Reading Ramadan: What Should We Demand of Muslim Intellectuals in the West?

Summary

Tariq Ramadan is an exciting, and controversial public figure who presents himself as a bridge between Islamic and democratic communities which have at times radically different understandings of justice, morality and even, in some cases, of which basic facts best describe the way our social world operates. This figure presents two distinct messages to those two communities: to his own, a message of confidence and authenticity; to the outside community, a message of trust and conciliation.

Liberal democracies must have a firm but also consistent view regarding what they demand intellectually, morally and spiritually of minority communities. Because liberal democracies limit their aspirations to the just and stable ordering of social cooperation, democratic societies ought to require agreement from their fellow citizens on only those matters which are essential to the preservation 1

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of justice, political stability and social solidarity from one generation to the next. We must be very cautious about demanding further agreement about ultimate ends and the morality of policies and practices which are not predetermined by the standards of justice.

The Muslim community in Europe and North America is old enough to develop claims and grievances, but too young for there to exist a tradition of principled, philosophical thinking on how Islamic values and modern liberal democracies might respond to one another dialectically. Ramadan is the first authentic product of that dialectic; as it happens he is also both the beneficiary and victim of a complex geopolitical moment. He thus inspires excitement for what democratic societies see of themselves in his views and invites mistrust for what is still alien. But we must remember that as a public intellectual the laws of engagement must be different from those we employ for rival political and military leaders.

In articulating consistently a new language and way of speaking about Islamic duties, Ramadan is (whether sincere or not) creating a reality.

The rightful fascination of Western intellectuals with Islamic political and ethical traditions (predominantly its traditions of warfare, but also of governance, social order and gender relations) is now almost matched by our fascination with “Islam in the West,” with particular interest in whether Islamic religious values might be “compatible” with the liberal political order of European and North American countries. This interest quite naturally manifests itself in a focus on certain key public figures in European Islam. In Britain, these figures are often colorful and uninhibited advocates of some of the most radical and violent strains of fundamentalist (or, Salafi) Islam. However, by far the single most prominent symbol of the search for an authentic Islamic voice holding out the promise of an affirmation of citizenship in the West is Tariq Ramadan. The prominence of Ramadan in this discourse is understandable. He is, on the one hand, a scion of political Islam – the grandson of Hasan al-Banna the Egyptian founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, the wellspring of many of Islamism’s 20th century tendencies, and the son of Sa‘id Ramadan, one of the most prominent mid-century figures in
the “Islamist International” comprised of exiles from Muslim countries, local grassroots movements (from the Brotherhood to more radical “Salafi” groups), and the conservative Oil Monarchies. On the other hand, he is an outspoken advocate of the notion that European Muslims can be both in equal measure. He calls on Muslims to be active and engaged citizens of European countries, faithful to their constitutional systems, yet insists that this can be done without adopting a diluted, “liberal Islam” in matters of social and personal morality. On top of this, Ramadan is telegenic, articulate, multilingual and charismatic. For a Western audience he is a unique Muslim media figure: neither a radical bogeyman a la Bin Ladin or Khomeini (or one of their myriad imitators such as Sheikh Abu Hamza al-Masri or even, significantly, Ramadan’s own brother Hani), nor an outright secular liberal (ex-)Muslim a la Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji or Salman Rushdie.

As such, Ramadan occupies a crucial, yet precarious position. His entire career as a public intellectual is predicated on a single proposition: that a Muslim intellectual in the West can both be authentically Islamic, retaining a good measure of authority amongst conservative, believing Muslims, and at the same time advocate an Islamic doctrine which is not in conflict with the basic terms of social cooperation in liberal societies. Of course, occupying such a position involves a familiar dilemma: that authenticity for insiders and acceptability for outsiders are locked in a zero-sum calculus. Let us call it the Conciliator’s Paradox. A figure like Ramadan, to be the public figure he is, must constantly walk the tightrope of preserving the respect of the European Muslim community and the trust of non-Muslim Europeans. It is inevitable that such a task will involve sending different signals to each group and it is thus equally inevitable that each group might come to suspect the intentions of such a figure. For Muslims the suspicion might arise that Ramadan is, in fact, a “sell-out” or goes too far in making Islam acceptable to infidels; for non-Muslims it is that Ramadan is merely the attractive, human face of a darker, more radical Islam threatening to the social order of European societies and incompatible with their values. The European (and now, American) intellectual scene has thus produced what we might call a certain “Ramadanology” devoted towards getting to the bottom of Tariq Ramadan’s “true” views and intentions. This
literature is, of course, older and richer in France, where Ramadan is a household name and full-fledged public figure, but now includes periodic coverage in the British press, a prominent profile by Ian Buruma in the *New York Times Magazine*, a series of internet-based apologia by Timothy Garten Ash and, most recently and notably, Peter Berman’s 29,000 word polemic in *The New Republic*.

Ramadan is a rightfully important figure, and not just as a symbol or media phenomenon. Scrutiny of his views (and, surely, his non-public political activities or connections) is very much in order and not a witch-hunt or a form of so-called “Islamophobia”. However, much of the journalistic and popular debate over Ramadan takes the form not so much of a close reading of his published works, but of an attempt to answer the question “Who is the real Tariq Ramadan?” This trope, which resembles the parlor game of speculating on the true intent or motivations of political office holders with the aim of deciding whether they are worthy of trust (think: Yassir Arafat, Gerry Adams or Vladimir Putin), assumes that Ramadan is either a sincere proponent of integration into Western societies or a “crypto-Islamist” engaging in double-speak.

