It will demonstrate the need for further analysis of Tariq Ramadan’s contribution to the field, by assessing the

current state of Muslim political participation in Europe. It will look at research conducted by European think tanks, as well as academic literature on the public space for Muslims in Europe. Academic literature critical of Ramadan and his views on Muslim political participation will be analysed in a distinct chapter later in the research.

The ‘At home in Europe Project’ and European Union research

Political participation in democratic societies takes many forms. While the most direct and visible form of political participation is voting in national or municipal elections, attending public meetings, active participation and membership in civil society groups are also key acts of political participation. An incomplete picture on the prevalence of Muslim political participation in Europe exists, due in part to the difficulty in collecting data based on religiosity or ethnicity. However an ongoing study by the Open Society Foundation which began in 2009, is examining the level and nature of integration of Muslims in 11 cities across Europe. 12 A key part of the Open Society study focuses on the integration of Muslims into civil society, and has measured their trust in local and national political institutions. The research was undertaken by interviewing 200 local residents in each of the 11 cities. 13 The research paints a negative picture on the current state of economic, social and political inclusion of European Muslims across these cities. For example, the study found that in particular, Muslims who were not citizens but rather permanent residents in Germany and France remain politically disenfranchised due to their lack of rights in voting in municipal elections. 14 Those interviewed for the study spoke of their distrust in political institutions (at the national level more than at the local level) and high levels of distrust in national parliaments. While the research found that the number of European Muslims standing for public office is increasing, their ethnic or religious background often comes under question from constituents when they reach public office, suggesting a misunderstanding of European Muslim values. 15

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13 The 11 cities are Antwerp (Belgium), Copenhagen (Denmark), Marseille and Paris (France), Berlin and Hamburg (Germany), Amsterdam and Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Stockholm (Sweden), and Leicester and Waltham Forest–London (United Kingdom).  
The Open Society study notes some positive aspects, particularly when looking at Muslim youth across Europe. The research found that Muslim youth are generally positive about their ability to participate and enact political change.\textsuperscript{16} As many young Muslims have been born and raised in European cities, their familiarity with institutions and their citizenship rights to vote enable a more positive outlook and empowered approach to politics.

The research also identifies that Muslims are discriminated against socially, economically and politically across Europe, and offers policy makers and public officials a menu of suggestions towards remedying this. Only two of the recommendations in the Executive summary suggest engagement with Muslim communities, civil society Muslim leaders on these issues.\textsuperscript{17} This could act to perpetuate further the disengagement from political processes that the study itself attempts to highlight.

The European Union (EU) the overarching political and economic body for 27 European countries, conducts research on the social and political standing of Muslims through the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). A 2006 report titled \textit{Muslim's in Europe – Discrimination and Islamophobia} admitted that statistics on ethnic communities across Europe remain sparse, and that discrimination against Muslim communities was a real problem, and pointed to Muslim integration into the labour market as a significant issue.\textsuperscript{18} However, it appears from a literature search that the EU undertakes little research on the political participation of Muslims in Europe, and the majority of the literature that does exist, focuses on social change through education, and ending discrimination. Increased research on the political participation of European Muslims by both national governments and transnational bodies such as the European Union is pertinent to an understanding of Islam’s future interaction with the public space.

\textsuperscript{16} The Open Society Foundation, \textit{‘At home in Europe Project’}, 25.
\textsuperscript{17} The Open Society Foundation, \textit{‘At home in Europe Project’}, 25.
Academic literature on the intersection between Muslims and political participation in Britain alone is vast, with multicultural experts such as Tariq Modood, Tahir Abbas and sociologists such as John Eade having spent decades researching the behaviour of British Muslims against the background of the British class and race experience, and migration to Europe. Islam and multiculturalism is another area of enquiry that feeds into research on Muslim political participation in Europe. As Modood and Ahmad explain in the British context, the historical ethnic makeup of British society and the emergence of state managed multiculturalism over the past 20 years have been influential in developing the public space for Muslim voters.\footnote{Tariq Modood and Ahmad Fauzia “British Muslim Perspectives on Multiculturalism.” Theory Culture Society 24,2 (2007): 187.} Despite the introduction of a multicultural policy managed by the state in Britain, as well as the aspiration of the majority of Britons to embrace their diverse society, the impact of globalisation on the traditional notion of ‘Britishness’ and events such as September 11 and the London bombings, have made it difficult for Muslims in particular to be trusted as ‘loyal’ British citizens.\footnote{Modood and Ahmad, ‘British Muslim Perspectives on Multiculturalism’, 188.} Other European nations have not implemented entrenched policies of multiculturalism.

Both Gilles Kepel and Bassam Tibi are scholars of relevance to this research on Muslim political participation in Europe. Both Kepel and Tibi have written extensively on the emergence of the public space for Muslims in Europe, and have been critical of Tariq Ramadan’s approach to the concept of identity formation for European Muslims. Middle East scholar Gilles Kepel, is critical of the multicultural policies implemented by European governments, and sees them as directly responsible for ‘groups to develop totally separate identities from other groups, and allowed those identities to prevail over shared values, morals and way of life.’\footnote{Kepel, ‘Beyond Terror and Martyrdom’,196.} This ‘ghettoisation’ of Muslim communities, as Kepel sees it, has allowed negativity towards Muslim communities to prevail, leading to increased support for right-wing conservative parties across Europe. Kepel notes that the lack of focus on ‘common national identity’ and promoting shared values between the ‘native’ populations and Muslim immigrants and Muslim citizens to be the missing

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\footnote{Tariq Modood and Ahmad Fauzia “British Muslim Perspectives on Multiculturalism.” Theory Culture Society 24,2 (2007): 187.}
\footnote{Modood and Ahmad, ‘British Muslim Perspectives on Multiculturalism’, 188.}
\footnote{Kepel, ‘Beyond Terror and Martyrdom’,196.}
link to cohesive communities.\textsuperscript{22} This isolation often sees Muslim communities becoming removed from social, economic and political participation in their own societies. Disenfranchised populations generally see little point in participating in political processes, and distrust political organisations. Kepel sees Tariq Ramadan as ‘one of the most visible participants’ in attempting to reconcile differences between the British government and its Muslim population after the London bombings. However, he is critical of the fact that Ramadan fails to acknowledge the perceived failure of the multicultural model.\textsuperscript{23}

Bassam Tibi has written prolifically on European Islam, and was responsible for coining the term ‘Euro-Islam’. In Tibi’s view Islam should be europeanised – Europe should not be Islamised. The concept of Euro-Islam has been derived from a similar look at Islam in other continents outside of its traditional Arab origins, particularly in Africa, where Tibi identified the Africanisation of Islam in Senegal.\textsuperscript{24}

Tibi looks outside of Europe to see how other societies have welcomed Muslim communities, by asking the question ‘How can we make Islam European in Europe, in the way that it has become African in Senegal and South East Asian in Indonesia?’\textsuperscript{25} Tibi’s main argument is that if a secular form of European Islam is ‘accepted by both Europeans and Muslims, then both parties may live together in peace.’\textsuperscript{26} This positive view acknowledges traditional secular institutions within Europe, and does not suggest that Muslims cannot realise their rights within Europe. Tibi accuses Ramadan of pursuing the Islamization of Europe, driven by the history of Islamic imperialism or expansion.\textsuperscript{27}

Both Kepel and Tibi have written critical analysis of Tariq Ramadan’s ideas for Muslim communities in Europe. These criticisms will be analysed in further detail in chapter three, in comparison to other critics such as academics Timothy Garton Ash and Ian Buruma, as well as journalists Caroline Fourrest and Paul Berman.

\textsuperscript{22} Kepel, ‘Beyond Terror and Martyrdom’, 196.
\textsuperscript{23} Kepel, ‘Beyond Terror and Martyrdom’, 191.
\textsuperscript{24} Bassam Tibi, ‘Europeanisation, not Islamisation’, Last modified 22 March 200, \url{http://www.signandsight.com/features/1258.html}
\textsuperscript{25} Bassam Tibi, ‘Europeanisation, not Islamisation’, Last modified 22 March 200, \url{http://www.signandsight.com/features/1258.html}
\textsuperscript{27} Tibi, ‘Euro-Islam’, 160.
Multicultural citizenship and rights

Canadian academic Will Kymlicka’s work focuses on the rights of minority groups within increasingly diversity of societies. His book, ‘Multicultural Citizenship – A liberal theory of minority rights’ published in 1996, tackles the idea that, despite hundreds of years of ethnic diversity across the world ‘most Western political theorists have operated with an idealized model of the polis in which fellow citizens share a common descent, language, and culture.’ 28 While political theorists must acknowledge the diverse nature of societies, the rights of migrant, ethnic minorities and indigenous people within societies cannot come under one simple policy. From a western liberal position, Kymlicka believes that the ‘demands of ethnic and national groups are (by and large) consistent with the liberal principles of individual freedom and justice’. 29 In this sense, Kymlicka and Ramadan share similar thoughts on the rights of minorities in Western liberal societies, while acknowledging the challenges that exist to realising the public space.

Tariq Ramadan – The subject in question

Tariq Ramadan has been an important figure in the debate on the presence of Muslim populations in Europe since the 1990’s. His academic writing tackles themes surrounding integration, belonging and participation of Muslims in the West, and particularly Europe. Ramadan does not advocate for bringing down western secularism, or waging a Jihad against the West. He argues for active Muslim citizenship in Europe, proclaiming that this does not come in contradiction to Islamic values. The fundamental basis for this is the idea of universalism. Ramadan believes that there is compatibility between the two, which allows Muslims to make a positive contribution to their societies – political participation is the avenue towards this positive contribution. Ramadan is a dynamic force within the discourse on Islam in Europe, well versed in western political thought and particularly media savvy, making his views accessible to both Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe. He has made a substantial contribution to the dialogue between Islam and Europe, and the controversy surrounding the integrity of his views, makes him a political figure of primary importance to the wider discussion.

29 Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship,193.
of Islam’s place in European politics. However, the current political climate of fear that surrounds Muslim communities in western countries, often called Islamophobia, is prohibiting Muslims from the same rights as non-Muslim citizens in these countries.

**Research methodology**

The thesis acts as a critical analysis of Ramadan’s contribution to the discourse on Islam in Europe, through the lens of Muslim political participation. It does so by focussing on the development of Ramadan’s key ideas on Muslim political integration, analysing criticism from different parts of society, and assessing Ramadan’s response to the constraints to European Muslim communities realising their own citizenship rights. As Ramadan is a citizen of Europe, and his work focuses predominantly on European Islam, Europe has been chosen as a geographic focal point for this research. Various political decisions, such as banning the building of Minarets in Switzerland, and criminalising Islamic dress in France, have raised important questions on the role of religion in the public space. The research is primarily literature based, focussing on Ramadan’s published books, opinion articles and writing in English. Ramadan’s programme ‘Islam and Life’ on Iranian Press TV, is also utilised to follow the development and recurring themes in Ramadan’s ideas within European political environment.

**Structure of the Thesis**

Following from the introduction, which presents a background to and relevance of a study on Tariq Ramadan, the research will be presented in three main chapters to address the main research question:

*Does Tariq Ramadan adequately address constraints to the full political participation of Muslims in Europe, and do the criticisms of his approach hinder his effort in proving the compatibility between Islamic and Western values?*

These chapters focus on the development of Ramadan’s key ideas on political participation, the major criticisms of these ideas, and an analysis of the constraints to actualisation through the lens of citizenship rights and responsibility.
Chapter two will look at the key influences on the development of Ramadan’s thought, and summarize his views on Muslim participation in the European political sphere by focussing on the universalism Ramadan sees to exist within Islamic values. His family history has been important in shaping his views on political participation, and the relationship he sees between Islam and western democratic processes. His grandfather Hassan al Banna, and his father Said Ramadan influences will be analysed here, along with the fact that Ramadan was born and raised as a Muslim in Europe and is a European citizen. His political activism at a young age and influences outside of the Islamic frame of reference will also be discussed to set the scene for the development of Ramadan’s thoughts on political participation. Ramadan’s view on the ‘universalism of Islam’ will be the starting point to a discussion on his focus on political participation of European Muslims. The events that followed September 11 were particularly significant in Ramadan’s career and development of his thought in focusing his views on the democratic participation of Muslims. Ramadan was personally affected by various policies that he saw to have restricted the rights and freedoms of the Muslim minority during the US led ‘war on terror’. The chapter will summarize Ramadan’s key views on political participation of Muslims from his key publications, interviews and his weekly show *Islam and Life*, featured on Iranian Press TV.

Chapter three will look at criticisms of Ramadan’s views on the political participation of Muslims in detail. Firstly it will analyse the contribution of Paul Berman and Caroline Fourest - journalists who attack Ramadan’s ideas on the basis of political Islam, branding him an Islamist and not the moderate and reformer that he claims to be. This section examines Berman and Fourest’s claims, in comparison with Ramadan’s key ideas on political participation as described in chapter two.

Bassam Tibi also uses the term Euro-Islam, and his interpretation of this concept and its meaning for the political participation of Muslims in Europe comes in stark contrast to that of Ramadan. Tibi believes in the ‘Europeanization of Islam’, while stating that Ramadan’s project is to ‘Islamise Europe’. An analysis in the difference between the two scholars will be important to a broader understanding of Ramadan’s ideas.
Ramadan also has critics from within the Muslim community. An analysis of these will provide a cohesive picture of Ramadan’s influence on, and reaction from the Muslim community, illustrating the diversity of opinion within it. As Ramadan states his project for Islam in the West to have a reformist agenda, there are clear critics from within the Muslim community, particularly those groups coming from Salafi Literalism, Scholastic Traditionalist tenets. This section will look at Hizb ut Tahrir’s anti-voting stance and examine the differences between their own and Ramadan’s thought, while acknowledging their focus on political engagement for western Muslims outside of voting. Interestingly, while Hizb ut Tahrir claim they are a political party they dissuade western Muslims from participating in democratic elections.

Chapter four will look at citizenship, the rights and responsibilities and the constraints to European Muslim communities realising their full citizenship rights in the current political environment. It will begin by looking at the Islamic concept of the *umma*. Ramadan believes that the notion of the *umma*, the global community of faith, is an integral part of identity formation for Muslims living in the West. As Ramadan notes ‘All Muslims are individually invested with the common responsibility of bearing witness to the message before the whole of human kind’.

Finally, it will look at Ramadan’s warning for Muslims not to be blind to the ‘vote seeking behavior’ of politicians in both national and municipal elections. The section will look at Ramadan’s key ideas on voting decisions, the importance of the *umma*, and the national interest in forming these decisions and how Ramadan does not see the relationship between collective identity and individual identity in political participation as a constraint.

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30 Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 90.
31 Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 154.
Summary

This research will argue that assessing the development of Ramadan’s ideas on the political participation of Muslims in Europe, considering the main criticisms of his ideas along with his response to the constraints to full political participation of Muslims, is necessary to an understanding of the influence of leaders in the European Muslim community to inspire political participation. Ramadan holds an important space as an interlocutor between academic, government and community groups in Europe (both Muslim and non-Muslim) and due to his popularity holds a public profile that is worthy of this analysis.

