

In the House of War

Dutch Islam Observed

SAM CHERRIBI

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2010

Contents

Introduction: Confessions: The Composite Relationship
of the Secular and the Religious, 3

1. The Established Outsiders of the European Integration?, 23
2. Immigration without Integration, 57
3. How Europe's Secularism Became Contentious:
Mosques, Imams, and Issues, 83
4. Prisoners of the Mosque, 105
5. Pim Fortuyn versus Islam: Muslims, Gays,
and the Media's Reliance on Conflict, 133
6. The Public Intellectual versus Islam:
A Year of Sex and Rhetoric, 155
7. Riding Pim's Wave: Islam, Women,
the Sacred, and the Naked, 187

Conclusion: The Vanishing Muslim Individual, 217

Notes, 233

Bibliography, 257

Index, 269

Introduction: Confessions

The Composite Relationship of the Secular and the Religious

How it was I quote before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is three parts I say it as I hear it

—Samuel Beckett, *How It Is*

Before Pim

For much of its history, the Netherlands has set the bar for social progress in Europe. For centuries, its neighbors have looked upon it with a mixture of horror and awe, and sometimes puzzlement. “Only the Dutch,” they’ve said, and the Dutch have echoed with a note of pride, “Yes, only the Dutch.” And so the events at the beginning of the twenty-first century in that most progressive country have been particularly troubling. For while the Netherlands has been swept by the same forces of change that have swept the rest of Europe—consolidation of the European Union (EU), a massive influx of Muslim immigrants, and the rising voice of Islamic fundamentalism—this small country has amplified those forces, allowing an observer to view the whole of Europe through a Dutch lens. But understanding how to use that lens is crucial, not only for those of us who have participated in this chapter of Dutch history but also and especially for those who must learn from it as a secondhand account.

How, then, do we tell the history of what happened in Europe, and particularly in the Netherlands, to our children without allowing emotions to distort the story?¹ What we are studying, after all, is part of the world we live in. It's not something kept in a petri dish in a sterile lab. I hear the voice of Pierre Bourdieu telling me that if you're not going to draw on your own experience in a real, personal way right from the beginning when talking about something so close to you, your own social world where you have been an actor and have also been acted upon, then you have nothing new to offer in terms of insight. This book draws on many sources, one of which is my own experience. And since I know personally most of the players in the field discussed here, even Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, as well as Geert Wilders and Hirsi Ali and all those who have written about them, from politicians to journalists, I must confess as to my role in all of this, however insignificant.

It's not easy to write a firsthand account of my life as a Moroccan, a Dutchman, and now a permanent resident of the United States. However, a way to gain distance from the people and events discussed in this book, a way to find perspective, is through scholarship, and it is this approach that I attempt to use, as a sociologist and an immigrant, in navigating a deeply personal narrative in the pages that follow.

The Trifecta of Coercion

The *academic* purpose of this book is to explore the historical, geographical, political, cultural, and sociological contexts sometimes missing from observations of tensions surrounding the Islamic community in Europe, and in the Netherlands in particular. Within those contexts, I have observed three major developments since the 1960s: (1) the movement of rhetoric from inside to outside the mosque, as well as the emergence of more persistent claims of Muslims to European society; (2) the crisis of models of integration and incorporation in Europe, complicated by Europe's own integration within an enlarged EU configuration (the EU, after all, has challenged individual national identities); and (3) the globalization of Europe's Muslim "problem." All three developments—greatly facilitated by the media—laid the foundation of the present renaissance of fundamentalist Islam.

It is this renaissance, coupled with my own unique history and the inquiries of my young students into that renaissance and that history, that has led me to write this book. There are many others, more formidable scholars than I, who have lent their considerable genius and talents to this field, but my life and the people I love have moved me to contribute the experience and

insight I have, however limited, to hopefully enlarging an understanding of the field. This work is an academic and personal examination of the conditions that, beginning in the 1950s, paved the way for the tragedy of September 11, 2001, as well as its aftermath.

So much focus has been given to the United States and the Middle East that the prevalent view has lacked a firsthand political and academic narrative of how Islam in Europe has shaped the present image of Islam in the world. This book seeks to assist in filling that void. I hope to do that largely through the exploration and explanation of a simple model that I call the trifecta of coercion: coercion of Europe's Muslim migrant community from below, from within, and from above.

