



## What I Believe

*Tariq Ramadan*

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Tariq Ramadan is very much a public figure, named one of *Time* magazine's most important innovators of the twenty-first century. He is among the leading Islamic thinkers in the West, with a large following around the world. But he has also been a lightning rod for controversy. Indeed, in 2004, Ramadan was prevented from entering the U.S. by the Bush administration and despite two appeals, supported by organizations like the American Academy of Religion and the ACLU, he was barred from the country until spring of 2010, when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton finally lifted the ban.

In *What I Believe*, Ramadan attempts to set the record straight, laying out the basic ideas he stands for in clear and accessible prose. He describes the book as a work of clarification, directed at ordinary citizens, politicians, journalists, and others who are curious (or skeptical) about his positions. Aware that that he is dealing with emotional issues, Ramadan tries to get past the barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding to speak directly, from the heart, to his Muslim and non-Muslim readers alike. In particular, he calls on Western Muslims to escape the mental, social, cultural, and religious ghettos they have created for themselves and become full partners in the democratic societies in which they live. At the same time, he calls for the rest of us to recognize our Muslim neighbors as citizens with rights and responsibilities the same as ours. His vision is of a future in which a shared and confident pluralism becomes a reality at last.

## What I Believe Details

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# From Reader Review What I Believe for online ebook

???????????? says

Je n'ai pas pu terminer le livre que j'ai lu ca fait maintenant un an, mais j'ai trop apprécié le style de l'écrivain et sa façon de présenter ses idées et se présenter lui même, étant incapable de suivre les émissions de Tariq Ramadan j'ai pu trouver dans ce livre beaucoup de réponses don j'avais besoin.  
Je peux dire aussi que Ramadan a réussi à se dévoiler de la manière la plus simple possible.

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**Owlseyes says**

Once in the "Le Matin", on its cover, it was written: "Does he threaten democracy?" [menace t'il la démocratie?]; and on the Swiss TV program Infrarouge, a headline: "Not understood or dangerous?" [incompris ou dangereux?]

In a debate with journalist Lionel Favrot, he had the chance to listen to these accusations: of being an "Islamite", a "dangerous impostor", having a "double face", being an "Islamic priest", of mixing "politics and religion". Ramadan was questioned on the source of the law; should it be the Koran or the Constitution? Plus, the journalist charged Ramadan of speaking of a State (État de droite) not in the western mode.

Ramadan did well in the interview. Spoke of the western hypocrisy regarding the Saudi money. Asked for a moratorium on this issue of women's "lapidation"/stoning, a subject which should be discussed.

As a Swiss "fonctionnaire", he expressed his duty of reserve.

On another debate someone asked him and others attending to "define themselves". One of the interviewers defined himself as a "French Jew". Ramadan preferred using the definition inside of one of his latest books. Which says:

**[my translation] "of Swiss nationality, Egyptian by memory, of Muslim religion, European by culture, universalist on principles; and Moroccan and Mauritian by adoption".**

Yet, I would like, one day, Ramadan to comment on this: "There are signs that Allah will grant victory to Islam in Europe without sword, without gun, without conquest. We don't need terrorists; we don't need homicide bombers. The 50 plus million Muslims (in Europe) will turn it into the Muslim Continent within a few decades." [Muammar Gaddafi said]

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**Huda says**

This book is quite challenging, I admit I'm having a hard time reading it.  
Many people questioned his thoughts; he was banned from speaking in the US, and now he's banned by other 6 countries.

I had no idea who the guy was till I saw him on stage last week. Shame on me.

Anyway.. as he wrote in his introduction, it is better to read his book and know about his thoughts rather than googling what other people wrote about him. Fair enough!