Given the increasing Muslim population in Europe, against the backdrop of rising popularity of anti-immigration politics, the future of the public space for Muslims in Europe is becoming increasingly complex, and requires a great deal of further analysis and discussion. The European Muslim community is ethnically and culturally diverse, and it is fundamental that the Muslim community, European governments and the wider society, acknowledge the contribution Muslim have made to the development of European economy and society.
CHAPTER TWO: TARIQ RAMADAN – DEVELOPMENT OF KEY IDEAS

My aim is to show, in theory and practice, that one can be both fully Muslim and Western and that beyond our different affiliations we share many common principles and values through which it is possible to “live together” within contemporary, Pluralistic, multicultural societies.

(What I Believe, Oxford University Press, 2010)

Introduction

This chapter will look at the key influences on the development of Ramadan’s thought, and summarize his views on Muslim participation in the European political sphere by focusing on the importance that Ramadan places on the universalism within the Islamic faith. Ramadan’s family history has been important in shaping his views on political participation. Hassan al Banna and his father Said Ramadan’s influences have been central in Ramadan’s cultivation of a public profile, but the research will argue that Ramadan’s views are markedly different to that of his grandfather in particular. This has much to do with the fact that Ramadan was born and raised as a Muslim in Europe, and works in a socially and politically different environment to Hassan al Banna. Ramadan’s political activism at a young age and influences outside of Islam will also be discussed to set the scene for the development of Ramadan’s thoughts on political participation. The chapter will move to summarizing Ramadan’s key thoughts on the need for Muslim political participation and integration in Europe. Ramadan’s belief is that the universal nature of Islam allows there to be no contradiction between Islamic and Western values, and therefore there is no reason that Muslims should not be able participate fully in politics at all levels.

The research argues that certain geo-political events have not changed Ramadan’s fundamental views on political participation, however various incidents - in particular his banning from the USA in 2006 – led to an increase in his public profile and due to this experience, his views on political participation have become linked more directly to
the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, through his questioning of securitisation of Muslim communities in the west after the events of September 11.

**History and Influences – A European, A Muslim, An Egyptian**

Tariq Ramadan was born in Switzerland in 1962. The year before his birth, his father Said Ramadan founded the Islamic centre in Geneva (*Centre Islamique de Genève*) or ‘The Little Mosque’.

32 This centre would act as an important part of Ramadan's upbringing, and his career trajectory as a Muslim leader, as his father Said was an important figure in the Muslim community in Geneva. Ramadan’s family moved from Geneva to Lyon during his young adult life.

Tariq Ramadan’s major influences were not confined to the Muslim political or theological ones ingrained in him by his father Said or his maternal grandfather, Hassan al Banna, founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Ramadan lists some of his key influences as leaders in social justice, communitarian and solidarity movements such as Buddhist leader the Dalai Lama, and Catholic leader Dom Helder Camara. These people have influenced not only the content of Ramadan’s view on Islam in the West, but also in his approach as a leader that attempts to transcend cultural or religious boundaries, and, as he notes, ‘engage in that process of mediation between universes of reference, culture and religion’. 33 Ramadan sees the influence of these two religious leaders and in particular, their focus on inter-faith dialogue as a driving force behind his mission for justice and solidarity. 34

Ramadan spent many years in Egypt fervently studying Islamic Theology, the *sunnah* and *hadith* but has also studied aspects of Western Philosophy, which has given him the ability to participate in the discourses on both areas. He completed his Masters dissertation on the notion of suffering in the work of Freiderich Nietzsche, and his doctoral studies again focused on Nietzsche, with a dissertation titled *Nietzsche as a Historian of Philosophy*. His academic focus on western philosophy has shaped the

32 The centre is currently run by Tariq’s brother, Hani, who has also been accused of being a ‘hardline Muslim’ and having links to terrorist groups by a number of Tariq Ramadan’s detractors.
Ramadan’s project for bringing together western Muslim sphere’s of identity has been inspired by geo-political events that occurred across the Muslim world from the late 1970’s onwards, such as the Iranian revolution in 1979, which is widely perceived to have catapulted the political face of Islam into the international spotlight. The effects of the Iranian revolution were felt outside of the Middle East, in the European social and political sphere when Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeni placed a fatwa against Salman Rushdie’s ‘Satanic Verses’ in February 1989. The fatwa is seen as an influential episode in creating the rift between ‘Islam and the West’. Events such as the Gulf War in the 1990’s, the increasing migration of Muslim populations from areas of conflict in Africa and the Middle East to parts of Europe and the United States, and debates surrounding the headscarf and public displays of religion in France, motivated Ramadan to take both his Islamic culture and heritage, and his European citizenship together into the public space. Ramadan sees the events between 1989 and 1999 to have driven him to engage in what he already considered a major challenge for the future: ‘building bridges, explaining Islam and making it better understood, both among Muslims and in the West’. While Ramadan grew up during a time of major political change, and these events and leaders stimulated his call to action, his family background is of key significance to understanding how he became the Muslim leader that he is today.

**The Muslim Brotherhood & Hassan al Banna**

Ramadan’s maternal grandfather Hassan al Banna was the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, giving Ramadan a place within the Islamic reformation. Al Banna is seen by many as an important figure in the post colonial modernization of Egypt. Al banna is described as anything from a hero, to a terrorist, and was assassinated in 1949, due to the contention surrounding his political motives. Al Banna was a teacher and was primarily concerned with the propagation of Islam through education. Ramadan’s critics focus heavily upon the influence Hassan al Banna has had on the trajectory of his academic life, and life as a leader in the European Muslim community. While it must be

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Acknowledged that Ramadan has been influenced by his grandfather, over-emphasizing this influence acts to seriously confuse Ramadan’s views on the Muslim political participation in Europe. This comparison is often used by authors such as Paul Berman to link Ramadan to more sinister or violent motives, but does not take into account the different historical, political and cultural contexts that al Banna and Ramadan have operated within.

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) was founded around the time of the abolition of the Ottoman Empire in 1924, which fuelled some Egyptians to push for the faith to ‘reclaim its political dimension’. The MB thrived in the Egyptian post-colonial environment, which had left behind a British influenced democratic constitution the members of the MB wanted to abolish. The MB believed that Islam contained its own political tools to be utilized in the Egyptian context, and thus did not require a western constitution.

According to Ramadan, Hassan al Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1920’s, based on a resistance to the British presence in Egypt and impending colonization. In an interview conducted at the University of California, Berkley in 2010, Ramadan professes his belief that al Banna’s Muslim Brotherhood was inherently non-violent, and it was not until after his assassination in 1948, and the subsequent repression of the MB by Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser, that the process of radicalization and splintering occurred. In a February 2011 opinion piece in the New York Times, Ramadan further reiterates his thoughts on the formation and ideology of the current Muslim Brotherhood, in an attempt to distance al Banna from its’ more radical manifestations:

‘In the West, we have come to expect superficial analyses of political Islam in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. However, not only is Islamism a mosaic of widely differing trends and factions, but its many different facets have emerged over time and in response to historical shifts’.

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38 In a 2010 ‘Conversations with History’ interview at the University of California Berkley (http://conversations.berkeley.edu/) Ramadan is candid in reviewing the non-Muslim influences in his political and social values and ethics earlier in his life. He notes that his influences have almost all been part of a religious resistance and social justice movements.
Here, Ramadan criticises those analysts who attempt to prove that the Muslim Brotherhood was a dangerous actor in the formation of a new Egyptian Government. Islamism, the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood at the movement’s inception, has been changed over time by various members’ extraditions to countries such as Saudi Arabia, where literalist tenets of the Quran have informed new and more radical interpretations of Islamism.\footnote{Ramadan, \textit{Whither the Muslim Brotherhood}?} It is not surprising, given his grandfathers public influence on the changes in politics and democracy in Egypt, that Ramadan has forged a career as a change maker and reformer of Islam in the west.

In two accounts where Ramadan speaks of his grandfather, as well as in his more personal publication ‘What I believe’, he does acknowledge the influence that Hassan al Banna has had on his academic and spiritual trajectory as well as his career as a public figure. Ramadan has been heavily influenced by the principles and ethics of justice and resistance, which were also key components of the struggle of the Muslim Brotherhood in the postcolonial context of Egypt. While there are similarities in the ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood and Ramadan’s proposal for a European Islam - in joining faith and reason, as well as modernity and traditional tenets of Islam, Ramadan now works in a completely different geographical, and political landscape to that of his grandfather, and his critics often fail to take this, and many other principles of Ramadan adheres to into account. This will be discussed in detail in chapter three. It must be noted that Al-Banna was working on the Muslim problem as a separate entity against the colonial West; he was critical of weak Muslim leaders for not representing the interests of the population in the face of European colonisation. In contrast Ramadan has been writing about the Muslim problem within the West and integration. This is a significant distinction that has taken Ramadan beyond the classical division of the \textit{darul Islam} (abode of Islam)/\textit{ dar-alharb} (abode of disbelief) dichotomy. While the influence of al Banna on Ramadan cannot be discounted, to compare Ramadan and his grandfather directly, as some critics do, is to take a one dimensional view of Ramadan and the current political environment he is operating within.
Said Ramadan

It is not only Tariq Ramadan’s maternal grandfather who has been an influential thinker on political Islam. Tariq’s father, Said can be seen as an important figure in the development of Ramadan’s world view, and his role as a European Muslim leader. Said Ramadan was involved in the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood, editing their political publications and after al Banna’s assassination, Said Ramadan published his own magazine *al-Muslimun*. After the Egyptian government crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, Said fled across the Arab world, finally making a home with his wife, the eldest daughter of al Banna, in Geneva.41 He restarted *al-Muslimun* magazine and founded the *Centre Islamique de Genève*, which to this day continues to serve as an important mosque to the increasing Muslim community in Geneva. He passed away in 1995, leaving Tariq and his older brother Hani with a legacy of Muslim political thought and leadership that was grounded in both the Muslim and Western world. 42

The difference in the rhetoric and approach taken by Ramadan, his grandfather and father, have much to do with their respective citizenships, as much as they have to do with the importance all three men place on the Islamic faith within the development of their ethics and identity. As a European citizen, Tariq Ramadan is able to face the European audiences, general public, politicians and critics as an equal. His father and his grandfather, as Egyptian citizens, working in a different period of history, struggled to gain the support of their European counterparts without suspicion. As their ideologies were, at the time, seen not to fit within the current discourse on Muslim space within liberal western societies. However, given the increased Muslim population in Europe, and the increased discussion on the rights of citizenship of Europe’s minorities, Tariq Ramadan has found a political and social arena in which he can promote his ideas on Muslim political participation.

The Principles of universalism in political participation

In all of his written work, Ramadan reinforces the ideas that universal values are at the core of the theory that Islam is fundamentally compatible with, and operational within

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the confines of ‘European Values’. Ramadan’s focus on universalism is the key to understanding the importance he places on political participation of Muslims in the West. If Islamic values are universal, and can develop and function within western societies and democracies, there is no contradiction that denies European Muslim’s the right to political participation. Ramadan is not convinced that Islamic scholars and also Western scholars recognize the universalism within Islam:

‘One of the aspects of the crisis and of the short comings that can be observed today in the Islamic Universe of reference, always with the same reflexes of defensive formalism as obsessed with otherness, whereas what should be initiated is a confident, universalistic reform movement, which is both wholly inclusive and positively assertive.’\(^{43}\)

Critics, such as Bassam Tibi note the danger in Ramadan’s assertions on Universalism, as they appear ‘expansionist’ in nature. This gives rise to the idea that Ramadan’s intention is the ‘Islamisation of Europe’. Ramadan is wary of this idea and states that ‘In order to ward off the ‘necessarily expansionist’ universality of Islam, either Islam must be refused its claim to universality or Muslims must be pressed to accept this exercise in wholesale relativisation.’\(^{44}\)

Slovenian Philosopher, Slavoj Zizek, in discussion with Tariq Ramadan on Al Jazeera, summed up the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings of early 2011 by saying ‘here we have direct proof that freedom is universal, and proof against the cynical idea that somehow Muslims prefer some kind of religiously fundamentalist theocracy… what is happening in Tunisia and Egypt is precisely this universal revolution of dignity, human rights and economic justice’.\(^{45}\) Ramadan agrees with Zizek’s notion, by saying that the West must allow the universalism that it espouses within democracy to be fully realized by Muslims – in both Muslim majority countries, and in the West.\(^{46}\)

\(^{43}\) Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform – Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 274.


In his book, *Radical Reform*, Ramadan suggests a complex revisiting of the Islamic texts, and a rigorous reinterpretation of these texts so that they express a ‘deep reverence of the heart and mind toward nature, societies and cultures through all time and in all diversity’. According to Ramadan, Muslims must rethink the way in which Islamic Law is applied to their identity, and formation of their ethical world view. This allows Ramadan to compare Islamic ethics to Western Ethics, or almost remove the Islamic components of his ethical world view, further propagating a universalism within the Islamic faith.

‘The return to goals and higher objectives, requires us to approach the issue of the way and of the laws from a necessarily more comprehensive standpoint….principles such as peoples maslakah, respect for life, peace, dignity, welfare, knowledge equality, freedom, justice and solidarity, which constitute the fundamentals of Islamic ethics.’

In a New York Law School Research paper, Andrew March suggests that this idea removes Law from Islam, by saying Ramadan’s ‘views and emphases are not necessarily what an average, moderately traditionalist jurist-scholar might come up with, but nor does Ramadan go out of his way to single out widely –held juridical positions for rebuke and rejection. For that matter, nor does he go out of his way to elaborate what is particularly Islamic about his ethical vision, beyond references to connecting human action with the eternal and the ‘universal’.

When applied to political participation, Ramadan’s point is to show that an Islamic world view – one that is informed by religion, and holds universal values at its core, can adapt to a certain social and political situation, be a part of civil society and be a positive aspect to political participation. Ramadan addresses, although not diligently enough according to March’s observations, the idea that his universalism sounds expansionist. This creates the fear that his critics have about his mission for the Islamisation of Europe, and is detrimental to his self professed moderate approach.

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Ramadan believes that universalism also means acknowledging the roots in an individual’s ethics that are different. Islam’s universalism is often illustrated by its adaptability and interface with different cultural settings and faiths, particularly when looking at the religions migration to parts of Southern and western Asia as well as the Western world.

**Tariq Ramadan - What political participation means for European Muslims?**

Ramadan sees Muslim political participation in Europe to be the key to integration in social and economic spheres. He has written extensively on the subject, with ‘Western Muslims and the Future of Islam’, ‘Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity’ and ‘What I Believe’, providing the key information on what Ramadan believes to be the basics of political involvement. More recently, his weekly show *Islam and Life* on the Iranian state funded Press TV, has provided Ramadan with an opportunity to voice his opinion on the importance of political participation, by responding to events such as the 2010 British Election. He has used, albeit controversially, *Islam and Life* to promote the British elections and what he sees as the Muslim communities involvement in these. While the barriers to this political participation will be discussed in the next two chapters, a summary of Ramadan’s key ideas on political participation is necessary here in conjunction with the key influences to the development of Ramadan’s world view by looking at the political nature of his father and grandfather, and demonstrating the differences within their thought.