Coercion from below is how one's migrant status affects common and even universal pressures—the pressure to make a living, to succeed in one's profession, to have a place in one's community—but the way this coercion occurs among migrant imams and the influence that the imams consequently have throughout the European Muslim community are strongly significant to the issue of integration. The second part of the trifecta is coercion from within, which refers to the pressure within the Muslim European individual, as well as within his or her community. This coercive pressure is produced by the conflict of messages put forth by the larger society and the Muslim religious establishment. Coercion from above, the third part of the trifecta, is twofold. It is exerted by official Islam through embassies and government programs and by radical unofficial Islam through a message of Muslim transnationalism and anti-Western activism. Radical, unofficial Islam uses official Islam—governments, civic organizations, and their programs—as vehicles to gain access to poor, uneducated, and isolated immigrants. For radical unofficial Islam, Europe is a hunting ground, and its quarry is the disenfranchised seeking empowerment. This coercion is also brought to bear against well-educated and affluent European Muslims through the Muslim migrant underclass, whose very presence at times makes their more economically advantaged or more literate fellows feel guilt or estrangement; there is within them the ancient question, “They are Muslims and I am Muslim, but surely we are entirely different individuals?”

The trifecta of coercion acts as a pulverizing machine that destroys the individual who happens to be Muslim and reconstitutes him or her as someone who is only a part of a larger, alienated, monolithic entity, in this case the “Muslim threat.” The trifecta may be seen in any migrant context, among Mexican and Central American migrants in the United States—who become reconstituted as part of the “brown threat”—as well as among sub-Saharan migrants in North Africa (the “economic and cultural threat”) and any other migrant group anywhere in the world. The very heartening fact is that it is entirely possible to

dismantle the trifacta of coercion simply by removing or substantially alleviating any one of the sources of pressure or conflict. For example, by reducing the conflict between the religious message and the message of the larger society, or by diminishing the pressure exerted by radical unofficial Islam, the individual Muslim is given a little more critical breathing room, enough freedom to reject violent so-called solutions. Any lessening of coercions within the trifacta is like snipping a connecting wire in a bomb. Alleviate the pressure, and dismantle the apparent threat. For this, the Netherlands provides a kind of bomb-dismantling guide with cautionary tales of what not to do, as well as some hopeful intimations of approaches that seem to work.

With that in mind, in the seven chapters that follow, I use transformative trends and pivotal events as a road map to the place of Islam in the Netherlands at the start of the twenty-first century. These trends and events include the introduction of Muslim guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s; the appointment of, first, uneducated imams and, later, more radical imams to European mosques in the 1990s; the emergence of Abu Jahjah in neighboring Belgium; the rise of Pim Fortuyn; the terrorist attacks on former New Amsterdam on September 11, 2001; Fortuyn's assassination in May 2002, followed by the celebrity of Hirsi Ali; the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004; and the anti-Muslim immigration campaign of Geert Wilders.

Of Headlines and Hittists

After working on this for years, all the while wondering what more I could add, in a scholarly sense, that would be worthy of those like Mohammed Arkoun whose shoulders I stand upon, the will to finally make a real go of it, an understanding of my personal role and my academic responsibility, crystallized for me on the morning of February 20, 2007.

That morning, I walked across my lawn in Atlanta, Georgia, to pick up my newspapers. This little ritual, performed every day by millions in the United States, is almost a symbol of the American dream, but the headline I saw emblazoned across the *New York Times* pulled me, with sharp recognition, back into my adolescence in Morocco and what has become a seemingly inescapable nightmare for Arabs, Europeans, and Americans. The words "North Africa: A Staging Ground for Terror" blared above an article about the fear that grips the West when terrorists and their new recruits use North Africa's arid, mountainous landscape as a base from which to launch attacks against targets in Europe.

The headline thrust me into the distant past, because in the post-9/11 world, the staging grounds of North Africa are old news. The area's nearly

ubiquitous poverty and the presence of a massive population of restless, unemployed youth—called Hittists, a derivation from the Arabic word for “wall,” because they are so often seen leaning against walls, waiting for anything that will change the empty monotony of their lives—is, today, a well-known image.

In the mid-1980s, when Islamists from North Africa—specifically from Algeria—mounted a wave of terrorist attacks on France’s subway system, neighboring European countries were concerned that terror would be imported to their own soil. Algeria itself was little more than a forced accessory to the crimes, having been brought to its knees by violent Islamists, terrorists trained in Afghanistan. Until that time, the distinction between the citizens of certain states and the Islamists who dominated them escaped many onlookers; European consciousness of Islam as a political force was vague, the Europeans only just having adapted to the idea of their former colonies having their own sovereignty.