NOT COMPLETED

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## **Kelly says**

So, I was feeling kind of lazy. You know that feeling when there's just so much you feel like you should be doing, you freeze up and don't do anything at all for a bit? Yeah, that was me earlier this week. Not even reading was working for me- I seriously resorted to watching back episodes of Gilmore Girls and smirking at Top Chef, people. It was getting dire. Then I remembered I had this little tiny book by Tariq Ramadan to read- entitled, blessedly simply, *What I Believe*, and that it was due to the library by the end of the week. I positively leaped onto it as my way back to the world of the active and properly enraged against the dying of the light. I'd been meaning to read one of Ramadan's works for awhile- he keeps being referenced in other works I read.

For those not familiar, Ramadan is a Swiss citizen who just so happens to be the grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (trigger!), who spent a good part of his early life as a teacher (his dissertation was on Nietzsche) and a school dean, working on solidarity movements in the Third World as well as Europe. When Islamic terrorism became the world's new Big Bad, Ramadan decided that this was the next big challenge of the world and took 20 months off and moved his family to Egypt to complete an intensive (like 5 am-11 pm intensive) course in Islamic studies so that he could be qualified to be involved in the conversation. He has since tried to, in his words: *"stand up for my religion, explain it, and above all, show that we have so much in common with Judaism and Christianity but also with the values advocated by countless humanists, atheists and agnostics."* He's been banned from both conservative Muslim countries and the US (Bush administration revoked his visa in 2004, nine days before he was due to move to Indiana to take up a professorship at Notre Dame, we just allowed him to come back to the country this year). He continually gets called "controversial" by people who says he employs "doublespeak" (ie, saying one thing to Muslim audiences and another to Western audiences), neither fully Western nor "only" a Muslim. He says he is Swiss by nationality, Egyptian by memory, European by culture, universalist by principle and Moroccan and Mauritanian by adoption.

In other words- he's exactly the sort of guy I can root for. Which was going to make it even easier to get into this book. *And* he was going to make it super easy for me as a reviewer. His simple title gave way to a similarly straightforward introduction that told me exactly what he wanted this book to be.: *"This book is a work of clarification, a deliberately accessible presentation of the basic ideas I have been defending for more than twenty years. It is intended for those who have little time to spare: ordinary citizens, politicians, journalists... Rather than entering my name in a web search (and coming up with the million links that mainly report what others have written about me) or being content with the so-called free virtual encyclopedias that are in fact so biased (like Wikipedia, where the factual errors and partisan readings are astounding), I give readers this opportunity to read me in the original and simply get direct access to my thought... Being an introductory work, it may not suffice to convey the complexity of a thought (which may moreover have evolved and gained in density in the course of time) but it will at least, I hope, help start an open, thorough, critical debate. This is greatly needed."*

Fair enough, dude. No arguments here. Seems reasonable enough, definitely not "controversial." The sort of platitude that I think everyone has to at least pretend to agree with even if they don't like you personally. Just trying to ease people into what can be, as you say yourself, a very emotional, irrational topic that scares everyone on all sides. Fools rush in, and all that.

Here's my problem with this book: The entire thing is a platitude that everyone can agree with. It's the Little Platitude that Could- unrelenting, endless, monotonous and boring. Honestly, the book could just have easily been titled: "Why I Am Not A Terrorist Nor A Subversive Secret Imperial Agent Come For Your Souls! (... but I will take your abuse for the cause!)" (Okay, maybe it wouldn't have been just as easy to title it that.)

Look, I get it. Ramadan has been under pretty ridiculous attack for a good long time, from many very different people. I'm sure that gets wearing- so much so that you write a whole book just to get people to leave you alone. But Good Lord- for someone who has a lot of attention paid to him, you sure say some pretty useless things. Ramadan takes on pretty much the whole gamut of "Islamic" related issues that people care about in Western public discourse and clarifies what he thinks about all of them- communalism, multiculturalism, identity crisis (and multiple identities), different types of Muslims, dialogue between faiths, women's rights and the veil, extremism. I'd go through it all, but every single issue says the same thing in the end.:

Islam has a lot in common with other religions. Islam has different interpretations- we're not all terrorists. Western Muslims can be citizens of democracies and Muslims at the same time- there's nothing contradictory in that. Muslims are people too- and we're not just Muslims. Sometimes people make different choices than you and you have to respect that. The West is having its own identity crisis and projects ridiculous things on Muslim populations out of fear. Let's all communicate better, understand each other better, and let's make sure there's some room for communities to come together just as people rather than as "Muslim" or "Christian" or "immigrant" or "native" dialogue. Then let's build a campfire and sing kumbaya!