**Challenges – Islam in the democratic process**

Ramadan sees the initial challenge associated with Muslim political participation in Europe to be linked to the Islamic sources and scripture. Historical principles have been applied to Islam as a majority religion, while the minority nature of political involvement in western liberal democracies is relatively undiscovered.\(^{50}\) Hence Ramadan’s emphasis on the importance of enquiry in this area. There are various scriptural reflections which Muslim communities of the literalist and traditionalist schools of Islamic thought, believe to come into contradiction with political life in the

\(^{50}\) Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 158.
Ramadan notes that the Ulama ‘have not completely come to terms with the idea that Muslims are at home and must live with this reality’. 51 Ramadan states that in a literalist or traditionalist interpretation of the Quran, political participation comes in opposition to Islamic core beliefs and values. He refers to lines ‘There are no elections in Islam’, and ‘a Muslim can give allegiance only to a Muslim and must otherwise abstain from all political involvement’, to demonstrate this. 52 Ramadan heavily refutes these notions, and provides clarification for political involvement in democracy, by acknowledging that there is a general confusion from both Muslims and non-Muslims as to the role of Islam in political participation. He notes:

Some Muslims reject the word “democracy” because it is a part of Western history and also because ‘it is not found in the Quran’. Similarly, some Western intellectuals have only a very vague notion of the Islamic concept of shura. 53

In 2010 on the Australian television show Insight broadcast on the SBS, title ‘Banning the Burqa’, Ramadan faced French Member of Parliament Jacques Myrad, who was a key figure in pushing for the burqa ban in France. Ramadan states:

The real problem is this one - the new visibility of western Muslims in western society is a problem for some politicians and some trends within the society, and this is what we have to talk about. This new visibility is not a threat for the West it is just the reality of Muslims living in this country. 54

Ramadan’s argument is that various politicians in France are using the traditional notions of secularism as a mechanism to further impinge on the increasing presence of the French Muslim communities. Here, Ramadan attempts to show that the traditional notion of western secular democracy must be challenged, just as much as traditional notions of Islam and politics. This introduces Ramadan’s idea of ‘Euro-Islam’ to the discourse on Muslim political participation. Bassam Tibi criticises Ramadan on this very issue, stating that Ramadan is attempting to ‘Islamicise Europe’ through statements such as this. This argument will be developed further in Chapter Three.

52 Ramadan, Western Muslims, 159.
53 Ramadan, Islam, the West and the challenges of Modernity, 76.
Ramadan believes that the way for European Muslims to maneuver the scriptures, and participate actively in their society is to change their ‘frame of reference’. While this notion may not be ideal according to the Quran, as Ramadan notes ‘We find in the works of specialists in the foundations of law and jurisprudence a series of rules that stress not the character of action itself, but the objective conditions that lead to encourage it’. Ramadan believes that Muslims should read the reality of their own world that is situated in the western democratic tradition, and develop a character of actions that are related to this, and their values as a Muslim. The key here is adaptation to one’s surrounding, which is made possible by the universal nature of Islam. Ramadan notes the great responsibility Muslims face in the current political context. ‘To remain Muslim in the West is a test of faith, of conscience, and of intelligence’. Perhaps one of Ramadan’s most encompassing quotes, one he repeats often in books and in public appearances, is the ability for Muslims to engage their spheres of identity ‘I am Swiss by nationality, Egyptian by culture and Muslim by religion’.

Ramadan sees no confrontation between these three key identity markers and his ability to function as a European citizen. Ramadan brings in the complexity of identity to the forefront in his views on political participation, and also asserts that the Islamic texts do not restrict political involvement. ‘It is necessary to be socially and politically active in the West by trying to bear witness to one’s spirituality and, essentially, by adapting one’s presence to one’s ethics.’

The importance of informed politics

Ramadan’s views on the formation of one’s political values as they apply to the notion of citizenship will be discovered further in Chapter four, but it is important to note here that while Ramadan believes in the opportunity democracy affords Muslims; he is often highly sceptical of it. ‘In the end, it must be clear, whatever the nature of our civic or political involvement, that one is not compelled to follow all the chosen views of a party, an elected representative, or even a population at large.’ Ramadan places a

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strong emphasis on political education, and has been involved in promoting Muslim community organizations efforts to educate and inform Muslim populations on voting, particularly in the British context.

Since 2009 Tariq Ramadan has hosted a programme on Press TV, titled *Islam and Life*. The weekly show, filmed at Press TV’s London headquarters, features local Muslim and non-Muslim leaders, activists and politicians, discussing a weekly topic pertinent to Muslims living in the western world. As website claims it is 'A weekly show presented by Tariq Ramadan on the world's fastest growing religion and the daily challenges faced by its followers especially in the West.' 60 Press TV is an Iranian state funded and run by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), online English language website and satellite television network, with 24 hour news, weekly programming and documentaries. Press TV was launched in 2007, around the time that the United States government first accused Iran of having a clandestine nuclear weapons programme. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad opened Press TV, stating that station will be "Broadcasting the truth immediately, providing precise analysis and exposing the plots of propaganda networks of the enemy are among your duties." 61 Given Iran’s history of closed press freedom, Press TV contributes to the English language media. The political nature of the channel, coupled with Iran’s current standing the in international politics has meant trouble for Ramadan’s academic pursuits.

The topics are linked to current political or social issues facing Muslims, and usually placed in the British context, although themes appeal to Muslims living across Europe. In the months prior to the British general election in 2010, the programme covered themes ‘Islam and Democracy: Does the Muslim vote in Britain count?’ and ‘How can Muslims increase their Political Representation?’ These programmes allow Ramadan to engage in current issues with influential Muslim leaders, as well as spiritual and religious leaders from other faiths. The topics are general enough to relate to both pious and secular Muslims and also non-Muslims. The message of these programmes is to illustrate pragmatic ways in which Muslims can engage and participate in western secular democracies.

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September 11, the War on Terror and political participation

Ramadan has been critical of western intervention and foreign policy in the Middle East since the ‘War on Terror’ began, in the wake of the bombing of the twin towers on September 11 2001. This event is perceived to have driven a wedge between the Muslim world and the West, and has had serious ongoing implications for Muslims living in Europe and across the globe. As Ramadan has said, the rhetoric of the Bush administration to the international community in the aftermath was divisive; ‘President George W. Bush gave American citizens, especially Muslims, a choice. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists’. 62 Ramadan himself was directly affected by the policies implemented by the government of the United States in the aftermath of September 11, and the restriction on his rights and freedoms have seen him focus more on political participation through the lens of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. While Ramadan’s key ideas on citizenship rights of Muslims will be discussed further in chapter four, here Ramadan’s own experience with the limitations of these rights will be explored. This adds to further explaining the development of Ramadan’s thought on Muslim political participation, and further demonstrates the important role that he plays in the discourse.

In 2004, the United States government revoked Ramadan’s US Visa, denying his tenure at Notre Dame University. Ramadan had been offered a role at the University’s Institute of International Peace Studies – the Kroc Institute. Just nine days before this, Ramadan had prepared to move his family to Indiana to begin the position, his visa was revoked. The State department used a clause in the Patriots Act, claiming that Ramadan had endorsed terrorism by funding a terrorist organization through donations to a Swiss Charity with alleged ties to Hamas. 63 Ramadan had to turn down the role, but would not stop fighting this refusal to enter the United States for another 6 years, and continued to criticize the Bush Administration, its securitization of the Muslim community, and foreign policies in the aftermath of September 11.

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63 Ramadan, *What I believe*, 64.
It was during Ramadan's ban from the United States that he cultivated his international profile, and began to focus on citizenship rights and freedoms and the role they played in political participation. He leveraged the negative press surrounding his visa refusal to his advantage. Ramadan notes in a Newsweek article from 2010:

‘By creating divisions and disregarding its values, even in the name of security, America tells the world that it is frightened and unstable—above all, vulnerable. In the long term, it also reinforces the religious, cultural, and social isolation of minority groups, encouraging the very kind of disloyalty that these ideological exclusions are meant to prevent.’

Here it is clear that Ramadan sees his ban from the United States as a symbolic gesture, indicative of an administration that felt unstable and threatened by the presence of minority groups within society, in this case, Islamic communities in particular. He also notes the forced social isolation that comes with such divisive politics in fact contributes to the radicalization that the government is trying to curtail.

In January 2010, PEN America and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), won a Supreme Court case against what they deemed as ‘intellectual exclusionism’, which saw the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reversed Ramadan’s ban, allowing him to enter the country. On his return visit to the United States, Ramadan spoke on Secularism, Islam and Democracy with a panel of other academics and researchers in this field. In his talk he launched a quote which he has used in several public appearances and publications since this time: ‘I am European by culture, Swiss by nationality, Muslim by religion, and all of this is fine. There is no contradiction’.

This quote encompasses the universalism and compatibility with democratic processes which Ramadan has constantly advocated for, but he now has a more personal stake in promoting these objectives. In this speech, Ramadan notes, the intent of Bush’s rhetoric during the war on terror faced off Western culture against Muslim culture, albeit implicitly. Ramadan’s exclusion symbolizes the challenges that Western Muslims must

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face in living as legitimate citizens with equality and freedom in the current political climate, and made his project for the political participation of Muslims in the European political sphere even more important.

Ramadan holds this social capital which has been derived from being a western educated Muslim living in Europe, which allows him a certain sense of levity in being vocal on issues to do with Islam and Europe. Ramadan is active in speaking engagements and public lectures at Ivy League Universities such as Berkeley and while he wields power within the Muslim community, his academic background allows him to navigate different levels of society from the grass roots level, to academic and political spheres. In 2009, Ramadan faced further attacks to his academic career and public profile. Between 2007 and 2009 Tariq Ramadan was hired by the city of Rotterdam, Netherlands as an Integration Advisor to "help lift the multicultural dialogue to a higher level".66 At the same time, the City of Rotterdam was funding Ramadan’s academic position as visiting Professor of Identity and Citizenship at the Erasmus University, located within the city. During this period, the Netherlands was struggling to come to terms with tensions between their Muslim and non-Muslim communities. This was exacerbated by the backlash concerning the murder of film maker Theo van Gough in 2004, coupled with the emergence of far right xenophobic political parties in Netherlands such as Geert Wilders’ Partij voor de Vrijheid (VVD) and the Front National (The National Front) in France. Ultimately, it was Ramadan’s affiliation with and position as a presenter on the Iranian State funded internet TV channel Press TV, which moved Rotterdam to relinquish his position as Integration Adviser.

Ramadan’s affiliation with Press TV continues to be a source of controversy and contradiction. Ramadan has continued his programme Islam and Life on Press TV, despite the conflict that continues to exist between the Iranian government and many European governments. In response to his sacking from Rotterdam, Ramadan published an opinion piece titled ‘An Open letter to my detractors in the Netherlands’.67 In this

piece, Ramadan tackled the criticisms of his links to the Iranian regime, through Press TV.

‘I have always taken full responsibility for my views; I have never supported either dictatorship or injustice in any Muslim majority society, or anywhere else for that matter. As for those who condemn me “on principle” for hosting a television program on an Iranian network, I reply: to work for a country’s television network does not mean support of that countries regime.’

Ramadan believes that his sacking and the criticisms of his affiliation with Press TV are indicative of wider social and political problems within the Netherlands, stating that ‘The answer is simple: when they single out a “visible Muslim intellectual” for attack their real agenda is the politics of Muslim-baiting and fear’. Ramadan justifies his program further by illustrating the inclusive approach that he takes, the editorial freedom that Press TV gives him, and that the show does not include support for the Iranian regime:

‘When I agreed to host a television program on Islam and contemporary life, I chose the path of critical debate. I accept no obligations. My guests have included atheists, rabbi’s, priests, women with and without headscarves, all invited to debate issues like freedom, reason, interfaith dialogue, Sunni versus Shi’a Islam, violence, jihad, love, art, to name only a few. I challenge my critics to scrutinize these programs and in them to find the slightest evidence of support for the Iranian regime. My program proclaims its openness to the world, and all guests are treated with equal respect’.

This research has looked at a number of ‘Islam and Life’ episodes in relation to Ramadan’s views on political participation and these have been analyzed contextually throughout the thesis. While this research demonstrates that Ramadan does present an inclusive view of a European Islam, and does not outwardly support the Iranian regime, the mere fact that he appears on an Iranian state based broadcaster allows his detractors to demonize his cause, acting to prevent positive aspects of his work. For example, a

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68 Ramadan, An Open Letter to my Detractors.
69 Ramadan, An Open Letter to my Detractors.
70 Ramadan, An Open Letter to my Detractors.
2011 an ‘Islam and Life’ episode titled ‘Al Quds Day: How should we spread the message to improve support of this day?’ 71 Al-Quds day occurs in Iran on the last Friday of Ramadan, and was initiated by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Its purpose - “The Quds Day is a universal day. It is not an exclusive day for Quds itself. It is a day for the oppressed to rise and stand up against the arrogant.” 72 Today, it is seen as a day of solidarity for Palestinians and against the occupation by the state of Israel, and reinforces the contentious nature of the Islam and politics within Iran. It is a controversial topic for Ramadan to tackle on Islam and Life, particularly and comes in contrast to his statements above about the Iranian regime.

Conclusion

Tariq Ramadan has developed a world view based on both Islamic and Western sources, and now utilizes these to portray moderate views on Muslim political participation in Europe. As Ramadan sees it, the universal nature of Islam allows Muslims to participate fully in European society, and as Oliver Roy notes ‘Ramadan goes as far to write that a Muslim enjoys greater freedom to live up to his religion in the West than in most, if not all Muslim countries’. 73 In this sense, Ramadan is neither a secular Muslim who insists on removing his faith from his public life, nor does he prescribe to European Muslims removing them from western democratic life. What Ramadan puts forward is a push for active Muslim citizenship in Europe, through the utilization of the current Western democratic mechanisms such as civil society, and voting.

This chapter has demonstrated that while Tariq Ramadan’s grandfather, Hassan al Banna, and his father Said Ramadan, have been influential in the development of his career and certainly his public presence, he has used his access to western education and his European citizenship, to bring two of the sphere’s of his identity together. This allows him to speak both as a European citizen and as a part of a European Muslim community, and affords him a different public space to that of his father and grandfather. However, despite this his views have also attracted heavy criticism from many academic and media circles. His academic career has been marred by two key

72 http://www.ihrc.org.uk/activities/projects/9428-al-quds-day
incidents – one in the Netherlands, and perhaps more importantly in the United States. Ramadan’s links to the Egyptian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, coupled with his alleged financial support for the Hamas, have seen controversy that has tarnished his image as a ‘good Muslim’ in the international media. Ramadan’s ability to successfully leverage these controversies has seen him further promote the need for the European community to acknowledge the rights of its Muslim citizens. There are often severe contradictions in his behavior. For example, his show Islam and Life, broadcast on Iranian state funded television has been seen by many as a dangerous move, for a ‘Moderate’ leader who espouses interfaith dialogue, and the importance of universal human rights. While he has made statements to distance himself from the Iranian regime, and believes that broadcasting his programme ‘Islam and Life’ on Press TV does not come in contrast to his values, controversial topics such as Al-Quds day allow Ramadan’s critics – from the mainstream media, to the neo-liberal journalists, to European academics, to Salafist groups – to bring to light contradictions within his work, tarnishing his efforts to promote an inclusive European Islam.

CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL VOICES
Introduction

An important part of understanding Tariq Ramadan’s project for the political participation of Muslims in Europe is to consider the criticism he has faced from neo-liberal journalists and academics, as well as from parts of the European Muslim communities. Ramadan has come under heavy scrutiny from journalists such as Caroline Fourest and Paul Berman, who maintain that Ramadan is a terrorist in disguise, challenging his efforts to act as a successful interlocutor within the Muslim community in Europe. Berman and Fourest portray Ramadan’s notion of a European Islam as a veiled expression of the ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood in a western context. By linking Ramadan’s views to political Islamism, writers such as Berman promote the fear of Islam in the public space. However, as this research will analyze, Berman, Fourest and a number of other writers and public figures with such as American Daniel Pipes and ex-Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali, must reevaluate their generalizations on Ramadan as well as generalizations on Muslim communities in the European political sphere. While critical debates on the political participation of Muslims in Europe are important, the reinforcement of negative stereotypes towards Muslims that these authors promote is not conducive to a positive public space for Muslims in Europe. Similarly, Muslims leaders, such as Ramadan should continue to engage in debates on these negative stereotypes.

Paradoxically, it is the personal criticisms that Ramadan has faced that have catapulted him into the spotlight as a controversial and popular figure. As noted, Ramadan faces criticism from various parts of the Muslim and non-Muslim community in the west. As Ramadan himself notes, “When one considers an intellectual presented as ‘controversial’ and takes stock of the amount of criticism that seems to come from all sides, having some doubt and suspicion is normal. Yet one should go further and not only question the target but also analyse the ideological dispositions and the intentions of the different sources that produce those criticisms”. 74

This chapter will also look at criticisms from European academics Bassam Tibi and Gilles Kepel. Both academics disagree with various parts of Ramadan’s vision for the

74 Ramadan, What I Believe, 96.
full political participation of Muslims in Europe. Tibi in particular, has a more personal grievance with Ramadan, stemming from the use of the term ‘Euro-Islam’ – a term that Tibi himself created, but which he believes Ramadan uses to promote the ‘Islamisation of Europe’ and not the ‘Europeanisation of Islam’ as Tibi intended.

Kepel criticizes Ramadan’s ‘internal contradictions’ on many topics, such as his stance on multiculturalism. Kepel believes that Europe’s ‘failed’ Multicultural policy has contributed to increased ghettoisation and extremism within Muslim communities in Europe, and criticizes Ramadan for not taking this into account.

Parts of the European Muslim community are also skeptical of Ramadan’s approach to political participation. Groups, such as Hizb ut Tahrir (HT), disagree with Muslim participation in Western democracy, based on literal readings of the Quran which they believe forbid voting and other forms of direct participation. Although they consider themselves a political group, they believe that Muslims must engage in other ways to depose, what they see as, oppressive western political systems. Members of HT are critical of Ramadan’s involvement with the British government in particular, as a sign of his contradictions. Finally, this chapter will illustrate Ramadan’s response to his all of his critics, while showing that his ideas are not a threat to western legal or political processes, as some of his critics may fear, but that Ramadan’s risk adverse writing style and lack of engagement with his Muslim critics, allows this disapproval to continue.

The Neoliberals and the Secularists

Paul Berman and Caroline Fourest are two neo-liberal journalists who have been amongst the most critical of Ramadan’s view on Muslim political participation, and his wider agenda for European Islam. Both perceive Ramadan’s comments on all aspects of Muslim political life in Europe as evidence that he holds a hidden desire to promote Islamic Law in Europe, and across the western world. Literature criticizing Ramadan’s political motives, familial history, academic and public work from neo-liberal journalists has become popular. While both Berman and Fourest’s contribution to the criticisms on Ramadan will be analyzed here, it must also be noted contributions from other critics including Daniel Pipes are important to note. Pipes, an American political commentator and writer, is responsible for the ‘Campus Watch’ website, which was set
up to ‘critique Middle East studies in North America with an aim to improving them.’

Pipes has also been critical of Ramadan, based on his visa denial from the United States in 2004. He notes ‘Ramadan denies all ties to terrorism, but the pattern is clear.’

Similarly, Ex Dutch Member of parliament, and Ex-Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali, is a public figure critical of Ramadan’s approach towards Islam in the European public space. In a CNN interview with Christiane Amanpour in 2010, Ramadan joined a panel with Ayyan Hirsi Ali and Danish Lawmaker Nasar Khader on the topic ‘Islam is not a European Religion’. During this segment, Ramadan and Hirsi Ali are involved in an argument on the issue of political Islam within Europe. Hirsi Ali calls Ramadan an ‘Islamist in the closet’, and challenges his view that Islam has a viable place within the European public space. Neo-liberal critics such as Fourest, Berman, Pipes and Hirsi Ali are driven to criticize Ramadan based on his family history, and their views on the secular nature of European politics.

**Paul Berman – Exposing the real Ramadan**

Paul Berman, American Journalist and editing contributor to the ‘New Republic’, has made a career out of criticizing Ramadan’s intentions as a ‘moderate’, and relating his ideas to the broader gamut of Islamism and terrorism. In his book ‘The Flight of the Intellectuals’ Berman focuses on Tariq Ramadan in an attempt to illustrate the inadequacies of modern society in discussing and identifying dangerous Islamists. Berman sees Ramadan as a representative for a broader, more extreme group of Muslim leaders in the west. He focuses heavily on two areas he believes to incriminate Ramadan; the fact that Hassan al Banna is his grandfather, and a heavy focus on the parallels between Ramadan, Islam and Anti-Semitism.

Berman’s three major writings on the topic of Islamism that include Ramadan are ‘Liberalism and Terror’, ‘The Flight of the Intellectuals’, and a 28,000 word piece written for The New Republic titled, ‘Who’s afraid of Tariq Ramadan?’. While ‘Terror and Liberalism’ presents a general summary on his thoughts on the dangers of

Islamism, and presents rationale for the US led war on terror, ‘Who’s afraid of Tariq Ramadan?’ written in June 2007, directly attacks Ramadan and has incited a number of criticisms from authors such as Timothy Garton Ash and Ian Buruma, who have written more balanced pieces on Ramadan, which are both critical and complimentary.

In his 2007 article in the New York Time ‘Tariq Ramadan has an Identity crisis’, Ian Buruma wrote:

‘To his admirers, he is a courageous reformer who works hard to fill the chasm between Muslim orthodoxy and secular democracy…. His critics see things differently: they accuse him of anti-Semitism, religious bigotry, promoting the oppression of women and waging a covert holy war on the liberal West’.

After interviewing Ramadan, he notes:

‘Ramadan offers a different way, which insists that a reasoned but traditionalist approach to Islam offers values that are as universal as those of the European Enlightenment. From what I understand of Ramadan’s enterprise, these values are neither secular, nor always liberal, but they are not part of a holy war against Western democracy either.’

On Muslim the public space for Muslims in the west specifically, Berman says that

‘Ramadan wants a share of the public space, not just a share of the private sphere. Or more than he wants: he demands a share of the public space. A properly Muslim life has a physical and communal quality, which must be lived in physical space, and this will require modifications in the existing European Secularism’.

Here, Berman makes a reasonable claim that Ramadan’s vision for an Islam that is integrated into the public sphere may change the current workings of secularism. In The

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As mentioned, there have been many scholars critical of Berman's approach to the topic of Tariq Ramadan and Islamism. Marc Lynch notes, writers such as Paul Berman “...get Ramadan's struggle backwards”.\(^{80}\) Ramadan's primary adversaries are not liberals in the West, but rather Salafists whose ideas are ascendant in Muslim communities from Egypt and the Persian Gulf to western Europe.\(^{81}\)

While Berman covers many topics, and does not directly attack Ramadan for his views on the public space for Muslims specifically, his criticisms of Ramadan suggest he is a man to be feared. The well researched aspects of Berman work however, fail to prove that Ramadan’s writings and rhetoric would be detrimental to the future harmony of Muslims and non-Muslims living in Europe. Like much of the divisive literature written on European Muslims, Berman raises a one dimensional view of their viability as European citizens, demonstrating a clear disengagement with Ramadan’s target audience. On Caroline Fourest’s view of the danger of Ramadan’s rhetoric, Berman says:

‘She pictures Ramadan delivering a lecture somewhere in Europe, and an impressionable young North African immigrant deciding to attend. And Fourest wonders what notions and impulsions such a person might take away. Which half of Ramadan’s thinking might prove to be the persuasive to such a person – the commendable half? Or the other half?’\(^{82}\)

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81 Lynch, *Veiled Truths*.
Caroline Fourest, a French Journalist of a similar secular ideology as Berman, wrote ‘Brother Tariq – The doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan’ in 2008. Fourest is French feminist writer, with an academic background in sociology and political science. What brought her to devote a book to ‘exposing’ Tariq Ramadan was driven by her ‘Manifesto against Islamic totalitarianism’, which was supported by many secular figures such as Salman Rushdie, and ex-Muslims Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Her pronounced version of secularism is apparent throughout the book, and one of her main issues with Ramadan is that he attempts to create a viable public space for Muslim communities in Europe. This is demonstrated in the following quote –

‘Ramadan would have us believe that his approach is progressive minded because he is not a terrorist. But the American Christians who do the most harm are not those who, in the name of god, kill abortion doctors, but those who, day after day, in the name of God and using legal means, roll back the laws guaranteeing individual liberties’. 83

However, the angle Fourest takes in ‘Brother Tariq’ is one that attempts to expose the truth of Ramadan’s sinister rhetoric. Fourest believes that to western audiences Ramadan plays the misunderstood moderate who pronounces a proud and dynamic Islam, one that is enlightened and modern, but to his ‘faithful Islamist’ followers, he espouses more sinister motives, aligned to violent Islamism. 84 Fourest relies heavily on Ramadan’s family background as the reason for his acting like a ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’. 85 She says, ‘Thinking back on his experience as a child brought up in exile, traumatized by the fear of being assimilated, one can understand why, Ramadan promulgates hermetically sealed Islam that transforms his disciplines into eternal exiles within their own country’. 86 While Fourest attempts to provide examples of Ramadan’s behavior or rhetoric that link him to the more sinister side of Islam, her arguments are flawed with the constant comparisons to Hassan al Banna, and his father Said. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is no doubt that Ramadan’s family history of leadership has had an influence on the social capital he now wields. However, it must

84 Fourest, *Brother Tariq*, 171.
85 Fourest, *Brother Tariq*, 171.
86 Fourest, *Brother Tariq*, 171.
again be noted that the geographical and historical space in which both men have operated. For example, when discussing the maintenance of Islamic culture within European societies without assimilation, Fourest proclaims ‘Tariq Ramadan abhors the idea that young Muslims in the west should succumb to cultural influences that might turn them away from fundamental Islamism’.\(^87\) Her proof of this is the fact that Hassan al Banna wanted to ‘close the dance halls’ ‘controls the theatre and the cinema’ in the Egyptian context.\(^88\)

Much like Bassam Tibi, Fourest is also mindful of Ramadan’s mission to Islamize Europe. She claims Ramadan is ‘simply sticking to his grandfather’s method, namely seeking first social conquest and then political conquest’.\(^89\) Fourest’s fear here is that once the social space for Muslims exists, it will only be a matter of time before Islam makes its way into the political sphere. Again, this fear of Ramadan rests heavily on Fourest’s ideas on liberal secularism.

The universalism which Ramadan sees as the key to linking European Muslims and Western democracy is seen by Fourest as a charade. In 2003, Tariq Ramadan and the then Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, engaged in a televised public debate, which has become a source of much criticism for Ramadan. In this debate, Ramadan famously did not oppose corporal punishment or stoning within Muslim majority countries. It is important to look at this debate as it illustrates a contradiction within Ramadan’s views on universalism and connection to western democratic principles. In the debate, on the topic of his brother Hani Ramadan publishing a piece on justifying the stoning of adulterous Women in Muslim countries, Ramadan did not condemn the article or its contents.\(^90\) He did however say:

‘I’m in favour of a moratorium so that they stop applying these sorts of punishments in the Muslim world. What’s important is for people’s way of thinking to evolve. What is needed is a pedagogical approach’.\(^91\)

\(^87\) Fourest, *Brother Tariq*, 171.
\(^88\) Fourest, *Brother Tariq*, 171.
\(^89\) Fourest, *Brother Tariq*, 187.
\(^90\) Fourest, *Brother Tariq*, 83.
\(^91\) Fourest, *Brother Tariq*, 83.
Fourest’s response to Ramadan’s call for a moratorium generalizes Ramadan’s as the voice for all European Muslims:

‘First of all, by limiting himself to the call for a moratorium, Tariq Ramadan, who is speaking from the point of view of European Muslims, gives the appalling impression that European Muslims are still debating whether or not to stone someone to death for adultery.’

Fourest's claim that Ramadan’s call for a moratorium is a subtle nod towards condoning the practice is baseless, particularly when Ramadan himself has never approved of stoning. However, it does point towards a trend in Ramadan’s response to such traditional Islamic practices. His inability to condemn these practices outright, which are against the values and principles of universalism, for example, come in contrast to his view that Islam is a religion of universality.

Ramadan’s link to the Islamic Foundation, (previously known as the Leicester Islamic Foundation) is also troublesome for Fourest. Ramadan’s first publication in English was *Islam, the West and the challenges of Modernity*, written while Ramadan was teaching Philosophy and Islamic Studies at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. The book was published by The Islamic Foundation. Ramadan spent a year in 1998 studying at the Foundation in its Islamic training centre, the Markfield Institute of Higher Education, whilst research and writing for the book. Fourest contends that the Foundation was ‘an Islamist institute, whose mission was to use England as a base for spreading the doctrines of Mawdudi and Qutb’. These were two Islamic revivalist thinkers, who Hassan al Banna was heavily influenced by.

The Foundation’s website states that ‘The Islamic Foundation, established in 1973, is a unique and pioneering institution specializing in the fields of research, education and publication. Since its inception the Islamic Foundation has strived towards building bridges between the Muslims community and the rest of society by creating a better understanding between communities through greater awareness about each other.’

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92 Fourest, *Brother Tariq*, 130.
In the aftermath of the London Bombings on the 7th of July 2005, many moderate Islamic community organizations and groups came under harsh scrutiny for their links to radical organizations. As ‘homegrown terrorists’ – British citizens – undertook the attacks, the government and media made significant investigations. The Islamic Foundation came under harsh scrutiny, with links being found to the group Jamaat-i-Islami. This allows critics such as Fourest to draw some serious parallels between Ramadan’s education, training and links to terrorism.

Despite the explained inadequacies and ideological bias present in the arguments of both Fourest and Berman, Ramadan’s evasion of certain issues and confrontation often allow his most vocal critics to paint him as a ‘terrorist’ in disguise, hindering his efforts to act as a successful interlocutor both within and outside of the Muslim community in Europe. Authors such as Berman and Fourest portray Ramadan’s notion of a ‘Euro-Islam’ as a veiled expression of the Islamist ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood in a western context. By linking Ramadan’s views to what they perceive as a violent political Islamism, writers such as Berman can promote Islamophobic sentiment across the European political sphere.

**Academic perspectives**

Criticisms from Ramadan’s academic peers are diverse and complex, and often involve a deep understanding of the current literature on Islam and multiculturalism in Europe. Olivier Roy, a French Academic on Islam in the West has accused Ramadan of inspiring Muslim involvement in the anti-globalization movement in the early 2000’s by saying ‘Islamic Militants, such as Tariq Ramadan, in Europe, are trying to find some common ground with the anti-globalization movement.’ Roy has also criticized Ramadan for targeting the upper echelons of European Muslims society, in saying ‘He appeals to people of the second generation, who have a college or university education but do not feel fully integrated. They are the would-be middle class’.