But is a template appropriate for taking the measure of wielders of actual political power (it *did* matter what Arafat’s ultimate intentions or capabilities were, if he in fact had any; we now *know* the answer to the question of whether Gerry Adams was sincere about ending the IRA’s terrorist campaign) actually to the point in dealing with public intellectuals? After all, what are we trusting Ramadan with? He is not a candidate for European Minister of the Interior, or even some “European Integration Czar.” He does not command a militia. He is not using Muslim communities (never mind the threat of violence) as a bargaining chip in exchange for political power for himself or a party. In fact, he is not using his prestige or authority per se to *demand* anything. Thus, while the basic cultural and psychological dynamic of the Conciliator’s Paradox more commonly associated with actual negotiation strategies such as the Irish or Palestinian peace processes does have an analogue in Ramadan’s career as a public intellectual and influential figure in European Islam, there is not a trace of the rational concern with the threat of *perfidy* which accompanies long-term peace negotiations in the conditions of mistrust and imperfect information.
We thus need a better template for reading the writings and speeches of a figure like Ramadan, primarily for intellectual reasons. We are simply missing something important when our sole concern is to unmask the ultimate intentions of a public intellectual, if not getting it wrong outright. However, it is also in our interest if what we ultimately want is a class of a Muslim public intellectuals who enjoy not only our trust and approval, but also authority with committed Muslims. For, to be sure, the Conciliator’s Paradox is the dilemma of the outside group as much as it is the Conciliator’s: presumably the community seeking a bridge to another alienated community is interested in an effective spokesperson for conciliation. There is no use in having a prominent “moderate Muslim leader” if that person enjoys no authority amongst the alienated group (here, the analogy to figures like Gerry Adams or Yassir Arafat is, in fact, apropos). Thus, public treatment of a figure like Tariq Ramadan (and, more broadly, Islamic discourses in the West) requires a high degree of thoughtfulness about our own political culture and a long-term perspective about what we regard as the boundary between reasonable (if illiberal) and unreasonable religious responses to life in a diverse society, certainly more thoughtfulness than what characterizes much of the journalism on this subject (which reached its apogee in Berman’s article).

Liberalism and Religion

Much of the evaluation of the views of a figure like Ramadan takes the form of suggestion and innuendo. (It is noteworthy that Berman’s exposé, which depicts Ramadan as his grandfather’s grandson, an Islamist in sheep’s clothing, has nothing close to a smoking gun in the form of the mildest statement justifying terrorism against or even disruption of European societies). It also invariably involves a certain bait-and-switch, in the form of casting doubt on the possibility that an Islamic religious thinker could be sincere in his advocacy of civic loyalty to non-Muslim societies by quoting his conservative or illiberal views on unrelated matters, such as evolution or gender relations. What is lacking is a clear and explicit sense in own minds what exactly the place of (possibly illiberal) religion is in a liberal society, what constitutes a loyal affirmation of citizenship, and what positions cross the boundaries of reasonableness.
So, what is the place of religion in a liberal society, and what is special about Islam? Why does a liberal society care about the religious views of its citizenry; when it is entitled to make demands on citizens which might conflict with obligations of conscience? Does a liberal society ultimately seek to create citizens or human selves and how do we know the difference? What sorts of ultimate disagreements should we tolerate and which should we seek to remove or contain? We ought to be clear about our understanding of liberalism when we look for moral contemporaries from within other communities, but commentators are often not sensitive to what this means. (Berman’s piece is subtitled “The Islamist, the Journalist and the Defense of Liberalism” but is often confused about what liberalism requires by way of tolerating non-liberal forms of life. Buruma’s piece, while more favorable towards Ramadan similarly lacks any evaluation of his controversial positions from within a principled analytic framework.)

Contemporary academic political philosophers often speak of two forms of liberalism: “comprehensive liberalism” versus “political liberalism.” Comprehensive liberalism is a way of life, a theory of value and an epistemology. Comprehensive liberals value rational autonomy, critical scrutiny of tradition, skepticism and experimentation. They make truth claims for these values and do not seek to disguise their incompatibility with ways of life based on heteronomous deference to established authority. Political liberalism, by contrast, is a doctrine of social cooperation. It seeks to elaborate the most reasonable public conception of justice and citizenship for free and equal persons, given the fact that many of us disagree on the ultimate meaning of life and the epistemological foundation for discovering it. Political liberals value the right to individual freedom from being coerced to live a certain way based on a certain conception of the good. They value social solidarity based on mutual recognition and a fair distribution of resources. They insist on the education of citizens so that they are aware of their freedoms and rights and that they recognize the equal right of other citizens to these freedoms; but they do not presume to educate citizens into a single world view or epistemology. Political liberalism defends these terms of social cooperation not as “true” but as the most reasonable given the fact of moral pluralism and – importantly – insists that these terms need not contradict the aims of most ways of life, particularly religious ones.
Many of us are both comprehensive and political liberals. We value autonomy and critical thinking in our own lives and raise our children in this way, but do not assume that our religious fellow citizens need to be taught the truth of these values in schools and other public institutions. Many of us are comprehensive authoritarians but political liberals. We believe in the truth of a revealed morality and raise our children to obey it, but do not seek to commandeer the state or other coercive authority to impose it on others (or even our own children). Of course, many of us are not political liberals at all but (to continue to follow the philosophical jargon) “political perfectionists”: we think we know that our metaphysical (religious or secular) beliefs are true and that this alone justifies using public authority to advance these views.