... yeah. He pretty much just repeats that for 120 pages. I fell asleep like four times reading this. I can only listen to the man piously repeat the same crap about us all loving each other for who we are and seeing beyond our differences to how much we have in common and coming together as a community beyond our divisions (but still celebrating diversity!) without any practical suggestions for so long. Who doesn't know this already? And when it comes with his very high opinion of himself, casting himself in the right in every situation, and some pretty dodgy writing to boot, my interest continues to decline. And he doesn't even really engage with the criticisms of his work that much- mostly just to say, here's the criticism (presented in a way as to make it seem bad), and here's two sentences about how I really feel- moving on. I found it deeply frustrating.

One caveat on this verdict: I did like one section very much. There's a part in the book where he talks about policies of "integration" directed towards "immigrant populations". He points out the very true fact that many of these "immigrants" are now fifth generation citizens of their countries and have never been to their "country of origin", have nothing much to do with it, and yet are still being demanded to "integrate." One of my favorite parts expressed something along the lines of: This is "Western now". These people live here. They are part of the story- they are not "foreign". This is French now, German now, etc. You have to make room for this. "Integration" is an ignorant, irrelevant, and offensive word. I really liked the idea of "post integration"- ie, that it is time to move on and solve other problems. "Islamizing" social issues is a cop out that will do nothing. Just because the majority of the population who is affected by an issue is Islamic does not mean that it is a Muslim problem- it probably means that it is a poor immigrant problem. Class issues are still around, guys. That part was a good rant.

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## **Ishraq says**

I've been listening to Tariq Ramadan's lectures and speaks for a while now, and this book was a must read in order for me to take the next step in understanding his ideas and new ways of thinking in reforming Islam.

Although this book was written in order to give his critiques the chance to read his true ideas and thoughts instead of following the stream that calls him a "controversial intellect", to clarify his main ideas and thoughts regarding Muslims in the west, I found in it a good start for those who wish to investigate more in his ideas and his new ways of thinking.

Although his main stream of ideas is targeting Muslims in the west, I can say that personally I managed to understand most of the issues he was addressing, as for me working in an environment where being a Muslim is a minority and being confronted with secularism and atheism and even doubtful Muslims face to face for the first time, it was really challenging and this book really helped me in shaping some new ways of understanding this new environment and at least accept for the first time that these things are for real and you need to live with it!

For sure this book was a start and I will move on Insha'Allah in the quest for meaning with Dr. Ramadan.

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## **Pashew Majeed says**

As a reader it feels different when you meet an author and then read him, fortunately I had the chance to meet Tariq Ramadan last year at the MAS-ICNA convention held in Chicago, if not previously I only listened to him, I didn't read him well except for some online articles. His meeting and attending to his lectures gave a different impression to encounter him when reading, he is too critical which I live about him. What I believe, is a book of his thoughts and encounters in the past, it gives the reader a foundation to what he believes about (Islam, west, and contemporary movements) to his other readings, I suggest any reader to first read this book and then the other ones.

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## **Nassim Touati says**

"Mon intime conviction" est ma première lecture pour Tariq Ramadan, dans ce livre l'auteur retrace un peu son parcours tout en essayant de répondre à des questions très complexes en relation avec les citoyens de confession musulmane.

Dans une langue très claire et simple l'intellectuel controversé développe ses idées et partage sa pensée avec le lecteur en 17 Chapitres où il s'adresse tantôt aux citoyens occidentaux de toutes les confessions, tantôt aux citoyens occidentaux musulmans ! Il parle de l'intégration des immigrants, du traitement médiatique des faits divers en relation avec les musulmans et de l'instrumentalisation politique de l'islam en occident pendant les élections, des problèmes socio-économiques dans les ghettos où les musulmans y résident et de la place de l'islam et des musulmans dans les pays laïques !