While Ramadan has been widely criticized on various issues by his academic peers, this section will focus on the criticisms of both Gilles Kepel and Bassam Tibi, as two they

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present arguments directly against Ramadan’s notions on political participation of Muslims Europe.

Gilles Kepel, French expert on contemporary Islamism wrote in his 2004 book The War for Muslim Minds, ‘Unless Tariq Ramadan takes responsibility for his growing internal contradictions they will propel him, like all shooting stars, into the dark night.’ Here, Kepel adds to the discussion on the contradiction within Ramadan’s rhetoric.

In two of his major books ‘The War for Muslim Minds’ and ‘Beyond Terror and Martyrdom’, Kepel criticizes Ramadan on his stance on multiculturalism. He points to one specific Guardian article from 2007 to illustrate their differing views on the relationship between failed multicultural policy and Muslim extremism in the United Kingdom. The article by Ramadan, published in The Guardian in June 2007, openly criticizes the British government and Tony Blair directly, for the overzealous securitization of Muslims. Of this article, Kepel says:

“Ramadan did not take into account the fact that Britain’s terrorism was also made possible by a multiculturalists philosophy that encouraged groups to develop totally separate identities from other groups, and allowed those identities to prevail over shared values, morals and ways of life.”

This statement demonstrates that Kepel’s fundamental criticisms of Ramadan are based on his views on multiculturalism, and Ramadan’s apparent eagerness to ‘blame everyone else’ but Muslims for not integrating into British society. Kepel is also critical of Ramadan’s ideas within the Dutch socio-political context. The Netherlands has been affected severely by the dichotomy which posits liberal western democracies against the apparent ‘illiberal’, anti Christian or anti secular tenets of Islam. As Kepel has commented, the death of prominent critic of Islam and film maker Theo van Gogh, coupled with the and the ostracization of ex Muslim MP Ayan Hirsi Ali, paved the way for Ramadan to contribute to repairing the ‘social fabric’ of a multicultural Dutch society, much like he had been a part of in the taskforce after the 7/7 bombings in Britain. Kepel describes Ramadan’s project as ‘the concept of minority Islamic law –

meshed with the multiculturalists’ vision in the Netherlands’. Kepel’s mention of ‘Islamic Law’ is indicative of many of Ramadan’s critics. Kepel does not believe that Ramadan is intent of implementing Islamic Law; however, he is uncomfortable with the contradiction between Ramadan’s view of Islam in the political sphere, and the secular nature of democracy within Europe. Ramadan’s ideas test the secular space, and Bassam Tibi is another academic who is critical of this view.

Ramadan’s concept of Euro-Islam is one that is contested by German Scholar Bassam Tibi. Tibi is a Syrian-born German citizen and believes that ‘Euro Islam’ is not simply about bringing two communities together, but rather refers to the concept as the ‘interpretation of Islam in a liberal open-minded and unscriptural madder to accommodate civic values of pluralism in Islamic terms’. Tibi believes that ‘Euro-Islam’ is rather ‘a vision for the future than a current reality and engaging in the de-ethnicization of Islam in Europe’ is fundamental to its realization. This approach leads Tibi to emphasize the centrality of European citizenship first and foremost in what he describes as the ‘citizenship of the hearts’. This ideal goes beyond contractual obligations of Muslims to pledge loyalty to their secular states in Europe. Instead it advances the absorption of European values (e.g. human rights, pluralism and religious freedom) and reforming Islam in line with secularism – most importantly, keeping Islam as a private matter, and not a public one. Therefore, for Tibi, Euro-Islam can only mean the Europeanization of Islam. For Tibi, Euro-Islam can only mean the Europeanization of Islam, which will ‘facilitate a worldview that allows an embrace of secular democracy’. While Ramadan is accused Tibi accuses Ramadan of promoting the reverse: the Islamisation of Europe. According to Tibi this would not lead to Muslim immigrants becoming European, but would see Europe become the ‘house of Islam or dar al-shahada’ part of the history of Islamic expansion. There is little in Ramadan’s writings to substantiate such a bold claim. Yet the mere fact that Ramadan makes no effort to break with Islamic scholarship, albeit reformed, as the starting point for his idea of European citizenship is noted by Tibi as contradictory and misleading. The

99 Kepel, Beyond Terror and Martyrdom, 191.
101 Bassam Tibi, "Ethnicity of Fear?", 126.
notion of parallel communities and identities, one European and one Muslim, living harmoniously side by side is a myth, Tibi argues.\textsuperscript{104}

In a 2007 online discussion at the website ‘Sight and Sound’, Tibi criticizes Ramadan by challenging his claim to be an ‘Oxford Professor’ and then by challenging his claim to ‘reform’ Islam. In this article, Tibi does not dwell on Ramadan’s ‘project’, as he believes it unworthy to the cause, but through further analysis of Tibi’s work it is clear that Ramadan and Tibi tend to disagree on the cultural changes and manifestations inherent in ‘reforming’ Islam in the west.\textsuperscript{105}

‘I should make it clear that Euro-Islam is impossible without cultural change involving religious reforms. And this is not something Tariq Ramadan is pursuing….Tariq Ramadan presents Orthodox Islam as Euro-Islam presumably with the intent to deceive’.\textsuperscript{106}

Similarities exist in the way both Ramadan and Tibi see Muslim self-determination and participation in democracy. Tibi says, ‘Those who seek to come to Europe must also strive to become part of its community, adopting the democratic consensus expressed in its value system.’\textsuperscript{107} It is when their concepts of identity are discussed, that differences are evident. Tibi says, ‘They must want to become European, and participate in European identity rather than seeking to alter it’\textsuperscript{108} while Ramadan argues that ‘one must resist the temptation to reduce one’s identity to a single dimension that takes priority over every other’.\textsuperscript{109}

As Ramadan states his project for Islam in the West to have a reformist agenda, there are clear critics from within the Muslim community, particularly those groups coming from Salafi Literalism and Scholastic Traditionalist tenets. While Berman and Tibi have their own specific target audiences in critiquing Ramadan, it is also important to analyst the responses of European Muslim Communities.

**Critical voices from European Muslim communities**

\textsuperscript{104} Bassam Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics, and Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 197.

\textsuperscript{105} Tibi, Bassam. “Europeanisation Not Islamisation”.

\textsuperscript{106} Tibi, Bassam. “Europeanisation Not Islamisation”.

\textsuperscript{107} Tibi, Bassam. “Europeanisation Not Islamisation.”

\textsuperscript{108} Tibi, Bassam. “Europeanisation Not Islamisation.”

\textsuperscript{109} Ramadan, ‘What I believe’, 37.
While Ramadan advocates for full political participation of Muslims in Europe and calls for an Islamic reformation in the West, there are critical voices from within in the Muslim community on his views, although these voices are often much quieter than those of those from the media and academia. Ramadan’s views on political participation are challenged by both the more conservative ulama, who seek to maintain Islamic Traditions, and also Salafist groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir, who see western government’s as oppressive and call for a reversion to the Islamic texts.

Hizb ut Tahrir advises Muslims not to participate in political processes, such as general elections. HT dismisses voting as a sin; however encourage members to engage politically in other ways, and define themselves as a political party. Sulthan Parvin, a Member to HT Britain notes ‘Voting is not going to have all the solutions my parents' generation believed it would have. I've been active in what I would classify as political work at a grassroots level, talking about drugs, talking about crime, talking about projects which we can get the youth to be involved in rather than acts of violence’

Hizb ut Tahrir operates in many western countries, by implementing the principles and values encapsulated in the Islamic texts. Quranic phrases are interpreted literally to promote this idea:

“Indeed legislation (ruling, judgment, command) is only for Allah; He has commanded that you shall not serve aught but Him; this is the right religion but most people do not know” (TMQ 12:40)

Opposing the western democratic systems of government, Hizb ut Tahrir see the establishment of the Kalifah (Caliphate) as the only option for Muslims living in the West. Due to HT’s desire to exclude interaction from public life, their intentions are often aligned with extreme ideologies. Their stated objective is to create a single Islamic nation, bringing to an end what they perceive as the oppression of Muslims and Western occupation of Muslim lands. The extreme view that HT has taken is often over publicized, and taken to represent the views of the Muslim community. Ramadan’s views come in stark contrast to that of HT, particularly when looking at political participation. Ramadan actively encourages Muslims to be politically active, and

believes that the ‘new visibility’ of Muslims will be a positive step towards the actualization of European Islam.

Politicians and social commentators, who oppose or fear Islam in western contexts, often accuse Muslims of participating in society, purely as a rouse to establish a ‘global caliphate’ with the intention of imposing Shari Law on western nations. HT does not encourage Muslims living in Western countries, to participate in political processes. In the European context, Hizb ut Tahrir Britain is arguably a visible and vocal group whose ideals differ markedly from Ramadan’s. Ramadan professes the ability for an individual to have multifaceted, yet interconnecting parts of their identity, yet also individual citizenship despite and not in replacement of, their communal identity as part of the global ummah – the global community of faith. This allows Muslims to participate politically as citizens and exercise their ‘european-ness’. However, Hizb ut Tahrir Britain prescribes ‘The party does not work in the West to change the system of government, but works to project a positive image of Islam to Western society and engages in dialogue with Western thinkers, policymakers and academics. Though individuals currently have some 'freedom' to criticise and change their politicians in the West, the reality is that whichever politicians are elected, they are of the economic elite and they rule on behalf of the economic elite’. Their emphasis on a lack of participation within democratic processes however, does not result in projecting a ‘positive image of Islam’. For example, in their 2010 election manifesto, the Conservative party noted their aim to "ban any organisation which advocates hate or the violent overthrow of our society, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir." In the 2010 British election, HT encouraged Muslims not to participate by producing and disseminating leaflets claiming it was haram for Muslims to vote. They actively fought against campaigns by the Muslim Council of Britain to encourage Muslims to enrol and vote in the British elections in 2010, called ‘Muslim Vote 2010’. Much like Ramadan, HT use social media platforms like websites, blogs and message boards to disseminate and engage Muslim youth. HT members have been vocal in criticizing Tariq Ramadan as a traitor to the Islamic faith on various message boards, claiming that Ramadan in his role as an advisor to the British Government in the aftermath of the London Bombings ‘Now

works for Blair in the fight against Islam’. 114 HT see Ramadan’s belief in the ability for Muslims to enact change in their society through Essentially, the ideologies of hizb ut tahrir come in complete contradiction to that of Tariq Ramadan and many HT members see Ramadan, and reform of Islam in general, as a threat to the religion. However, younger members of HT, advocate that while they disagree with Muslims in the west participating in formal political process, they do not see themselves as totally removed from their politics, and advocate for discussion outside of and within the Muslim community.

**Ramadan’s response**

Ramadan wrote ‘What I believe’ in 2010 as a defensive explanation of his family history, and his views on issues such as citizenship, political participation, and identity. It is a succinct piece, which acts to clarify Ramadan’s academic work over the past 20 years. The book is aimed at a mainstream audience, and reflects the nature and changes in Ramadan’s public appearances and writing between 2009 and 2010. Through *What I believe* Ramadan attempts to promote a moderate perspective on the emerging public space for Muslim communities in Europe and the West, by introducing his ‘Manifesto for a New We – An appeal to Western Muslims and their fellow Citizens’. The Manifesto sees Ramadan explain the emergence of the perceived ‘Muslim problem’ in Western societies. As Ramadan sees it ‘the war on terror’ coupled with the inability of Western governments to tackle immigration issues, has seen the politicization of issues that directly affect Muslim communities, contributing to fear and Islamophobia. In his view, ‘Muslims must rise to the occasion. They must express confidence in themselves, in their values, and their ability to live and communicate with full serenity in western society’.115 Muslims should be critical of their own communities, their governments and bring their Muslim identity to contribute to ‘Western cultural richness’.116 He goes on to say, ‘hardly a western society has been spared its own searing questions of identity’ its


own 'integrations' related tensions and its own debate on the place of Muslims within its confines.\textsuperscript{117}

As Andrew March has observed, Ramadan’s published work, particularly “What I believe” shows that ‘In comparison with his explicit theoretical, theological and methodological broadside on traditional, mainstream understandings of legal and moral theory, his applied ethical vision is much more elusive and risk-averse.’\textsuperscript{118} Here, March acknowledges the ability for Ramadan's critics to misinterpret his work due to the often elusive way in which he applies his theory of practical living for Muslims in the West. As March suggests, Ramadan’s written work has developed over recent years on an undulating path from the philosophical and ethical, to the pragmatic, focusing on mainstream political issues facing Muslims in the west. March’s notion is that the gritty nature of Ramadan’s theological writing is much different to his safer use of his commentary on ethics.

As Ramadan has gained notoriety and criticism as an outspoken and charismatic Muslim commentator (rather than academic figure), his published and public work is following the trajectory that March describes. \textit{What I believe} is a key example of this.

Ramadan’s main issue is that he rarely responds to the criticisms that come from the Islamic community. While Ramadan has been active in engaging publicly with his non-Muslim critics, it is his aversion from tackling various Islamic practices, such as corporal punishment, stoning and the treatment of women that are in opposition to the universalism he promotes, impedes his success as a reformer. While Ramadan attempts to address many of the issues he is criticized on, as well as the ideological roots of these criticisms, he maintains a risk-averse writing style. For example, issues based criticisms on Ramadan conclude that his modern, reformist agenda is against homosexuality, and has misogynistic tendencies. Ramadan categorizes the origin of these criticisms e.g. ‘The far right’, ‘Some feminist trends’, ‘Some homosexual groups’ etc, he fails to adequately address these groups ideological dispositions or issues in a manner which befits his ‘reformist’ approach. For example, on Islam and Homosexuality he notes on

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\textsuperscript{117}Ramadan, \textit{What I believe}, Appendix II\textsuperscript{118}Andrew F March. "The Post-Legal Ethics of Tariq Ramadan: Persuasion and Performance" *Middle East Law and Governance* (2009).\end{flushright}
accepting same sex marriage and adoption, ‘This is the price for Muslims to be truly integrated and any other discourse will inevitably be held with suspicion’.\(^{119}\) By responding in this way, Ramadan can acknowledge these controversial issues, but also not offending conservative members of the Islamic community. This style severely restricts his ability to tackle his critics who accuse him of using ‘double speak’.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has summarized a variety of criticisms on Tariq Ramadan’s views on the public space for Muslims in Europe, and demonstrated that Ramadan is much more comfortable responding to his non-Muslim critics, than those from the Muslim community. What emerges demonstrates that Ramadan’s critics come from various ideological and political stand points. Neo-liberal critics tend to focus heavily upon Ramadan’s family history, and criticize his thoughts through the belief in the traditional tenets of European secularism. Caroline Fourest in particular, strongly asserts the French notions of secularism at the core of her criticism on Ramadan. Ramadan’s critics from the neo-liberal and secular standpoints often use generalized definitions of Islamism, to link Ramadan with more extreme ideologies, warning readers of the danger of the emerging public presence of Muslims in Europe. The polarized nature of the rhetoric of such writers as Paul Berman, Daniel Pipes, Caroline Fourest and Ayan Hirsi Ali, illicit a high amount of media coverage, promoting a fear of Islam which can only create negative tension within European society.