Which are we in contemporary European and North American societies? Broadly speaking, a form of political liberalism holds sway although not usually by that name. Rather, we speak of societies which accommodate diversity, religious freedom, pluralism, multiculturalism, fairness, and tolerance. But the broad agreement with political liberalism is unmistakable: We do not think that the state ought to come down on one side or the other of metaphysical questions (Is there a God? Which revelation best conveys His instructions? What is the best way to live?); religious communities ought to be tolerated within the confines of human and civil rights and left alone to perform their own exegesis and theology; the state (i.e., the majority of a democratic community) is only permitted to interfere in the lives of individuals and minority communities insofar as this is necessary to defend the rights of vulnerable individuals or to protect legitimate public interests (such as security, public health, etc.); and we expect that certain religious ways of life will survive which do not affirm the primacy of individual freedom, scientific rationality and absolute gender equality.

Our task is to think through the problem of what exactly the minimum demands of “integration” are with special reference to Islamic doctrine and the possible points of principled conflict. Integration into a liberal democratic society involves, I would like to
submit, demands of *justice* and demands of *citizenship*. Demands of justice relate to the broad range of liberal rights and freedoms which all citizens enjoy on an equal basis. There is no doubt that a committed Muslim can find within Islamic legal doctrine plenty of grounds for rejecting liberal conceptions of justice; Muslims are enjoined to “command the right and forbid the wrong” and a long tradition of juridical, political and theological thought encourages Muslim communities to enforce Islamic morality in ways which manifestly violate modern liberal civil and human rights. Thus, it is certainly plausible that a European Muslim thinker could assert that Muslims have, in principle, the right to enact the infamous *hudud* punishments even within Europe or, at the very least, that Muslims have no principled reasons for recognizing the legitimacy of modern liberal freedoms, such as the freedom to leave Islam, flout Islamic sexual morality, or depict the Prophet Muhammad in offensive ways.

Demands of citizenship relate to the idea of membership, belonging and loyalty to a *particular* political community. This is problematic from an Islamic perspective to the extent that many jurists and theologians have argued on the basis of revelation that Muslims form a political community themselves and are not permitted to form deep bonds of solidarity with non-Muslims. Non-Muslim political communities are often presumed to be directly antagonistic to the Islamic community and only enjoy rights to immunity if so contracted with a legitimate Imam. On this basis, it is plausible that a European Muslim thinker could assert that Muslims ought not to strengthen their non-Muslim host societies, ought not to integrate into them and owe those societies no loyalty, political or military.

There is no doubt that a liberal society has the right to expect its citizens to endorse its most fundamental principles of justice and citizenship. Given the capacity for Islam to deny them, the most important and elemental principles which liberals ought to insist on include:

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- that Islamic conceptions of morality can only be cultivated and encouraged within Muslim families and communities though non-coercive means;
- that the public sphere in non-Muslim liberal democracies cannot be expected to accommodate all Islamic religious sensibilities by limiting freedoms of expression;
- that grievances with public authorities be redressed politically and with a long-term commitment to democratic political systems;
- that non-Muslim fellow citizens are recognized as eligible for bonds of political and social solidarity and that relations with them are regarded as relationship of justice (rather than contingent accommodation);
- that Muslims can recognize the diversity and ethical pluralism of liberal societies as a permanent feature and not something to be ultimate overcome by a future Muslim majority;
- that, whatever legitimate solidarity Muslims feel for the global community of Muslims, non-Muslim states of citizenship enjoy immunity from violence.

These principles amount to a principled and robust commitment to citizenship, and are quite contestable from within Islamic sources. However, because they represent an affirmation of the most basic reasonable terms of social cooperation, all citizens are justified in insisting on their affirmation by other fellow citizens. It must be said – and remarkably, none of Ramadan’s critics or skeptics question this – that Ramadan is exemplary and consistent in his endorsement of these basic principles. For Ramadan, Muslims are bound by an explicit and demanding contract with European societies which compels their loyalty to the constitutional orders of those societies. What is crucial in Ramadan’s understanding of the moral force of this social contract is that it is not a mere formal or legalistic contract, but one which is legitimated by the liberal terms set by modern constitutionalism. Because “the various European constitutions and laws respect Islam as a Religion and Muslims as Believers who have the right, as others, to enjoy freedom of worship” and “the great majority of Muslims live in an atmosphere of security
and peace regarding religious matters.” Muslims are obliged to support the liberal constitutional orders which provide these guarantees.

I would like to argue further, however, that these above principles are all we are justified in demanding. Political liberalism allows for a wide range of disagreement on moral matters and does not insist on Muslim assimilation to all aspects of liberal culture. If it is true that modern European and North American societies are in their liberalism more “Rawlsian” (pluralistic and neutral between conceptions of the good) than “Voltaireian” (committed to a robust and true conception of autonomy and scientific rationality to which the religious must conform), we have an obligation to evaluate the political thought of someone like Ramadan from this perspective: Is he endorsing the liberal terms of social cooperation on principled grounds or not? Is someone like Ramadan actually calling on Muslims to endorse European citizenship or he is peddling an esoteric doctrine of subversion from within liberal societies which a close reading of his utterances will reveal?