Faisant appel aux musulmans occidentaux de mettre fin à leur isolation et de chasser ce sentiment de victimisation par l'engagement dans un dialogue citoyen au niveau local et national qui leur permettra de défendre leur religiosité et de pratiquer leur citoyenneté à la fois, Tariq Ramadan prône une nouvelle ère

pour les musulmans en Europe, USA, Australie....etc

C'est un livre qui mérite d'être lu, même si l'ambiguïté y est encore, j'ai pu me faire à travers ce récit une idée globale sur la question de l'islam en occident.

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### **Amira Bousdjira says**

Le controversé, l'intellectuel diabolisé en France, l'incontournable Tariq RAMADAN présente dans cet ouvrage son « intime » conviction et ses prises de positions par rapport aux sujets mis –et remis à chaque fois – en question en Occident.

J'ai pas pu m'arrêter de me demander, tout au long de cette lecture, pourquoi toute cette haine ? pourquoi toutes ces accusations ? faut-il vraiment faire taire les voix de la paix, l'amour et du pardon ? faut-il négliger toutes les travaux de réconciliation et d'intégration pour garder toujours la dénomination du « Nous » et « eux », et des musulmans « minoritaires » toujours incapables de s'adapter et s'intégrer dans la société Occidentale dont ils appartiennent pendant au moins trois génération ?

M.Ramadan ici est triste, prenant une position défensive dont il n'a pas besoin.. et son ouvrage porte beaucoup de réflexions et résultats conclus de son engagement de plus de vingt ans.

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### **Miroku Nemeth says**

I must admit that I have not read any of Tariq Ramadan's works other than perhaps a brief essay or two. I have heard a couple of his interviews on Democracy Now, and liked his perspective, but did not find it necessarily compelling enough that I would want to take the time to read a book of his in its entirety. This book was on sale at Borders—I picked it up feeling that I had neglected to read the work of an important contemporary Muslim intellectual and that I needed to gain some knowledge to amend that neglect. He had, after all, lectured with my teacher and someone I have trusted intellectually and spiritually for nearly two decades, Shaikh Hamza Yusuf, and Shaikh Hamza's cardiologist, Muhammad Ashraf, had recently mentioned Tariq Ramadan's opinions to me a few weeks ago in relation to the issue of Islamic schools versus public schools, etc. So, as often happens in life, there were signs on the path, and I was led to a learning experience.

After an initial introduction which was fairly conventional, the first chapter "The Early Years" pulled me in and touched my heart. I knew that Tariq Ramadan was the grandson of Hasan Al-Banal, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, and that he was a Western educated intellectual and believing Muslim with what I considered to be a balanced and needed public voice, but I did not know he, like me had been a high school teacher. And what impressed me was the empathetic relationship with the human beings who comprised "Western" society he taught in—how interacting with the students of the high school helped him to understand so much about the societies he was a part of and himself. Ramadan was highly involved in the movement for solidarity awareness for oppressed and exploited peoples in ghettos and in the Third World throughout his educational career—much before he became "a public Muslim"—and I find this admirable. I have always endeavored to make this an essential element of my role as a teacher as well.

I had been a teacher, then a very young dean in a Geneva high school, and I had launched solidarity