Ramadan’s academic critics present well researched and analytical criticisms, based on the current state of multiculturalism and identity within Europe. Although Bassam Tibi and Ramadan both support a viable public space for Muslims in Europe, it is Tibi’s view that religion itself should remain in the private sphere. Both Keppel and Tibi refrain from bringing Ramadan’s family background into their criticisms, although Tibi attacks Ramadan personally on a number of occasions for misusing the term ‘Euro-Islam’ – a phrase that Tibi lays claim to and that Ramadan misinterprets.

While Hizb ut Tahrir’s criticisms of Ramadan are less direct, their ideology comes in stark contrast to Ramadan’s, and their belief that Muslims should disengage entirely from political processes, adds to the negative tension for Muslims in Europe. The amount of media attention that HT has gained is not proportional to their representation in the European Muslim community. It appears that his critics have had little change on his key views on Muslim political participation, or the public space for Muslims in Europe. On the surface, Ramadan’s ideas continue along a moderate, or middle ground, where he acknowledges the both western democracy and Islamic ethics. Although there have been attempts to prove it, there is no evidence to suggest that Ramadan is a ‘terrorist in disguise’, or that he poses any kind of real threat to the traditional pillars of European democracy.

The ‘fear of Islam’ rhetoric attached to the neoliberal criticisms of Ramadan’s work creates a difficult space for Ramadan and other Moderate Muslims leaders, to progress their ‘reformist’ agendas. However, as noted, Ramadan’s tendency not to tackle the conservative and traditional parts of the Muslim community that is a drawback to his cause. If Ramadan espouses universalism and rights within Islam, he must do so without an aversion towards difficult issues.

CHAPTER FOUR: CITIZENSHIP, RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Introduction
‘We have thus created a new type of citizenship, one that we do not entirely trust’¹²⁰

Tariq Ramadan has responded to the question of Muslim political participation in Europe by looking closely at the rights and responsibilities of Muslims as citizens. While he presents a case for active Muslim political participation in the European political sphere, it is important to acknowledge the various social, political and legal constraints there are to the full realisation of citizenship rights for Muslims in Europe. These constraints lead to an inability for Muslims to participate politically on par with their fellow citizens. A number of constraints have been identified to the citizenship rights of European Muslims, and this chapter will look at the ways in which Ramadan addresses these constraints, and whether he does so effectively.

Ramadan sees the umma – the Muslim global community of faith - as an integral part of identity formation for Muslims living in the West. ‘All Muslims are individually invested with the common responsibility of bearing witness to the message before the whole of human kind’.¹²¹ This section will examine how Ramadan sees the interrelationship between collective identity of the umma and importance placed on national identity in political participation. Ramadan does not see this as a constraint to political participation, however by looking at the connection between Foreign policy and identity for European Muslims, it will be demonstrated that a conflict between the two does arise.

‘New visibility’ is the term Ramadan uses for what critics claim to be ‘The Muslim problem’ in Europe. In Ramadan’s view, as Muslims have begun to assert their political rights, they have come under scrutiny for not integrating. Muslim involvement in politics and government is viewed with fear by many anti-immigration and right wing political parties. Ramadan does not place the blame squarely on xenophobic politicians or groups for this, and acknowledges the role the European Muslim community must take through active engagement to counter negative views.

Minority citizenship is the ‘new type of citizenship’ that Ramadan sees as one of the biggest psychological barriers against Muslim political participation. While legally,

¹²⁰ Tariq Ramadan, The Quest for Meaning – Developing a philosophy of pluralism, (London: Allen Lane, 2010), 169.
¹²¹Ramadan, Western Muslims, 90.
many European Muslims are citizens of their countries, Ramadan argues that the social ‘minority’ status of Muslims is used as a representative of distrust and questioning, impinging on their common rights as citizens. Political participation, in all forms, is another way in which European Muslims can exercise their legal rights to insight changes in perception.

The lack of civic education that European Muslim communities receive is a barrier to the realisation of their rights as citizens. Ramadan believes that both the state and the Muslim community have the responsibility to provide and promote this education, and through his programme *Islam and Life*, Ramadan himself attempts to educate his viewers on the importance of political participation. However, socio-economic factors are an integral part of the distance that much of the Muslim community have in accessing civic education.

The abandonment of multiculturalism by many European governments is another important issue for European Muslims. Both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister David Cameron have voiced their views on ‘The death of Multiculturalism’ – which has, according to these leaders been demonstrated by the European Muslim communities’ lack of integration. Ramadan tackles these issues in two episodes of *Islam and Life*, which will be analysed. This section will argue that Ramadan does not address the issue of Multiculturalism in a consistent manner, and tends to use ‘us vs. them’ dialogue rather than employing his usual style of Universalism. This chapter will also look at Ramadan warning to Muslims not to be blind to politicians interests in representing European Muslim communities.

**The *Umma***

*‘Should Muslims be defined in the light of the notion of the community (umma), or are they simply Muslim citizens of one or another western country? ’ To which*
The \textit{umma}, as defined by Ramadan is ‘the community of faith, spiritual community, uniting all Muslim men and women throughout the world in their attachment to Islam’.\textsuperscript{123} It is often the outward expressions of faith, such as prayer, \textit{zakat} (tax raised for the poor or needy) and pilgrimage which are the common practices of faith that link the global Muslim community. When looking at the prevalence of ethnic diversity within Islam, the concept of \textit{umma} is often contentious when discussing identity. Ramadan believes that the notion of the \textit{umma} is an integral part of identity formation for Muslims living in the West. ‘All Muslims are individually invested with the common responsibility of bearing witness to the message before the whole of human kind’.\textsuperscript{124} If European Muslims see their European citizenship as an integral makeup of their identity, the concept of the \textit{umma}, and connection to the global Muslim community, can often be seen to confuse this. Throughout his publications, Ramadan often reflects on the importance of the global Muslim community in forming a European Muslim world view. The conflict comes when we look at this idea in relation to the value western Muslims place on their citizenship and views on Western foreign policy towards the Middle East. How can one pledge allegiance to a state that has waged war against their co-religionists and members of the \textit{umma}? Is there a contradiction between the national and religious identity?

As a result, Muslim identity and political interests can be said to be both internal and external to the Europe. The transnational nature of the \textit{umma} must be taken into account when discussing domestic political behaviour, particularly when discussing aspects of foreign policy towards the Middle East. Ramadan acknowledges that Muslims are also ‘people of the west’ and are afforded the rights and responsibilities as such, they must also take responsibility for their governments actions and foreign interventions.

On his return to the USA and in his speech at the ACLU conference, Ramadan pushed for Western Muslims to take their citizenship seriously and to be vocal on issues of

\textsuperscript{122}Ramadan, \textit{Western Muslims}, 86.
\textsuperscript{123}Ramadan, \textit{Western Muslims}, 258.
\textsuperscript{124}Ramadan, \textit{Western Muslims}, 90.
Foreign policy. He said ‘To be loyal as a citizen is to be critically and constructively loyal’. Ramadan warns, however ‘One must remember the reality of the general climate and of political games and tactics: numerous Israeli lobbies work at spreading suspicion toward the Muslim presence – seen as potentially anti-Semitic – and try to associate any criticism of Israeli polices coming from Arab and Muslim intellectuals.’\textsuperscript{125} Ramadan has acknowledged the fact ‘that criticizing America’s Middle East policies has cast doubt on my loyalty to Western values, and cost me a job’. \textsuperscript{126} Ramadan knows the implications of that come from European citizenship, but his opposition to certain aspects of foreign policy does not come solely from the perspective of his Muslim identity. He urges European Muslims to ‘resist the temptation to reduce one’s identity to a single dimension that takes priority over everything’\textsuperscript{127}

However, questions still remain as to the problem of one’s individual identity, and identity connected to the \textit{umma}. Throughout his publications, Ramadan reflects on the importance of the global Muslim community in forming a Western Muslim world view. The conflict comes when we look at this idea in relation citizenship rights and responsibilities, and views on Western foreign policy towards the Middle East. How can one pledge allegiance to a state that has waged war against their co-religionists and members of the \textit{umma}? Is there a contradiction between national and religious identity?

Ramadan does not deny that there are difficulties in coming to terms with these contradictions. He has made his career out of investigating this dilemma from the angles of Western Muslims and their governments. Interestingly, he is aware, that this is not only an affliction that the Muslim community feels. ‘All westerners do not support the policies of the super powers and multinationals, just as all Muslims living in the West are not linked to dictators of Islamic countries’\textsuperscript{128}. His solution to this potential constraint lies in political participation, the adaptable nature of the Islamic sources, and acknowledging the spheres of identity.

\textsuperscript{125} Ramadan, \textit{What I believe}, 106.
\textsuperscript{126} Ramadan, ‘Why I was banned in the US’ published March 29 2010, \url{http://www.tariqramadan.com/Why-I-Was-Banned-in-the-U-S-A.html}
\textsuperscript{127} Ramadan, \textit{What I believe}, 37.
\textsuperscript{128}Ramadan, \textit{Islam the west and the challenges of Modernity}, 185.
Ramadan notes the ‘great responsibility’ Muslims face in the current political context. ‘to remain Muslim in the West is a test of faith, of conscience, and of intelligence’.

Perhaps one of Ramadan’s most encompassing quotes, one he repeats often in books and in public appearances, is the ability for Muslims to engage their spheres of identity ‘I am Swiss by nationality, Egyptian by culture and Muslim by religion’. Ramadan sees no confrontation between these three key identity markers and his ability to function as a European citizen. Active political participation, and opposition to policies European Muslims disagree with, is an integral part of active citizenship. However, increased Muslim involvement in politics at various levels of government and civil society in Europe, has actually prompted concern by some right wing politicians and individuals, and in itself presents another constraint.

**Foreign policy, Identity and Citizenship**

The Israel-Palestine conflict is a central issue to the discussion on the relations between Islam and the West. As Halim Rane suggests, the conflict is regarded as the ‘crucible of the conflicts affecting the Muslim umma’. Ramadan believes that ‘The Israeli-Palestine conflict is a central issue and its impact has become global’. The conflict, one of the largest protracted humanitarian and political conflicts of the past 50 years, has had a far reaching impact on both the Muslim and Jewish Diaspora living in the west. Ramadan has been vocal on the plight of Palestinians since the beginning of his career, and as mentioned in chapter two, his supposed financial support for a Palestinian NGO with links to Hamas, led to the US State Department revoking his US Visa in July 2004, under the pretext that he had ‘endorsed or espoused terrorism’. Since his return to the US in 2010, Ramadan has used the mistreatment he received at the hands of the US government, as a symbol of Western government support for Israel, and the stripping away of various civil liberties for the Muslim community in the West post September 11 2001. On his first trip back to the United States in April 2010, Ramadan spoke on his ‘ideological exclusion’ at an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) conference. Ramadan delivered a powerful speech stating that ‘American policy (in

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129 Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 224.
Iraq) was wrong, and illegal’, ‘to not support the rights of Palestinians is wrong’ etc. Ramadan believes that he was excluded, not for donating funds, but for his outspoken stance on American foreign policy towards the Middle East.\textsuperscript{133} Against this backdrop, he is able to raise serious questions regarding the rights and responsibilities of Muslims living across the Western world.

Ramadan is critical of Israeli policy towards Palestinians, but carefully notes that he recognizes ‘the legitimacy of the resistance, without in any way condoning attacks against civilians and non-combatants’.\textsuperscript{134} Ramadan acknowledges the danger of being critical towards Israeli policy, and the tendency to be branded as anti-Semitic for doing so and has attempted to combat this by speaking out against anti-Semitism amongst Muslims, saying ‘anti-Semitism is by essence, anti-Islamic’.\textsuperscript{135} Paul Berman’s book ‘The Flight of the Intellectuals’ focused on Ramadan in an attempt to ‘shed light’ on what Berman sees as the anti-Semitic threads within his brand of Islamist discourse. Berman’s claims have been challenged by many scholars and journalist such as Andrew March as being extreme and unfounded, while his views have been repeated by other neo-liberal journalists and writers.\textsuperscript{136}

Berman says:

‘Ramadan is keenly anti-Zionist. He applauds the Palestinian resistance. And yet he has sometimes raised an objection to some of the methods of the Palestinian resistance: a careful distinction well drawn.’\textsuperscript{137}

Berman attempts to find the ‘little smudges’ in Ramadan’s rhetoric, by noting that he does denounce terrorism, but by standing by his grandfather Hassan al Banna’s views (particularly on that of Palestine) he is simultaneously condoning violence and anti-Semitism. Ramadan remains stridently defensive of his views on the Israel-Palestine conflict, and uses Universal Human Rights as a basis for his criticisms on Foreign

\textsuperscript{133} Tariq Ramadan, Speech to the American Civil Liberties Union uploaded 7 June 2010, ‘ACLU Welcomes Formally ‘ideologically excluded’ Scholar Tariq Ramadan’ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3m3zO_0Gl4
\textsuperscript{134} Tariq Ramadan “ Good Muslim – Bad Muslim”, Published February 12 2010, http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2010/02/muslim-religious-moderation
\textsuperscript{135} Tariq Ramadan, \textit{What I believe}, 105.
policy. He is vocal that his criticisms of the Israeli government do not mean that he is anti-Zionist.

In his speech at the ACLU conference, soon after being allowed to re-enter the United States, he pushed for Western Muslims to take their citizenship seriously and to be vocal on issues of Foreign policy means ‘To be loyal as a citizen is to be critically and constructively loyal’. Ramadan warns, however ‘One must remember the reality of the general climate and of political games and tactics: numerous Israeli lobbies work at spreading suspicion toward the Muslim presence – seen as potentially anti-Semitic – and try to associate any criticism of Israeli policies coming from Arab and Muslim intellectuals.’ Ramadan has acknowledged the fact ‘that criticizing America’s Middle East policies has cast doubt on my loyalty to Western values, and cost me a job’. By doing so, Ramadan believes that America is taking a backwards stop in assisting its religious and cultural minorities in realizing their rights, and that a pattern of exclusion based on ideology is has begun. Ramadan sees the US involvement in supporting Israeli policy on Palestine as a key problem. ‘It is common knowledge that the Palestinians have long been direct victims of the directionless, spineless and hypocritical polices of the Arab leadership.’

Ramadan believes that Muslims living in the west can use their transnational identities and connection to the global to influence western discourse and policy on the treatment of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli government. Although Ramadan praised the Obama administration for reinstating his Visa to the United States, much of his writing on the Obama administration, and in particular Obama’s rhetoric and action towards the Middle East, is highly cautious.

“But the Obama government’s policy for the last three years has been one of silence: silence during the Gaza massacre, and over the killing of dozens of unarmed civilians during the commemoration of the Nakba on May 15 2011. It is all well and good for Mr. Obama to pay lip service to the 1967 borders as a basis for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. But American inaction...
in the face of the ongoing Israeli policy of colonization and of ‘facts on the ground’ reveals his position as not only as inconsistent, but inapplicable. Once again, words are employed to make Palestinians and Arabs dream, while Israel is given a free hand to implement its long-term strategy behind the media façade of tensions between the American and Israeli governments.”