None of his critics appear to be arguing that the latter is true. Rather, they allude to his conservative views on gender, his anti-capitalist social views or, predictably, his views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, on this understanding of liberal citizenship, there is nothing alarming about a religious citizen who recognizes the full civic equality of women, yet believes in a traditional conception of gender roles or sexual morality (so do many Christian and Jewish theologians). Or one who espouses socialist economic viewpoints. Or one who expresses solidarity with Palestinians and opposes certain European foreign policies. What would be alarming is a citizen who regards the liberal legal order tout court as illegitimate and violence or revolutionary action appropriate responses to it. That accusation has never even been suggested in the case of Ramadan.

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3 Tariq Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim* (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), pp. 121-2.
Islam and the West; Islam in the West

A recurring assumption in the treatment of Western Muslim intellectuals is that Islamic thought on life in the West is continuous with Islamic thought on Muslim-majority societies and their relationship to Western power. The idea is that if we can place a Muslim thinker’s views on jihad, the Islamic state, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we know all we need to know about his or her views on life in the West, liberalism and citizenship. This assumption is particularly salient in Berman’s piece on Ramadan.

This assumption is not always misplaced. Many Muslim thinkers do, in fact, view life in the West as a sub-question to be answered by orthodox Islamic methodologies much like all matters. Many do, in fact, regard a country’s support for Israel or the war in Iraq as voiding any existing “contract of security” with that country. Many do, in fact, regarded Islamic religious punishments as equally valid in non-Muslim countries as in Muslim-majority countries.

However, many do not, and even some fairly conservative Islamic discourses treat life in a non-Muslim country as a special problem of Islamic legal thought. Alas, most journalistic commentators on Ramadan and other European Islamic thinkers are unaware of these intellectual debates (often conducted in Arabic) and are thus unable to appreciate where Ramadan fits on the spectrum of Islamic thought on life in the West. Here, writers like Berman are simply out of their depth yet do not refrain from making certain claims and connections (or intimating them) with great confidence.

A good entry into this problem is the question of jihad and violent revolution. A typical approach to Ramadan’s thought is, first, to establish a link from the early Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood via Sayyid Qutb and the 1970s violent jihadi organizations to al-Qaeda and other contemporary terrorist organizations. Then, by establishing Ramadan’s genetic connection (both literal and intellectual) to Muslim Brotherhood ideology the claim that Ramadan must at heart have sympathy for jihadi terrorism (including domestic terrorism in Europe) is regarded as proven.

There are many problems with this intellectual and historiographical strategy. But the most important one has nothing to
do with questioning the link between various strands of modern Islamic Revivalism or Salafism. For argument’s sake (and only for that), let us grant the notion that all forms of Islamic fundamentalism are open to the temptation of jihad and that the al-Banna-Qutb-Bin Ladin intellectual genealogy has some plausibility and that Ramadan’s on-the-record endorsement of his grandfather and Brotherhood thinkers like Yusuf al-Qaradawi implicates him in this chain.

There are two crucial problems with this basic approach. The first is that it is utterly uninformed about various Islamic jihad doctrines within the Revivalist-Salafi side of the spectrum. The second is that it does not take seriously the most important aspect of Ramadan’s career, which is as a theorist of a European Islam, rather than as a simple proponent of one version or another of modern Islamic Revivalism.

As to the first problem: For journalists like Berman, jihad against Israel or the Americans in Iraq is of one ilk with jihad against secular Muslim regimes like Egypt, the 9/11 attacks, indiscriminant slaughter in Algeria and Iraq, and the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid. But for Muslim thinkers who are sincerely interested in the Islamic legal and ethical tradition, they are not. Take the figure of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the famous Egyptian-Qatari Brotherhood-inspired theologian famous for his weekly show on al-Jazeera “Sharia and Life” and also for issuing a fatwa permitting Palestinian suicide bombing. The latter position, obviously contemptible, is often invoked as proof that so-called “moderate” neo-classical Islamic trends are not so moderate after-all and must therefore be ultimately part of the same web as the Egyptian Islamic Group, the Iraqi insurgency, al-Qaeda and the London bombers. As it happens, nothing of the sort is the case. Many conservative, juridically-minded Islamic thinkers view Israel and the American occupation of Iraq as simple aggressions on Muslim lands and populations, but argue in detailed Islamic terms against the slaughter of civilians (admittedly Israel is an unfortunate exception) or the reckless unleashing of “fitna” (broadly: chaos, or civil unrest). My argument is not that any of the Islamic jihad doctrines are reasonable by our standards and that the near-universal exception given to the Israeli case is tolerable, but rather that the assumption that once we can place a thinker in the web of “Revivalist
Islam” we know all we need to know about all of their specific views is an intolerable act of laziness.

An important example of the complexity of fundamentalist jihad doctrines is the seriousness with which Islamic legal thinkers since the Middle Ages have taken the idea of contract. According to Islamic legal and political doctrines since the 9th century, Muslims are permitted to travel to and reside in non-Muslim lands under an explicit “contract of mutual security” known as an “aman.” For Muslim jurists, fidelity to a contract is a non-negotiable religious duty and Muslims under an aman from a non-Muslim state are never permitted to betray that contract even during a legitimate jihad. Thus, many very conservative Islamic thinkers, even ones who support jihad against Israel or the United States, insist that Muslims residing securely and peacefully in non-Muslim states may not attack those societies. Famously, even the radical “al-Muhajirun” group in Britain declared that while they support “raids” such as the 9/11 attacks, American and British Muslims may not partake in such domestic terrorism because of their contractual obligations.