awareness operations in primary and secondary schools. A practicing believer in my private life, I respected professional discretion in my public position: I never put forward my religious affiliation. This was as it should be. Both the school system and the media praised the “Exemplary work” performed in mobilizing the young for solidarity in Third World countries as well as in the West, for we had also launched awareness operations targeting extreme poverty among the underprivileged in industrial societies and the aged....The point was to place the learning process at the heart of the city and use the teaching of French literature as a means to communicate with women and men facing social problems or simply differences. Those years taught me a lot about listening, patience, nonjudgment, and empathy. Early on, one of my former students had died of a drug overdose. I have never really forgotten him. I was his teacher, he taught me. He died when I was sure he had stopped using drugs. I understood that nothing is ever finally achieved and that our frailties remain...behind masks of strength. Strength indeed lies in accepting one’s frailties and not in persuading oneself that one has “overcome” them. But “overcoming” them may simply consist in accepting them. Thierry, my student with “difficult affection,” taught me those aspects of the educational relationship. It was not easy. One day, in the conflict, he also taught me empathy and critical distance. His sister had called me because he had hit his mother. Her upper lip had got stuck between her teeth. When I reached the hospital I was angry, I could not imagine such behavior: hitting one’s mother! When I walked into the waiting room, his sister rushed to me and explained that violence had been the language at their home and that I had to understand: both of them had seen their father beat their mother and experienced violence in their daily lives. “Violence was our means of communication!” she whispered to me. Suddenly I “understood” the probable causes of his attitude. I understood without accepting or justifying. To understand is not to justify: empathy makes this distinction possible and, through understanding, intelligence can help us to adopt a critical stance that allows us to look for solutions. I was young and my student had thrown those truths to my face. He made me grow up. I have never forgotten those teachings, his lessons.

That solidarity commitment, in Geneva, Brazil, India, Senegal, or Burkina Faso, led to many rich experiences. Such personalities as the Dalai Lama, Dom Helder Camara, the Abbe Pierre, Pierre Dufresne, or Sankara of course impressed me and I owe them a lot. But even more important were the nameless: the silent brave, resisting in the dark. They taught me so much, away from media and public attention. On one occasion, I had invited a Colombian social worker to our school as part of our solidarity meetings during the lunch hour. He was to speak about the problems of injustice, poverty, and crisis in his country. I sat at the back and listened. During the first half of his talk, he spoke about traditional Colombian dances, complete with music and illustrations. I looked on and told myself that he had misunderstood what I expected of him. Suddenly he stopped and explained to the students: I wanted to tell you about Colombian music and traditional dances so that you should know that as well as having problems, we Colombians have an identity, a dignity, traditions, and a culture, and that we laugh, and smile, and live. In thirty minutes he had taught me an unexpected lesson: never reduce the other to my perception, to his problems, his poverty, or his crises. He had taught me a lesson about the pedagogy of solidarity. I had been mistaken. After that I launched a movement in Geneva schools, calling for a true “pedagogy of solidarity.” One should begin with the being, the smile, the dignity, the culture that fashions the person before reducing him to a sum of needs which “I” support. Those thirty minutes of my life radically changed my outlook on others and on life. The twists and turns of that commitment taught me so much about life, wounds, hopes, and frailties: the power of knowledge, the strength of emotion, the necessity of patience, the need to listen. I have tried daily to forget nothing.

Ramadan pp. 9-11

When I first studied teaching academically in the 1990’s, I encountered the ideas of Paolo Friere—the “pedagogy of the oppressed”; I have always worked to make his ideas a core philosophical element in my classroom. Ramadan’s “pedagogy of solidarity” is needed—much in congruence with the “people’s history”



approach to teaching literature and writing that I use in my classroom. But what really resonated with me in this passage was the naked truths Ramadan speaks about the process of learning from the human beings one interacts with—the establishment in truth of what Friere called a “dialogical relationship” between teacher and students. The heart of learning is empathy.

More Muslims need to be teachers.

If you buy the book, read the Appendix on Thierry, the student who taught Ramadan so much.

