

## **European Muslim in Denmark. Foreword to Tariq Ramadan.**

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More and more Muslims are searching for answers to the many questions that become relevant when they make attempt to connect their faith and daily life. They have a need for formulation and elucidation of the meaning of Islam in relation to their identity. Simultaneously, it has increasingly been debated in the Danish population as to whether Muslims in their religious practice can be reconciled with a secularised democratic society. Thus there is a great need - among Muslims as well as non-Muslims in Denmark - to know more about what it means to be a Muslim in Denmark/Europe today.

Dr. Tariq Ramadan's book is the first and so far only attempt at a coherent and systematic presentation of what a European Islam could imply. European Islam is not an entity to introduce or point to as a common European Islam-discourse or a programme one may agree to or not, but it is a way to understand oneself as a Muslim in Europe. Therefore this book is not a definitive text about "European Islam", but the most important proposal to what guidelines can be stipulated - a proposal which distinguishes itself by being developed from within the Islamic tradition. Many Muslim philosophers and theologians have started from outside in Western thinking which is then applied to Islam. Ramadan has done the opposite movement, i.e. with the starting point in a deep rootedness in the Muslims tradition and the fundamental Islamic principles to interpret these principles in light of the reality in which Muslims find themselves in Europe.

When Islamic-Christian Study Centre has decided to publish a Danish translation of this classic it is first of all because there is a lack of literature in Danish on Islam written by Muslims - literature to which young Muslims, born and grown up in this country can relate on the background of the reality which is theirs, and which can inform the majority population of the direction that Islam is taking in Europe, and which problems and challenges Muslims in Europe are confronting.

The book is written to Muslims from the perspective that Islam can only create harmony and inner peace in the daily life of individual Muslims in Europe, if it becomes an integrated part of a European identity. The central point is that it is possible for Muslims to maintain the fundamental Islamic principles and at the same time live as full and active citizens in the European societies. But this requires that one goes back to the Islamic sources, the Qur'an and the traditions about Muhammads life and sayings, and finds the meaning of the words in their historical context in order to apply them to the actual European context. The scholars who are to interpret the texts must be found in Europe where they know the conditions, and not in a remote past. They must know the text as well as the context.

The term "Euro-islam" has from time to time appeared in the Danish debate, without being theologically motivated. The term has especially been used by non-Muslims - especially politicians and academics - and by secularist Muslims. Both are of the opinion that if a special European expression of Islam is introduced, then all difficulties related to integration will be solved, and the co-existence will be improved. Muslims must give up certain elements and values in Islam which the majority population finds incompatible with "Danish values". They must become more or less secularised.

Ramadan does not use the term Euro-islam and many Muslims in Denmark consider it misleading because it suggests a kind of EU-project whose purpose it is to Europeanise Islam

from outside. More and more Muslims, however, are aware that a paradigm shift is taking place these years, that a Danish form of Islam is under way, i.e. a conception of Islam that takes colour from the society and the culture in which it exists, and which calls for a new interpretation in light of the modern European context. The new generation of young Muslims consider Danishness as an important part of their identity. They are "Danish Muslims", not Turkish, Pakistani, Moroccan etc. Muslims. At the same time they emphasise that a Danish form of Islam shows itself as a result of a natural process, an interplay between Islam and the Danish society, its culture and values. This process has been on its way for a long time and is not a *new project* to be defined by the surroundings, constructed or enforced on them.

The process has taken place from the beginning, when the first Muslims arrived in Denmark but has become more evident over the past 10 years. This is related to the fact that young Muslims who have had their upbringing and school education in Denmark, speak the Danish language, are acquainted with Danish values and have the same problems, demands and expectations from society as the rest of the youth. They are aware of their co-responsibility for the future of society and show increasing interest in engaging in Danish politics and in solving the social problems they are confronted with.

They organise themselves on Danish conditions, establish Muslim organisations across nationality and sometimes without attachment to existing Muslim organisations and groups that have their origin outside of Europe. They separate religion and culture and are therefore often strongly critical of the culture-bound way of practicing Islam that their parents represent. This applies to areas such as views of society, gender issues, social conduct, forced marriages and child upbringing.