It goes without saying that Ramadan is one of the most vociferous advocates of the idea that Muslims are bound by their explicit or tacit contracts with their states of citizenship or residence: “millions of Muslims have tacitly or explicitly recognised the binding character of the constitution or the laws of the country they enter into and then live in. By signing a work contract or asking for a visa, they acknowledge the validity and authority of the constitution, the laws and the state all at once.” Thus, even if the claim were true (and I have serious doubts) that Ramadan is a knee-jerk advocate of the Brotherhood party-line, we must be very clear that this implies almost nothing about what views he holds regarding the obligations of European Muslims. In fact, the views that it does imply are quite promising in the area of establishing foundations for a secure social contract.

As to the second problem: It is troubling that journalistic investigation (such as Berman’s) into Ramadan’s intellectual links to the broader Salafi movement obscures the most important aspect of

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4 Ibid., p. 164.
Ramadan’s career, which is as a theorist of a European Islam. Indeed, given the lengthy treatment of his possible connections to fundamentalist ideology, it is noteworthy that Berman spends relatively little time discussing what exactly Ramadan believes the attitude of Muslims should be towards European liberal democracies, which he clearly sees as his mission in life (as opposed to, say, giving religious guidance to the Muslim world).

Now, the argument might run: “How liberal or loyal could someone with any Salafi sympathies possibly be?” But I have tried to show above that this is mistaken in the area of violence and terrorism, given how good the Islamic legal tradition, for all its faults, happens to be on the idea of contracts. Thus, while investigating the precise connections between the various strands of Salafism may be useful, in this case it actually obscures the real story about the intellectual career of Tariq Ramadan.

Most troublingly, this approach is something of a Rube Goldberg device. With Tariq Ramadan on record in such detail and at such length about his views on European Islam and Muslims’ obligations towards those societies, how is speculation about his possible intellectual, religious and moral loyalties based on family history and a shoddy understanding of modern Islamic trends a superior path to understanding?

What a more attentive and curious reading of Ramadan’s published works (and others on the Muslim-minority question) would reveal is that even “Revivalist” Islamic thought is concerned with many issues in addition to jihad, Palestine and the Islamic state. Muslim thinkers are concerned about, inter (much) alia, constructing a principled “ideological geography” of the world (e.g., adopting, reforming or abandoning the famous “dar al-harb” vs. “dar al-Islam” dichotomy), elaborating a doctrine of religious authority in new social conditions, understanding the place of Islamic legal thought for Muslim minorities and devising appropriate interpretative methodologies, addressing the problem of sustaining Islamic personal and social morality in permissive European cultures, and configuring their conflicting political loyalties and personal identities.

Any intellectually and morally serious treatment of the thought of Tariq Ramadan would begin by examining his views on these
subjects in light of our interest in an “Islamic doctrine of citizenship,” preferably in comparison with similar and/or competing Islamic treatments of these questions.

The Spectrum of Islamic Views on Muslim Minorities in the West

This leads to another problem with most of the popular debates on Ramadan’s thought – that in addition to no consistent and principled theory of what we may rightfully demand of Islamic thinkers, most commentators have no apparent understanding of what other Islamic thinkers are saying on these questions and thus reveal no awareness of where Ramadan fits within the burgeoning literature on how Muslims should live in the West and relate to their societies. There is a wide spectrum here, from radical Qutbists and Wahhabis who say Muslims should not live there at all (this, alone casts serious doubt on the affinity between Qutbism and Ramadan’s thought which Berman is so eager to establish), to some Salafis who say it is permitted but that Muslims cannot integrate into Western societies beyond what the law requires, to neo-classical scholars like Qaradawi who say that Muslims ought to integrate but only for the purpose of proselytizing (da’wa) and to bring about the ultimate Islamization of those societies.

So where does Ramadan fit in this spectrum? Briefly: on the far end of the pro-citizenship, pro-integration wing, very much independently of someone like Qaradawi (who Berman insists is Ramadan’s guiding light in all doctrinal matters). Ramadan’s views on contributing to non-Muslim welfare, establishing a consensus on justice based on the Islamic tradition of the “purposes of law” (maqasid al-shari’a), and obeying non-Muslim authority are, with little exaggeration, very innovative and bold within the context of the conservative, orthodox tradition in which he wants to keep one foot. That, and the sometimes severe criticism he gets from more radical perspectives, is something which needs to be born in mind and taken seriously in any assessment of the “real Ramadan.” In proposing a rethinking of Islamic doctrine for life in the West he goes way beyond what would be required by liberal citizenship and way beyond what more conservative voices like Qaradawi prefer.
Two examples are highly instructive, namely Ramadan’s views on the meaning and role of proselytizing (da‘wa) in Muslim life in the West and his understanding of the place and purposes of political participation in non-Islamic systems. As noted above, for many Islamic thinkers, the possibility for the spread of Islam in Europe through migration and missionary activities plays a central role in their justification of permanent residence in the non-Muslim West. This is exemplified in their revision of the classical designation of non-Muslim lands as “dar al-harb” (the “Abode of War”) to “dar al-da‘wa” (the “Abode of Proselytizing”). Many thinkers are quite explicit that they regard liberal freedoms and democratic political systems as fortunate insofar as they provide the opportunity to Islamize European societies (as which point, presumably, those freedoms and systems would be revised or discarded). The problem for liberals is that it is hard to object to the use of religious freedom in this way. All one can note publicly is that a citizen who openly looks forward to the day when a more favorable social majority will permit the restructuring of the constitutional order is – however law-abiding – hardly advocating support for liberal citizenship. If this were the case with Ramadan, critics would have important evidence against his claim to be endorsing integration into European social and political life.

