

Tariq Ramadan: I Would Not Teach in the U.S. Now

4/8/10 at 5:00 PM

Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan is tired of [talking about being barred from the United States](#). In 2004, he was all packed up and ready to move from his home in Switzerland to begin a tenured teaching position at University of Notre Dame when his visa was revoked by the U.S. government under George W. Bush. The stated cause was a donation he made to a Hamas-linked charity, but at the time he made the donation, the U.S. had not officially linked the group to terror. This January, Hillary Clinton issued an order that enabled him to get a visa and return. He's back in the country for the first time since then, and in New York for one day of his whistle-stop tour. Elegant and refined in a blue pinstriped suit, the professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Oxford talked to Intel over lunch today in a Soho bistro, in the middle of a day of wall-to-wall interviews.

What do you hope to do while you're here?

I'd like to carry on the work I've been doing, to create a collaboration between western countries and Muslim majority countries. Honestly, I'd like to get beyond this story of being banned from the U.S.

Were you ever given a proper explanation for why your U.S. visa was revoked?

No, never. They were trying to find something to keep me out. First they said it was the Patriot Act, that I had links to terrorism. Then it was that I gave money to a group that supported terrorists. But I gave the money before that group was blacklisted. I should have known? They said it was retroactive. It was silly. I condemn violence and terrorism. I never got from them the true reason.

Your grandfather Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Do you recognize the Muslim Brotherhood of today — which some would characterize as separatist and violent — as the organization he started?

As with any group, there are trends and there is historical context. My grandfather started the group as a reaction against colonization in Egypt. The group split in 1949 and became something completely different. I disagree with what it has become.

In recent years do you feel the chasm between the Muslim world and the West growing wider? Or coming together?

Well, I disagree with the characterization of a "Muslim world." I refer to certain countries as Muslim majority countries. There is a great deal of misunderstanding and misperception between them and the West — on both sides. There is a great deal of mistrust on both sides. Obama's election brought hope — he is intelligent, perceptive — his speech in Cairo showed that he knew how to communicate with Muslims. But there's been very little change on the Israeli-Palestine conflict. The settlements carry on. Obama has the vision and the words, but does he have the power? This is problematic. It seems he is limited.

What do you find to be the most alarming misconception about Islam?

That it is a violent and expansionist religion, a colonizing force. This puts people on the defensive. It keeps people from listening, in a peaceful way, to what Muslims have to say. And Muslims need to take more responsibility for this misunderstanding — many of them are doing things in the name of Islam that we have to condemn.

How can we, as you say, create a collaboration?

We need to have intellectual empathy for one another. Communicate in a way that people can understand; this is the true bridge. Also we need to increase democratization, but stick to our values. For instance, don't talk about supporting human rights but forget them when we're dealing with petrol monarchies with money.

How can New Yorkers act on this?

These misunderstandings will be solved in the streets, in daily life. Far from national controversies, it is our daily life that

determines how we feel about people or groups. Open up doors to diversity of cultures, and not just by eating their food or dressing like them. If you want something to change, take action and educate yourself. Be a creative citizen, not a victim. This is how we are effective, and how we will change the world. Look deeply to understand each other. Give meaning to your life and don't just sink into a consumerist way of life.

Would you ever come back to the U.S. to teach?

No. Maybe as a visiting professor. I'm very happy at Oxford.

Tariq Ramadan will be on a panel at the Cooper Union tonight to discuss "Secularism, Islam and Democracy: Muslims in Europe and the West."

By: [Cary Barbor](#)

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