The development in Denmark does not deviate from the situation in other Western European countries. Many of the guidelines given in this book are practiced to an increasing degree by young Muslims. But it is not enough to listen to what they say when they are asked. One also has to observe what they do in practice, how they live their daily life, their social conventions and what language they use, when they speak about existential or social problems. European/Danish Islam is not only about politics but is a much more all-embracing process including both theological, philosophical, ethical and societal aspects. This is clear from Ramadan's presentation.

Through such an observation it will be clear that several young Muslims relate more reflectively to their faith and tradition. They are very conscious that their belief is an individual choice and not just something that they have taken over from their parents. This creates a greater self-certainty and sometimes more openness to those who have chosen differently. Therefore they have a recognition that dialogue with the surroundings, with those who have different beliefs is important and relevant in order to clarify their own position in the Danish society. Several Muslim youth organisations are active in dialogue arrangements at the same time as they see the importance of informing their co-citizens about the content of their belief. All this is in accordance with the principles that Ramadan claims should be applied by Muslims in Europe. The young Muslims have grown up in a democratic society, and many express the opinion that the Danish society in many ways is more in accordance with Islam than many countries in the Muslim world. There is less corruption, more social justice, equal distribution of wealth, a collectively organized society where everyone contributes to everyone's welfare, freedom of speech, well functioning education system etc. However, like many Christians they believe that religious-ethical (Christian as well as Muslim) values ought to play a more central role in the

public sphere and in political life - not in the way that they govern politics but rather that politics to a greater extent is motivated by religious values, such as the view of creation, human dignity, the importance of collectivity etc. Most of the young Muslims thus, do not have any problems with a *secular state* (in contrast to a theocratic state) where politics is not governed by religion but are more sceptical of a *secular society* in which religion and religious values are pushed out of the social development.

For Ramadan European Islam is not about secularization or assimilation, a reduction of Islam to a spiritual, private entity. Nor is it a way of compromising Islam, reducing its principles in order to adapt to demands and values of the majority population - but rather, as this book shows, it is an attempt to find a constructive way as *European Muslims*.

Everywhere in the world there is an ongoing debate among Muslims about the relationship between Islam and modernity, about human rights, democracy and dialogue. What is the real meaning of Sharî'a and its relationship to the daily life of the believers? How should Islam relate to the modern society? This debate is going on in Denmark as well. Many Muslims do not understand Sharî'a as a fixed legal codex but as a number of principles derived from the Qur'an and the hadiths. Social justice, equality between human beings are some of these fundamental principles expressed by Sharî'a and which ought to prevail in the modern society.

One can say that a contextual European Islam is found in Denmark - in principle. At the same time one has to add that theory, a systematic thorough reflection on and formulation of a European Islamic theology has not followed in Denmark. This is partly connected to the fact that Denmark lacks Muslim intellectuals - scholars in theology or humanities - who can function as authorities when it comes to concretising what European Islam means in practice in Denmark. Another obstacle to the development of a European Islam has been the climate of debate in this country which has generally forced Muslims into a defensive position. When they constantly have to defend themselves in relation to the surroundings and are made suspect there is no time or surplus of energy to rethink tradition and be more offensive like Ramadan encourages them to do. It takes surplus and a sense of security to do that. The development of a European Islam is not a *one-sided project* where Muslims one-sidedly adapt to the European conditions and values, but it is *mutual process* where also the majority population show respect and trust towards the Muslims so that they may feel that they belong in this society.

Therefore, whether this process has a future in the Danish context depends not only on the Muslims whether they wish to identify themselves as Danish Muslims, relate reflectively to their belief and tradition and get involved in society. But it equally depends on the majority population whether it wants to maintain Muslims as a foreign element in and a problem to society, meet them with religious guardianship and social exclusion - or are open and include them in the society so they can feel sufficiently at home to be both Muslims and full and respected citizens. Tariq Ramadan's book can be of great help in this mutual process.