Interestingly (and, I add, without apparent criticism from non-Muslim audiences), Ramadan has articulated both the “ideological geography” of the West and the duty of da‘wa in an original fashion and one which is starkly more pro-integration than the more conservative “loyal resident alienage” articulated by jurists such as Qaradawi. For Ramadan, the West is neither the “Abode of War” nor the “Abode of Da‘wa” but “dar al-shahada,” the “Abode of Testimony [to the Islamic Message].” Importantly, for him the “Islamic message” to which Muslims are expected to bear witness is not primarily the particularist, socially conservative code of traditionalist jurists, but a commitment to universalism and the welfare of non-Muslims; it is also an injunction not merely to make demands on un-Islamic societies but to express solidarity with them:

the European environment is a space of responsibility for Muslims. This is exactly the meaning of the notion of “space
of testimony” [dar al-shahada] that we propose here, a notion that totally reverses perspectives: whereas Muslims have, for years, been wondering whether and how they would be accepted, the in-depth study and evaluation of the Western environment entrusts them, in light of their Islamic frame of reference, with a most important mission. ... Muslims now attain, in the space of testimony, the meaning of an essential duty and of an exacting responsibility: to contribute, wherever they are, to promoting good and equity within and through human brotherhood. Muslims’ outlook must now change from the reality of “protection” alone to that of an authentic “contribution.”

Furthermore, while most conservative thinkers emphasize da‘wa as a project of enlarging the ranks of Islam in Europe, for Ramadan, da‘wa is the duty to “present Islam, explain the content of this Faith and the Islamic teaching as a whole” and “must not be confused with either proselytism or efforts to convert: the duty of the Muslim is to spread the Message and to make it known, no more no less. Whether someone accepts Islam or not is not the Muslim’s concern for the inclination of every individual heart depends on God’s Will. The notion of da‘wa is based on one principle which is the right of every human being to make a choice based on knowledge and this is why Muslims are asked to spread the knowledge of Islam among Muslims as well as non-Muslims.” This articulation is clearly grounded in the public values of political liberalism: mutual recognition, restraint and individual freedom. Finally, when he expounds on the content of the Islamic duty to “enjoin justice” or “promote good and equity,” this takes on a particularly political (in the Rawlsian sense) cast: he understands the Muslim’s duty to bear witness to Islamic values as a duty to be involved in society in the areas of “unemployment, marginalisation, delinquency, reform of legal, economic, social and political systems,” etc., that is, precisely the sort of civic goals appropriate in a politically liberal regime. By contrast, for a genuinely strict Salafi scholar, “enjoining justice”

5 Ibid., p. 150.
6 Ibid., p. 147.
7 Ibid., p. 134.
would point towards the direct confrontation of sin or scandalous behavior, such as the infamous Danish cartoon incident.

The question of political participation is equally instructive. Many Islamic scholars reject participation in European political systems either on the grounds that it is sinful to collude in un-Islamic legislative and political power, or that it is preferable to not add to the strength of non-Muslim societies. Furthermore, many Islamic scholars or public intellectuals justify such participation only on the condition that it contributes to improving the welfare of Muslim communities in particular or that such participation could contribute to reforming European policies in an illiberal direction (such as when British Muslims called for the British blasphemy law to be extended to cover all religions). Here, the liberal objects that – again, while no laws are being violated – the arguments for political participation reveal an underlying antipathy towards democratic government and a distaste for excessive solidarity with non-Muslims.

Consider, by contrast, Ramadan’s views on political participation:

Muslims should be allowed to commit themselves within society and to act in favour of human solidarity. This also means that Muslims can be engaged in social as well as political and economic activities. This is why, both at local and national levels, their commitment as Muslims and citizens is imperative for it is the sole way of completing and perfecting their Faith and the essential Message of their Religion. The social space, with its laws and customs, should permit them to attain this.8

And on the duty to promote justice:

To defend justice cannot be to defend Muslims only: the best witness of the excellence (ihsan) of the Islamic way of life

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8 Ibid., p. 134.
lies in respecting the ideal of justice over and above the failings of Muslim believers.9

These brief quotations on da‘wa and political participation are certainly not the end of the story. There may be a genuine concern as to whether Ramadan hopes one day for a stronger Muslim presence in Europe which could then dictate illiberal social and political reforms. However, there is no excuse for ignoring what Ramadan has actually written in his most important works and for failing to compare that to other trends in Islamic thought.

Islamic Reform

A final important area of confusion relates to what liberal societies ought to demand of religious citizens by way of theological and hermeneutical revision. It is clear that we are entitled to press fellow citizens on what they regard as permissible or preferred practices or outcomes in a shared society, even if those preferences come from within religion. But are we equally entitled to insist on the way in which religious citizens articulate the relationship between the demands of citizenship and their religious sources?