The ‘Muslim Problem’ in Europe

The ‘new visibility’ of Muslims, as Ramadan describes it, has contributed to what many have called Europe’s ‘Muslim Problem’, with an increase in mainstream media and politicians victimising or placing blame on Europe’s Muslims for not integrating, and displaying tendencies of extremism and terrorism. Ramadan discusses the importance of European Muslims identifying with the global community of faith, but given the negative stigma that often surrounds the Muslim community in Europe, this places limitations on their civic freedom.

A common theme in Ramadan’s commentary is his battle with the ‘malaise’ that prevents western Muslims from constructing an identity based on their faith, their nationality and their ethnicity. Ramadan notes that this ‘malaise is an almost permanent feature of the Muslim psyche in the West’. He defines the outward expression of Muslim identity as ‘the articulation and demonstration of the faith through consistent behaviour.’ The four key elements that Ramadan sees to make up Muslim Identity are: Faith, Practice and Spirituality; Understanding the texts and the context; Education and Transmission; Action and Participation.

‘The great responsibility of Muslims in the west is to dress these four dimensions of their identity in a Western Culture while staying faithful to the Islamic sources, which, with their conception of life, death and creation, remain the fundamental frame of reference.’

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144 Ramadan, Western Muslims, 78.
145 Ramadan, Western Muslims, 82.
146 Ramadan, Western Muslims, 82.
Ramadan believes these elements are totally in line with living as an active citizen in a western democratic context. He discusses this, at length, in ‘Western Muslims and the Future of Islam’, under a chapter on the ‘Civil allegiance in the West’. His conclusion to the question of Muslim Identity and allegiance to the obligations of citizenship is that the Islamic sources allow Muslims to live in the West, conflicts in spheres of reference are rare, and the Islamic sources allow for adaption and change. He notes ‘to be a free citizen in the north means having the means and the right to make critical choices, assessments and evaluations from within the heart of the western frame of reference.’

While Ramadan is a supporter of Muslim self determination in the public space to counter negative stereotypes, he is highly critical of European societal contradictions, and sees these as a major constraint to the realisation of identity.

‘To them, in order to be completely integrated, people should not express their faith at all and should become religiously invisible: any reference to Islam should completely disappear from the public arena... essentially ones citizenship should never be inspired by religious convictions.’

While a European Muslim identity can be ‘inspired’ by cultural and historical influences of country of citizenship, or even ethnicity, in Ramadan’s view if one’s citizenship is inspired by their Islamic faith, rights become restricted. There is, according to Ramadan a ‘great difference between the normative constitutional order of laicite’ or secularism and the very tendentious and ideologically oriented reading of it that certain radicals, even extremists would like to impose.’ This demonstrates a disapproval of writers such as Caroline Fourest, who have used secularism to critique Ramadan’s views of Islam in the public space.

Constant references to the inability of current European citizenship to acknowledge the limitations of discrimination against Muslims, demonstrates Ramadan’s reform ideology. However it is this rhetoric that allows critics such as Tibi to portray Ramadan

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147 Ramadan, Western Muslims, 94.
148 Ramadan, Western Muslims, 146.
149 Ramadan, Western Muslims, 146.
150 Ramadan, Western Muslims 146.
as a man who wants to ‘Islamisise Europe’, and who is fighting against the current system, and not attempting to work within it. Ramadan says -

‘the role of the Muslim communities in the west is to defend principles, not interests, and if it transpires that it is in their interest to have their universal principles respected, it should be clear that their fight for these principles serves society as a whole.’

**Minority, Multicultural or Moral citizenship?**

The research has discussed Ramadan’s view on the multifaceted nature of identity for European Muslims, and the implications this has for voting behaviour and political participation. Citizenship is the modern, democratic form of political membership, and increased interest in its meaning is related to the prevalence of globalisation and migration. Traditionally, citizenship is about inclusion within a state and society, and ‘good citizenship’ means participating in the states various democratic functions, including political life. Migration and globalisation have dramatically altered the traditional homogeneity of European Culture, and citizenship discourse is evolving in response to these changes.

But, as Willem Schinkel notes in the Dutch context, the development of citizenship as it relates to integration is troublesome for minorities. In the Netherlands, culture has become a problematic term when discussing citizenship, particularly for Muslim citizens. He notes that:

‘Practices exemplifying the ‘active citizen’ are practices normalised according to ‘the dominant culture’ – and on the other hand a loyalty-centred way of thinking – the ‘good citizen’ has ‘loyalty’ towards ‘society’.”

The idea of minority citizenship is one that has been tackled by sociologist Will Kymlicka and philosopher Charles Taylor. Taylor has pointed towards the fact that

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151 Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 169.
there must be an awareness of ‘first-class’ and ‘second-class’ citizens. Kymlicka discusses the idea of ‘multicultural citizenship’ by noting that the ‘demands of ethnic and national groups are (by and large) consistent with the liberal principles of individual freedom and justice’. The current ethnic and religious diversity within Western society is not conducive to the traditional legal frameworks of citizenship.

Ramadan’s criticisms of citizenship, as they relate to the ability of Muslims to participate in European political life, echo the ideas of Schinkel, Taylor and Kymlicka. Ramadan see’s the classification of Muslims in Europe as a ‘minority’ to strip away many of these common rights. He notes ‘Citizen Status of course, supposedly gives everyone the same rights and the same obligations. The social contract is quite clear at this point.... but not everyone has the same status.’ Ramadan’s view is similar to that of Taylor: ‘There are, it would appear, ‘citizens’ and ‘citizens’ in European society. The legality of citizenship means nothing when the Muslim minority is not a part of the ‘collective psyche’. Ramadan’s strategy to tackle this discrimination is for Muslims to participate within the current context. He notes that Muslims ‘are faced with both a discourse and a pressure that systematically confuses orders: although they are citizens in some countries, they are constantly considered ‘minorities’ because their religion or their culture are referred to whereas secularized western societies clearly make a distinction between the citizen’s legal and public status and the believers religious affiliation.’

While acknowledging the constraints that exist, Ramadan believes that it is the ‘minority’ label placed on European Muslims, and their willingness to accept this that is the real issue. He says ‘there is no such thing as minority citizenship! They (Muslims) must therefore overcome this minority mind-set and fully participate in citizenship on an equal footing with the ‘majority’.’

While Ramadan acknowledges the minority mindset as a barrier, his arguments are not as developed as those of experts such as Will Kymlicka. As has been identified, the

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155 Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship,193.
156 Ramadan, The quest for meaning, 169.
157 Ramadan, The quest for meaning, 169.
158 Ramadan, What I believe, 57.
159 Ramadan, What I believe, 57.
mere visibility of Muslim’s in the public space has contributed to further scrutiny and discrimination. Ramadan’s promotion of participation does not adequately address this.

**Importance of Civic education**

‘increasing numbers of Muslim associations, especially in Britain, France and the United States, have constantly called on their coreligionists to vote and to take part in the political life of their country....Like all citizens who experience the same objective living conditions, Western Muslims vote rarely, if at all.”160

The lack of civic education the European Muslim community receives is seen by Ramadan as a constraint to political participation. Ramadan views it to be not only the responsibility of the state, but also of Muslim civil society and leaders to promote education on the rights and responsibilities involved in citizenship. He notes that concepts of citizenship and rights ‘are read and used but confusion is widespread, and Muslims must equip themselves with clearer discourse relying on a closer mastery and definition in terms’161 Again, the emphasis here is on the Muslim community’s need for self determination in this process.

Mosques across Europe are often seen as potential spaces for radicalisation and the promotion of extremist ideology. Contrary to this perception however is the fact that the men involved in the 7/7 London bombings, attended different mosques at different times, and attendance was not linked to the promotion of terror attacks. 162 Ramadan sees Mosques and Islamic community organisations as important educational tools in bringing both Islamic and national identity together. ‘What Muslims hear in mosques, lectures, or community events must enable them to feel comfortable both with their affiliation to Islam and with a confident citizenship reaching out to their fellow citizens.’163

Apathy and disengagement of youth in politics is not only a trend in the Muslim community. As the British riots of August 2011 demonstrated, young people across

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160 Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 165.
Europe are becoming increasingly disenfranchised and apathetic towards engaging in traditional forms of political participation. Ramadan notes that ‘Young people know less and less about the functioning of institutions and the whole political system of their countries and show a growing disinterest in voting and participation.’\textsuperscript{164} European Muslim communities often occupy low socio-economic places in European society. As such, their access to public education is limited, contributing further to disengagement from civic education. Again, Ramadan promotes personal responsibility to seek this by saying ‘All citizens need this civic education/citizenship training, which today is full of gaps, and Muslim citizens have to understand it is an integral part of their personal and collective development if they want to remain faithful to their principles and become actors in their societies.’\textsuperscript{165} Ramadan acknowledges the need for civic education, and takes a role in disseminating information to the Muslim community through his Islam and Life programmes.

**The ‘Death of Multiculturalism’**

Despite the introduction of a multicultural policy managed by the state in the United Kingdom, and un-entrenched policies of multiculturalism across Europe, as well as the aspiration of the majority of Europeans to embrace their diverse society, the impact of globalisation on the traditional notions of European culture, and events such as the 7/7 London bombings have made it difficult for Muslims in particular to be trusted as ‘loyal’ European citizens.\textsuperscript{166}

The 7/7 bombings raised many questions on the management of ethnic communities and lead to the further securitization of Muslim communities in Britain and across Europe. Even since September 11, the British government actively pursued a new relationship with British Muslims to prevent Islamphobia against Muslims, while also identifying Islamism as a potential security threat.\textsuperscript{167} Among these issues, globalisation has also significantly affected notions of citizenship and challenged traditional definitions of European culture. The apparent ‘failure’ of multiculturalism is an important part of the

\textsuperscript{164} Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 166.

\textsuperscript{165} Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 166.

\textsuperscript{166} Modood and Ahmad, *British Muslim Perspectives on Multiculturalism*, 188.

\textsuperscript{167} Toby Archer, “Welcome to the Umma: The British State and Its Muslim Citizens since 9/11.” *Cooperation and Conflict* 44,3 (2009):
Ramadan’s discussion on citizenship. Opponents of multiculturalism believe that policies have ghettoised Muslim communities, further marginalizing them from mainstream culture, the ability to integrate and participate in western democracies. Academics such as Tariq Modood view multiculturalism to have ‘many meanings, but the minimum is the need to politically identify groups, typically by ethnicity, and to work to remove stigmatisation, exclusion and domination in relation to such groups.’\[168\]

**Ramadan and Islam and Life**

‘A point should be noted: multicultural society is a fact: there is no being for or against it.’\[169\]

Ramadan has been critical of the politics of multiculturalism and its implications for Muslim political participation. During his *Islam and Life* programme on Press TV, he has discussed with academics and Muslim community leaders, ways for Muslims to engage on the issue of multiculturalism through political participation. Two of these episodes will be discussed here.

Ramadan has hosted two episodes on his Islam and Life programme on the topic of multiculturalism, Muslim responses and the specific impact that multicultural policies have on the European Muslim community. These two segments were sparked by an increased media focus on the apparent ‘Death of Multiculturalism’, firstly following German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s speech in 2010, and again following British Prime Minister David Cameron’s speech in 2011.

In an episode titled *Is the Multicultural Society failing?*\[170\] Tariq Ramadan interviews Professor John Eade of Roehampton University, regarding the perceived failure of multiculturalism in Britain. Ramadan and Eade’s views on Multiculturalism are similar, and as Eade notes the problem with the current state of Multiculturalism in British society is that policy makers see society ‘being made up of cultures that are fixed; the problem is then the everyday reality of the dynamism of British culture’ and that in the


current discourse, ‘there is an attempt to say that outsiders must conform to insiders culture and ways of behaving’. 

Professor John Eade is quite clearly in agreement with Ramadan on the ‘definition and vision’ of multiculturalism. They discuss the idea that, while there is no doubt that Britain for example, is a mix of cultures and ethnicities, and can be defined as a multicultural society; government management of multiculturalism has failed because it has treated cultures as fixed entities, when the reality is that culture is dynamic and fluid. This leads to the discussion on the dominant culture and the impact this has on defining multicultural policies. Eade and Ramadan agree on the ‘flatter’ view of multicultural society, as opposed to the ‘top down view’, and note the inability of politicians and policy makers to define what British culture is, which has implications for the rest of the multicultural society.

In this episode, Ramadan is outwardly critical of the types of legislation or policy (and he alludes very vaguely to the ideas of institutionalised multicultural policy) that are ‘token’. He says ‘the consequence is that laws, whose letters protects the rights of Muslims, are read and interpreted, and used tendentiously because of this atmosphere of suspicion and so become the “official” and legitimate justification for obvious acts of discrimination’. Ramadan repeats a common thread in his message for western Muslims. He is asking Muslims to be informed on the policies of multiculturalism that affect them, and to question the government focus on multicultural policy that appears to be token, or quick fix. Civic education and knowledge of citizenship rights is paramount to this.

This episode of Islam & Life was aired not long after the British election, which saw a change in government from Labour to a Tory-Liberal coalition, headed by Prime Minister David Cameron. There has been a significant change in stance (although, not in policy) by the new government, and Cameron’s speech at the Munich conference on ‘The death of Multiculturalism’ is an issue that Ramadan has been very vocal on. Ramadan is certainly in favour of the acknowledgement of Multicultural society, ‘Although multiculturalism as we speak about it in the UK is good, it is not good if we

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171 Tariq Ramadan, ‘Is the Multicultural society failing?’
172 Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 71.
mean by it a patchwork of communities not living together but living next to each other. And this is the problem. We have an ideal of multiculturalism but very often British 'indigenous' citizens don't mix with Muslim and culturally Pakistani-British citizens, or those of Bengali or Indian cultures of origin. 173

Almost a year after the previous ‘Islam & Life’ episode, Tariq Ramadan again tackles the issue of Multiculturalism in a very different manner. While the previous episode discussed whether the failure of the multicultural society was myth or fact, this episode looks at the specific causes of the blame being places on Muslims for this failure. The episode begins with an overview of European leaders Angela Merkel and David Cameron, and their speeches that implicitly targeted Muslims for failing to integrate into both German and British society. Essentially as Ramadan notes ‘the multicultural society is failing, and the first to be targeted and mentioned and shown as the main problem is Islam and the new Muslim presence’. 174

Ramadan’s guest is Marc Wadsworth, editor of The-Latest.com, a citizen journalism news portal. He begins by prefacing the history of immigration to the United Kingdom, and the fact that the pluralistic society that now exists in the United Kingdom, is a product of the history of British colonisation in the Caribbean and Africa. He notes that the term multiculturalism was created by ‘them’ (the British government) as a token policy to acknowledge ethnic and cultural communities, without having to confront the more important the socio-economic problems that these communities face due to marginalisation. 175 While his guest is quite clearly reinforcing the idea of ‘them & us’ and the power of the dominant British culture, during the conversation Ramadan clearly tries to diffuse Wadsworth’s approach, by introducing new ways of looking at the Multicultural debate, and ensuring that the focus of the discussion looks at the Muslim population. This is not to say that Ramadan does not agree with Wadsworth’s view on the power imbalance between cultures in British society. Ramadan has been known to attack the idea of cultural imperialism and power imbalance on many occasions

throughout his publications and appearances. However, as mentioned earlier, it is clear that Ramadan’s behaviour as the presenter and moderator of ‘Islam & Life’ often sees him more measured in his approach towards contentious issues.