Ramadan on “Islamic schools” in the West:

I have explained in many books and articles that my position is to encourage Muslim citizens to enroll their children in the public school system where they will learn to live with their fellow citizens of various origins and cultures. Private schools, which anyway only receive 2 or 3 percent of Muslim children, are neither a panacea nor a future-oriented choice. Engaging in the state school system, as parents and as students, is a necessity. It remains that the system should be reformed in depth, for the mixing of social statuses and cultures is but an illusion in what ought to be common, equal schooling for all. Some state schools are actually social and cultural ghettos, and inequalities in treatment within the public system are simply unacceptable. If nothing is done in this field, it can be no surprise that some people think of creating efficient alternative structures exclusively for Muslims.... (Ramadan 137)

An openly Muslim intellectual is after all most unsettling: he reflects to Western society a mirror of not always acknowledged contradictions or, by his mere presence, reveals unconscious Western-centrism with its suppressions, its hang-ups, possibly its traumas. (113)

Compelling a woman to wear a headscarf is against Islam, and compelling her to remove it is against human rights. Tariq Ramadan. What I Believe

Experience has shown me, both with young and older people, that day-to-day mingling and personal involvement is what awakens minds, brings awareness, and spurs the desire to go further, to understand better, and to carry out a dialogue. This is why we must really live and work together on shared projects.

The question is in effect simple. Over and beyond all the theories that could be devised, it is important to ask everyone, as I often do when concluding lectures: how many women and men from outside your “own universe of reference” have you met during the past month? How many women and men have you met in the past month, or two or six months, with whom you have experienced cultural, religious, and social diversity, been positively questioned, and been compelled to reconsider your way of thinking, your certainties, and your habits as well as some of your prejudgments and prejudices? It is easy to think of oneself as “open” in a universe peopled with always the same citizens and friends, and where openness is thought rather than actually experienced. Mental ghettos are not mirages; they actually exist in palpable reality: being “open” inside one’s mental or intellectual ghetto does not open its door but simply allows one to harbor the illusion that there is no ghetto and no door. The most dangerous prisons are those with invisible bars. Tariq Ramadan, What I Believe. Page 113





Le Prophète de l'islam dit un jour : « Aide ton frère qu'il soit juste ou injuste ! » Ses compagnons ne pouvaient pas manquer de s'interroger sur la nature du soutien à offrir au frère injuste : comment cela pouvait-il être ?! Et le Prophète ajouta, en renversant la perspective : « Empêche-le [le frère injuste] d'accomplir son injustice, ce sera ton soutien à son égard »

« Il est urgent de cesser de blâmer « la-société-qui-ne-nous-aime-pas » , « l'islamophobie » ou encore « le racisme », et de justifier ainsi une passivité coupable. Que ces phénomènes existent, cela ne fait aucun doute, mais il est impératif de les combattre en s'engageant en tant que citoyens et en luttant contre les injustices, le racisme, la discrimination, les discours populistes de stigmatisation et les hypocrisies. Cela signifie aussi lutter contre les discours paternalistes souvent néocolonialistes et les traitements infantilisants : depuis trente ans, l'Occident semble vouloir s'occuper des « jeunes musulmans » éternellement « jeunes » et qui tardent sérieusement à devenir des adultes dont la maturité permettrait de discuter d'égal à égal »

« Je l'ai dit et répété : l'islam n'a pas de problèmes avec les femmes, mais il apparaît clairement que les musulmans ont effectivement de sérieux problèmes avec elles, et il faut en chercher, de l'intérieur, les raisons et parfois les (discutables) justifications »

« L'excision des femmes, les mariages forcés, les crimes d'honneur, par exemple, ne sont pas islamiques, même si certains savants ont essayé de les justifier religieusement »

« Il est anti-islamique d'imposer le foulard à une femme et c'est une atteinte aux droits de l'homme que de lui imposer de l'enlever »

« L'Occident chrétien conservateur dessine un islam licencieux et permissif, l'Occident moderne et libre s'offre la caricature d'un islam de l'interdit et de l'oppression sexuelle ».

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## **Martin Gabor says**

EXCELLENT !!!

Un de mes philosophes préférés.

Ce livre je pourrais en parler pendant des heures donc je vais pas trop m'emballer mais il faut absolument lire ce livre si vous voulez connaître la/les pensée(s) de T. Ramadan.

Je trouve qu'il est cohérent avec ce qu'il dit depuis 25 ans et le style d'écriture est très accessible ce qui est souvent rare chez les philosophes qui se prennent pour la Reine d'Angleterre.

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