An excellent case in point is the famous debate between now French President Sarkozy and Ramadan on French television. Sarkozy pressed Ramadan on the hudud punishments in Islam, to which Ramadan replied that he supports a world-wide moratorium but not abolition. In his defense he claimed that he has no authority to proclaim such an abolition and that, memorably, “there are texts involved.”

This incident has been repeatedly invoked as a “smoking gun” revealing Ramadan’s true intentions, most recently and confidently by Berman. The claim is that Ramadan missed an opportunity to publicly side with a reformist vision of Islam and, in particular, to give hope to abused Muslim women. Of course this strikes one initially as just the right response; after all, how could one ever be too firm on the question of stoning for adultery (or many other prescriptions from Islamic law)?

9 Ibid., p. 22.
Except that in this case Ramadan was exactly right.

First, he did say (and has many times) that his personal view is that these punishments should never be carried out. Second, his call for a moratorium was not just for Europe but for everywhere in the Islamic world. The boldness of such a statement for a thinker trying to keep at least one foot in the traditionalist camp should not be underestimated and, indeed, Ramadan came under severe and sustained criticism for this call. (A fact which raises an important point on the question of the Conciliator’s Paradox discussed earlier. It is precisely Ramadan’s pedigree – often invoked as evidence against him by Western journalists – which allows him to survive so long on this tightrope. Any lesser personage would have destroyed his public career amongst traditionalist Muslims with a similar moratorium call.)

However, the more interesting question relates to whether we are justified in demanding precise forms of legal and theological revision, or merely principled affirmations of the practice of liberal democratic politics. We clearly have the right to insist that Islamic punishments never be carried out in Western liberal democracies; do we also have the right to insist that a faithful citizen must regard those punishments as having a certain epistemological status within Islam? Is it remotely proper – or, wise – to meddle in one another’s theology?

For example, consider a Catholic who is a candidate for a judicial appointment in the United States. We clearly have a right to demand that the American Constitution be regarded as trumping Catholic doctrine when it comes to legal interpretation. It may even be appropriate to ask that candidate how she would balance her religious convictions with her civic ones. Surely, a Catholic who responds that she is “bound by the Constitution of the United States regardless of what my personal religious convictions may be or of the dictates of my Church” is fulfilling her obligation of civic loyalty. Do we also insist that she pronounce on the formulation of Catholic doctrine? Do we also insist that she presume to correct the Pope on what Catholic doctrine ought to be? Surely this would be regarded as an impermissible incursion into religious freedom. She has pronounced her commitment to her civic obligations and we rightly leave her to figure out the relationship of these obligations to her theology herself or to her Church.
Something analogous was clearly going on with the Ramadan moratorium call. Far from an exercise in double-talk or evasion, what Ramadan was asserting by refusing to call for an abolition of *hudud* punishments was a factual, rather than normative, claim. It is simply a fact that Tariq Ramadan has no authority to proclaim those punishments void, given the undisguisable fact that, yes, “there are texts involved.” At stake is a very complex debate about reform and change in Islamic law: How does reform in Islamic law come about? Who is entitled to proclaim it? What we are entitled to demand is that Muslim citizens abandon the *political demand* to implement such things as Islamic moral punishments; how they *understand* this in relation to their 14-century long religious tradition is their business, not ours.

**Conclusion**

The Ramadan predicament is in some ways nothing new. We have a public figure who presents himself as a bridge between two moral communities which have at times radically different understandings of justice, morality and even, in some cases, of which basic facts best describe the way our social world operates. This figure presents two distinct messages to those two communities: to his own, a message of confidence and authenticity; to the outside community, a message of trust and conciliation. For us, the outside community, questions of both an empirical and normative nature arise: What, factually speaking, must this figure do and say to remain in good standing with his constituency? What, morally speaking, must we tolerate as part of the inevitable moral disagreements in a diverse society and what, in contrast, must we confront and challenge as beyond the boundaries of justice?

I have argued that we must be firm but also consistent in what we demand intellectually, morally and spiritually of fellow citizens. Because our liberal democracies limit their aspirations to the just and stable ordering of social cooperation, rather than the true and good ordering of individual souls, we ought to require agreement from our fellow citizens on only those matters which are essential to the preservation of justice, political stability and social solidarity from one generation to the next. We must be very cautious about demanding
further agreement about ultimate ends and the morality of policies and practices which are not predetermined by the standards of justice.

Or, we may in fact decide that our liberalism is a comprehensive one, where the social glue which binds us together is a deep consensus on reason, rationality, science, autonomy and the meaning of life. But in that case we would have to be honest, open and consistent, understanding that we lose all right to expect the loyalty of religious fellow citizens.

Tariq Ramadan is an exciting, and controversial figure for all of these reasons. The Muslim community in Europe and North America is old enough to develop claims and grievances, but too young for there to exist a tradition of principled, philosophical thinking on how Islamic values and modern liberal democracy might respond to one another dialectically. Ramadan is the first authentic product of that dialectic; as it happens he is also both the beneficiary and victim of a complex geopolitical moment. He thus inspires excitement for what we see of ourselves in his views and invites mistrust for what is still alien. But we must remember that as a public intellectual the laws of engagement must be different from those we employ for rival political and military leaders. With the latter we are suspicious of language; we know that the statements and promises of an office holder or militia leader can be revoked at any time and thus vanish into the air. With public intellectuals and the long-term creation of political cultures, language itself is much of what counts. In articulating consistently a new language and way of speaking about Islamic duties, Ramadan is (whether sincere or not) creating a reality. As his moral contemporaries, Western intellectuals (journalists and academics alike) are best served by a close reading of that language within both its liberal and Islamic context.
ČITAJUĆI RAMADANA: ŠTA BISMO TREBALI ZAHTIJEVATI OD MUSLIMANSKIH INTELEKTUALACA NA ZAPADU