**Rights achieved through political participation**

*‘The social message of Islam is born in all people’s consciousness of their obligations to make it possible on the collective level to organise structurally the protection of the rights of all’* 

In this vision, the behaviour of Muslims in the West is integral to the future of Islam. Ramadan advocates active participation at all levels of politics and urges Muslims to fulfil their full citizenship responsibilities. This relates to taking part in elections and informing state policies where possible. Ultimately this vision allows for an explicit declaration of allegiance to the state. This vision has led Ramadan to use the term Euro-Islam to emphasise the unity and harmony of Islam’s place in Europe. In his view there is no contradiction between being a good citizen loyal to the secular state and a practicing Muslim. Indeed Ramadan makes this concept a centre-piece of his writings by stating it is ‘My aim is to show, in theory and practice, that one can be both fully Muslim and Western and that beyond our different affiliations we share many common principles and values through which it is possible to “live together” within contemporary, Pluralistic, multicultural societies.’

In Ramadan’s vision the democratic legal and political system of the West offers the best protection to Muslims and multiculturalism is an important pillar of that system in the United Kingdom. This view has obvious links to the idea of social contract between the state and its citizens, although Ramadan does not use that terminology. Nonetheless, the notion of mutual obligations, rights and responsibilities are central to Ramadan’s view of how he and his fellow Muslim followers could be good Muslims and good citizens.

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176 Reyes, *Living together: an interview with Tariq Ramadan.*
177 Ramadan, *Western Muslims,* 149.
Ramadan’s emphasis on mutual obligations where Muslims have a duty to act as model citizens in a state that facilitates the free and unfettered expression of Muslim identity, coupled with his emphasis on promoting the essence of Islam, which he insists is consistent with the universal values that inform the legal framework in the West, has allowed Ramadan to navigate the assumed contradiction between secular and Islamic law. Ramadan’s ideas have excited many observers and have won him the title of ‘reformer’ and ‘bridge-builder’ between Islam and the West. Ramadan covets these descriptions and cultivates his public persona as a moderate reformist, titling his 2009 book Radical Reform. There he argued that ‘the contemporary Muslim conscience has to transform this turmoil... into an energy of debate, renewal and creativity that produces faithfulness as well as serene coherence at the heart of our modern age and its challenges’. Ramadan also notes ‘This is a matter of claiming rights in the name of Right: many Muslims passively submit to harassment, racist remarks, and discrimination that are unacceptable. All people as citizens are responsible for claiming their rights and gaining respect.’

Blind voting

‘At election time, candidates should receive a clear message without political contortions. Some of these elected representatives promise the “Muslim communities” a mosque or a centre, or a hall, or a cemetery... in order to get their support and their votes and unfortunately they find Muslim citizens ready to play the game.’

In an episode of Islam and Life in 2010 titled ‘Muslim Political Participation’, Ramadan raises the issues of a ‘blind political participation’ by the Muslim community. He notes that any campaign for political participation should be a campaign for Muslims and non Muslims together. He urges Muslim citizens not to talk only in terms of religious or Islamic issues that affect them. The starting point for this, is for an ‘individual to create their own understanding of political party policies’ individually and this involves education and the promotion of tools such as websites and public

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179 Ramadan, Radical Reform, 38.
180 Ramadan, Western Muslims, 154
181 Ramadan, Western Muslims, 167
meetings. He tells his viewers “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket”, and to take into account morals, ethics and responsibilities as British Citizens when making a decision who to vote for. But Ramadan’s rhetoric is also cautionary when it comes to the promotion of political involvement.

In this episode Ramadan also interviews Azzad Ali, who tries to explain the evolving nature of Muslim political participation in the UK by dividing it into time periods, connected to patterns of migration and external events. Ali proclaims that for the last 10-15 years, the theological arguments surrounding Shari Law and non participation of Muslims in politics have been the norm. Ali argues that this idea is now on the fringes, and the mainstream Muslim population sees it as a duty of their faith to participate in politics. Ramadan agrees with this notion, and as the episode was aired only weeks before the 2010 British general election, it served a clear message to Muslim viewers on the benefits of political participation. Azzad Ali also notes that the political minds of Muslims in the UK are maturing, and many are moving away from simply for Muslim MP’s, and moving to vote in a principled fashion.

In the programme, Ramadan approaches the topic of the political participation of Muslims bases solely on “Islamic issues” but when it comes to “un-Islamic” domestic issues such as environment, economy, Muslims appear to be historically less active in engaging on the political level. Ramadan is clearly opposed to this line of thinking, and insights change among Muslim voters. He states that Muslim voters must take a ‘balanced approach’ and to be wary of politicians ‘buying you’. Muslims should vote in a ‘strategically minded and tactical’ way. Essentially Ramadan sends a message to Muslim voters that participating in democratic processes is a positive way in which to dispel myths of the ‘Muslim Problem’. In an attempt to dispel the negative views of Muslim participation in politics, and quell views by groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir who advocate for non-participation, Ramadan pushes for active engagement. He states that the Quran encourages this kind of civic duty to the state in which you live in reinforces the ideas that Muslim voter behaviour can be informed by Muslims

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183 These are generally international political issues such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or the Israel/Palestine conflict or national issues such as building Islamic schools or mosques.
personal and religious duties. As he has written “the ethics of citizenship here come into full meaning: it is not about voting for a candidate capable of protecting our interests or of voting only for a Muslim; it is clearly a question of establishing objective criteria for making choices on the basis of conscience.”

Again, the depth of constraints must be acknowledged here, and as noted previously in this chapter, number of political factors has acted to further push the stereotype of ‘the Muslim problem’ in across Europe. The question of the failure of multiculturalism has been discussed by politicians across usually in regards to the lack of integration by Muslim communities into the wider society. This is an issue that academics, the media and politicians have been debating, and an issue that Ramadan has been fervently discussing in his ‘Islam & Life’ episodes.

**Conclusion**

Overall, what this chapter has demonstrated is that Tariq Ramadan holds an important place in contributing to a balanced debate on the future of Muslims in the West, and in particular Europe. Ramadan presents a sound argument for the full participation of Muslims in the European political sphere, although Western countries must continue work inclusively to come up with a menu of policies and practices for the realization of the kind of multicultural citizenship he espouses. He possesses the charisma, public persona, academic and theological knowledge and media savvy to appeal to both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities, as well as influencing government and public policy.

Tariq Ramadan addresses the key constraints to Muslim political participation in Europe. While he provides important insights into how Muslims should engage through various avenues to political participation, his views on the intersection between the global *umma* and the identity formation of Muslims is often troublesome and lacks clarity. It is important that Muslims are afforded the rights to express their religious identity in the public space; however this is seen by some politicians and groups as a threat to the secular nature of European politics. It is also seen by more classical scholars in the Islamic community as a threat to the traditional tenets of Islam. The problem is that Ramadan attempts, to be ‘all things to all people’.

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185 Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 170.
The constraints on the realisation of rights that have been discussed in this chapter; issues of identity, minority citizenship, multiculturalism and education, are all topics that Ramadan acknowledges separately in his books and also in his programme Islam and Life. What emerges is an unclear picture for Europe’s Muslims, as there appears to be very real restrictions on the dominant view of the Muslim community as a ‘minority’. Ramadan is keenly aware that European Muslims must discard the minority mindset and assert their political rights. But how realistic this is, given the social and economic discrimination European Muslims face, requires further discussion by Ramadan.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This research has examined the limitations in Tariq Ramadan’s approach to presenting a viable future for Muslim political participation in Europe. By analysing Ramadan’s key publications on political participation, as well as his public appearances and television programme Islam and Life, broadcast on Iranian Press TV, the concluding argument is that while Ramadan’s views on the significance of Muslim political participation present a significant contribution to establishing a viable public space for European Muslims, there are inconsistencies in his approach that stymie his efforts to make a substantial input. Ramadan’s views have been shaped by both Western and Islamic
scholarship, allowing him to occupy an important space in the discussion on political participation of Muslim communities in Europe. While this research has demonstrated that there is no evidence to suggest Ramadan is a ‘Terrorist in disguise’, academic critics such as Bassam Tibi provide important insights on the contradictions within Ramadan’s theoretical approaches to an inclusive ‘Euro-Islam’ based on the tenets of universalism, western democracy and Islam. Importantly, the research has also demonstrated that Ramadan’s banning from the United States for six years between 2004 and 2010 drove him to focus more specifically on the importance of Muslim political participation in the West, and more specifically in Europe. Ramadan began to more fervently advocate for the political participation of Muslims to counter policies and legislation such as the US Patriot Act, he saw to impinge on the rights of Muslims. Since 2010, in the European context, Ramadan has been vocal in his push for the importance of civic education and political participation. The most obvious sign of this has been his Islam & Life programme, in which he has used events such as the British Election, to promote his ideas on the political participation of Muslim communities. He has also responded to topical current events, such as the supposed ‘Death of Multiculturalism’ and instances of Islamophobic politics across Europe, focussing on the role that European Muslims can play in dispelling negative media attention towards Europe’s Muslim communities.

However, Ramadan’s ability to address the various social, political and legal constraints to citizenship for Muslims in Europe is often limited, due to his risk adverse behaviour in tackling controversial Islamic practices, and the fact that his Islam and Life programme is broadcast by an Iranian state funded network. While Ramadan has been widely criticised for these two contradictions, he has inadequately addressed these criticisms, particularly in the context of his constant promotion of the Universalism of Islam and its relationship to western democratic values. This poses a significant threat to the efficacy of his public profile and ideas.

**Political Participation of European Muslim Communities**

This research began by asserting the following research question as the core of the enquiry into Tariq Ramadan:
Does Tariq Ramadan adequately address constraints to the full political participation of Muslims in Europe, and do the criticisms of his approach hinder his effort in proving the compatibility between Islamic and Western values?

The research has demonstrated that Ramadan’s approach to the political participation of Muslims is positive and inclusive, and based on the principles of universalism Ramadan sees within the Islamic faith, and also within European democratic processes. Ramadan acknowledges that there are challenges to this political participation, particularly in the literal reading of the Quran and the belief of some parts of the Islamic community that participation of Muslims in politics in Europe to be *haram*. Nonetheless, it is Ramadan’s ultimate goal to promote civic education among European Muslim communities to view political participation as an avenue out of social and economic marginalisation within their own communities. Participation within the public space need not come with Muslims discarding their Islamic values in liberal secular democracies— as Ramadan as said ‘Nothing in secularism opposed a free and autonomous practice of Islam’.  

Ramadan is also wary of European democratic processes, and challenges Muslim communities to be mindful of individuals and political parties which seek to buy the Muslim vote. He urges European Muslims to be mindful of voting only for ‘Muslim Issues’ and see the wider application of Islamic values in environmental, social and economic policies. During the British election in particular, Ramadan was involved in a number of *Islam and Life* programmes which outlined his beliefs and ideas for the positive participation of European Muslim communities. As has been documented in this research, Ramadan has come up against many criticisms for his approach.

While Ramadan has formed a legitimate public persona, critics from neo-liberal writers such as Paul Berman and Caroline Fourest, public figures such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and academics such as Gilles Kepel and Bassam Tibi have been critical of Ramadan’s motives and approach. These criticisms, particularly from neo-liberal critics, are based on ideological bias, and are often driven by sense of Islamophobia, or the fear of the presence of Muslim communities in the public sphere. Critics such as Paul Berman and Caroline Fourest have focused heavily on the influence that Hassan al Banna has had.

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on Tariq Ramadan’s career trajectory, and view this as contrary to his statements on the 
universalism of Islam and its compatibility with Western democracy. Al banna’s 
struggle, which saw him advocate for the ousting of British control in Egypt cannot be 
equated with Ramadan’s mission in the West. In books and public appearances, 
Ramadan acknowledges the impact his grandfather had on his role as a public figure; 
however Ramadan operates in a different political and social environment than that of 
his grandfather, and this must be taken into account. Criticisms of Ramadan based on 
his apparent links to the MB, are not conducive to a cohesive understanding of 
Ramadan’s work, and do not illustrate flaws on the compatibility between Islam and 
western democracy. It is important to note the ideological stand point Ramadan’s critics 
come from. Fourrest believes in secularism, and the neutrality of the public space.

**Contradictions and Controversies**

Tariq Ramadan’s views for the political participation of Muslim communities in Europe 
are heavily grounded in his belief in the universalism of the Islamic faith. He believes 
that there is very little within the Islamic text that should dissuade European Muslims 
for participating in democratic processes. However, there are certain issues where 
Ramadan’s positive views of political participation, the universalism he espouses and 
his stance on certain Islamic traditional practices such as stoning that are contradictory. 
This has been seen in his call for a ‘moratorium’ on corporal punishment within Muslim 
majority countries.

Ramadan’s academic peers produce important thoughts on the contradictions fraught 
within Ramadan’s body of work, and these criticisms of Ramadan shed light on the 
inconsistencies in his work. Bassam Tibi, himself a European Muslim and academic 
who has written profusely on the topic of Islam in Europe, criticises Ramadan for the 
‘expansionist’ nature of his rhetoric.

The danger however, is that the controversies that Ramadan has been involved in could 
work to extinguish the positive aspects of his work. On two occasions he has lost 
positions at well respected universities due to his remarks against local or national 
politics. The controversies have both came at extremely difficult times for both the
Dutch and American governments, as they attempted to find policies and strategies which will accommodate the increasing diversity of their populations. As described, Ramadan has on many occasions tried to set the record straight on his grandfather Hassan al Banna, and the Muslim Brotherhood. The MB’s involvement in the Egyptian uprisings in 2011 has again brought the group into the spotlight, and because of this Ramadan has defended his grandfather as non-violent.

Ramadan’s views on the rights and responsibilities urge Muslims to participate within the structures that already exist, attempting to dispel the idea the generalization that Muslims in the west want to impose ‘their own’ Sharia law on the wider society. Ramadan’s *Islam and Life* programmes provide the most insight into his thinking on the range of issues that affect Muslims living in the west. Unfortunately, due to the fact that Press TV is an Iranian state funded organization, these shows do not make it into the mainstream media, and are therefore not viewed by a wider audience. This link to the Iranian government could also delegitimize the programme and Ramadan’s views.

While Tariq Ramadan proposes a practical, moderate and inclusive approach for the participation of Muslims as active European citizens, there are contradictions within his approach that stymie his work, and act to demonize his character. His inability to tackle controversial traditional Islamic practices, as well as his continuing role as a presenter on Iranian state funded Press TV, prevent his capability to act as a successful interlocutor in the debate on European Islam.

However, the research also argues that with changing religious and ethnic composition of European society, further policy dialogue must be undertaken to respond to the nature of European Secularism, and European Political participation. Tariq Ramadan plays an important role in this. The presence of Islam throughout Europe has challenged the traditional notions of secularism. Some governments have responded to this by implementing laws that ban religious symbols or practices, and reinforcing secular ideals. However, the backlash to these policies has raised questions on the rights of European Muslim citizens. While academic critics such as Bassam Tibi argue that Ramadan is attempting to ‘Islamisice Europe’, it is important to analyse Ramadan’s ideas on Muslim political participation in Europe in contrast with the increased
visibility of Muslim populations, and the assertion of their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

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