SAŽETAK

Tarik Ramadan je intrigantna i kontroverzna javna ličnost koja sebe predstavlja kao sponu između islamskih i demokratskih društava koja na momente imaju drastično različite stavove u pogledu prava, morala i, u nekim slučajevima, osnovnih činjenica koje na najbolji način definišu sistem na kojem naš društveni svijet funkcionira. Ova ličnost prezentira dvije različite poruke ovim dvjema zajednicama: svojoj matičnoj pruža sliku sigurnosti i autentičnosti, dok vanjskom društvu ulijeva osjećaj pomirenja i povjerenja.

Liberalne demokratije moraju zauzeti vrst ali, također, i konzistentan stav oko svojih moralnih, duhovnih i intelektualnih zahtjeve glede manjinskih zajednica. Budući da liberalne demokratije ograničavaju njihove aspiracije na nivo pravedne i stabilne uspostave društvene kooperacije, demokratska društva bi trebala osigurati dogovor sa svojim građanima samo u pogledu onih pitanja čija je provedba neophodna za očuvanje pravde, političke stabilnosti i društvene solidarnosti od jedne do druge generacije.

Moramo biti veoma oprezni što se tiče zahtijevanja daljnjih dogovora u pogledu konsekvenci i moralnosti propisa i običaja koji nisu unaprijed determinirani pravnim standardima.

Muslimanske zajednice u Evropi i Sjevernoj Americi su dovoljno stare da mogu da razviju zahtjeve i tvrđnje, ali i premlade da posjeduju tradiciju principijelnog, filozofskog promišljanja o načinu na koji islamske vrijednosti i savremena liberalna demokratija mogu postići dijalektičku kompatibilnost.

Ramadan je prvi autentični produkt ove dijalektike; on je, ujedno, i žrtva i pobjednik u složenom geopolitičkom trenutku. On, iz
tih razloga, inspiriše uzbuđenje u vezi onog što demokratska društva prepoznaju od sebe u njegovim stavovima i provocira nepovjerenje zbog dijela koji je još stran i nepoznat. Međutim, ne smijemo smetnuti s uma da odnos javnosti spram intelektualaca mora biti različit od odnosa prema suparničkim političkim i vojnim liderima. U konstantnoj artikulaciji novog pristupa i načina razumijevanja islamskih obaveza, Ramadan (ne uzimajući u obzir da li je iskren ili ne) formira stvarnost.
قراءة في فكر طارق رمضان: ما المطلوب من المفكرين المسلمين في الغرب؟

خلاصة البحث

طارق رمضان شخصية عامة، مثيرة للجدل يقدّم نفسه كوسير بين المجتمعات الإسلامية والغربية. بين تلك المجتمعات اختلافات كثيرة من ناحية الحقوق والأخلاق في بعض الأحيان وفي الأحيان الأخرى من ناحية الحقائق الأساسية التي توضح وعلى أحسن وجه النظام الذي يقوم عليه عالمنا الاجتماعي.

طارق رمضان يقدم رسالتين مختلفتين لهذين المجتمعين: مجتمعه الأصلي يقدّم رسالة الأمان والثبوت، بينما يقدّم للمجتمع الخارجي الإحساس بالمصلحة والثقة.

على الديمقراطيات الليبرالية أن تتفق موقفاً راسخاً وثابتاً في الوقت نفسه حول مطالبها الأخلاقية الروحية والفكرية بجاه الأقلية. علماً أن الديمقراطية الليبرالية تحدّى من تطليعهم على مستوى إقامة تعاون اجتماعي عادل وراض، فإنّ على المجتمعات الديمقراطية أن تؤمن الاتفاق مع مواطنيها على المسائل ضرورية التنفيذ فقط للحفاظ على العدالة والاستقرار السياسي والتكافل الاجتماعي من جبل إلى جبل. علينا الحذر الشديد بالنسبة إلى المطالبة بالاختلافات الأخرى تجاه النتائج والأحكام الأخلاقية والعادات غير المحددة بالمعايير القانونية الأخرى سلفاً.

المجتمعات الإسلامية في أوروبا والأمريكا الشمالية قادرة على تطور المطالب، ولكنها غير قادرة على التفكير المبدئي والفلسفي حول طريقة الربط الجدلي بين القيم الإسلامية والديمقراطية الليبرالية المعاصرة.

طارق رمضان أول نتاج صحيح لهذه الجدالة ويمثل أيضاً ضيحيً ومنتصراً في اللحظة السياسية الجغرافية العالمية المعقّدة. من أجل ذلك فإنه يشير الجدل حول ما تجده المجتمعات الغربية من نفسها في آرائها، ولكن يثير هيجان عدم الثقة من أجل الفهم المجهول. ولكن يجب أن لا ننسى أن علاقة الرأي العام تجاه المفكرين يجب أن تختلف عن علاقته بالرؤساء السياسيين والعسكريين المنافسين.
يشكّل طارق رمضان، بغضّ النظر عن صدقه أو عدمه، حقيقة موجودة في مجال توضيح دائم للتناول الجديد وطريقة فهم الواجبات الإسلامية.