But the Algerian Civil War, when bearded Islam lost its innocence in the very public conflicts of North Africa and the attacks they spawned in Europe, changed that: suddenly, Islam exploded on European consciousness in a way it had not since the Ottoman Empire’s soldiers battered the gates of Vienna. Since the terrorist attacks in France in the 1980s, Islam as a whole has been considered a security threat on some level by nearly every public personality or organization in the Western world. Consequently, its adherents in the West, desperate to live in peace without stigma, have felt compelled to differentiate themselves from each other by delineating just what kind of Islam they practice. Some, like Rachid Mimouni, one of many Algerian intellectual émigrés who fled to nearby Morocco and Europe, refined their Islamic distinctions in a very public way by writing critical and expository articles about the emerging Islamists.²

Much more recently, as detailed in a July 1, 2008 *New York Times* article titled “A Threat Renewed: Ragtag Insurgency Gains a Lifeline from Al Qaeda,” this history and these distinctions, as well as their significance in the Arabic and European societies, are set to take on a fresh importance in the years that lie ahead.

“Just as the Qaeda leadership has been able to reconstitute itself in Pakistan’s ungoverned tribal areas, Al Qaeda’s North Africa offshoot is now running small training camps for militants from Morocco, Tunisia and as far away as Nigeria, according to the State Department,” the *Times* reported, and went on to say that in April 2008 the State Department “categorized the tribal areas and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb as the two top hot spots in its annual report on global terrorism. The threat is felt most acutely in Europe.”

The Binary Social Reality of the Migrant Community in Europe

I am from the Maghreb (North Africa), and I am a bit like other Muslim migrants except for four important distinctions: I am a European citizen, I am a former member of the Netherlands Parliament, I am a resident of the United States, and most important for this story, I am a secular Moroccan who grew up in that country's Muslim culture.

I attended college in France in the early 1980s, when tensions between North Africans and the French made it a fairly uncomfortable place for anyone who might be mistaken for an Algerian. In Amsterdam, where my uncle and many cousins lived, I was treated well. So, I decided to move there. I loved to feel and smell the city that is a kind of seventeenth-century open-air museum, with its canals and legions of antique bicycles. The professors at the University of Amsterdam were not formal and cold, as my French professors had seemed to me. The French approach, of course, was not unfamiliar to me; it was the system that I had grown up with in Morocco.

Through the University of Amsterdam, I became immersed in the cultural and artistic institutions in the heart of the city. I was the first Moroccan in the University of Amsterdam's sociology department. Moroccan university students were so unusual that there were no Moroccan student organizations. My singularity gave me an enormous push in my professional life. After three months of preparation, I earned my Dutch degree of proficiency, and I was accepted at the university.

Eventually, I found a job at the Amsterdam Center for Foreigners established at the historic house of the French philosopher Descartes. Then, I found a position at the Dutch Broadcasting Company to work on minority programs. Simultaneously, I freelanced for the International Broadcasting Service's French and Arabic programs because I spoke both fluently. So far, my life in Amsterdam was rich and joyful. I never felt like a foreigner. I was seen as an individual, perhaps in large part because there were no others like me in my department, and there were very few other Moroccans working in broadcasting at that time.

And my intellectual diet was a feast. Abram de Swaan, the famous Dutch sociologist, introduced me to the reflexive and critical approach to one's own community. Pierre Bourdieu himself, whom I had met in France, inspired me to work on universalizing the access to the universal for those who are denied access or don't have the right tools to enter it. For me, these were not merely academic discussions. In Amsterdam, I was divided between two worlds. I regularly popped in to see my uncle's family, my cousins, and their friends who

were living the lives of guest workers. All through my first year as a student in Amsterdam, while I circulated among brilliant scholars and worked on broadcasts at the radio station, I also worked in a French restaurant where my cousin Omar was the chef. My family was proud of my getting into the university and helped me in every way they could. No matter how much I felt like a part of things on campus, I knew when I spent time with my family that ultimately, they were me and I was them, and I wanted them to have equal access to the beautiful, fascinating world I had discovered in the city where they took the jobs that no one else wanted. I have always thought, and I still think, that mastering the language of one's adopted culture and learning about its history are keys to becoming mainstream and escaping from the margins of society where migrants reside. As I moved fluidly between Amsterdam's glittering academic circles and the gritty, hardworking world of the Moroccan migrants, all I wanted to do was help the migrants, including my family, to become full citizens.

Eventually, I became a Dutch citizen, and in 1994, with a lot of support from my friends and the faculty at the University of Amsterdam, I was elected to the Dutch Parliament. By then, helping to fully integrate the migrants had become my *raison d'être*, and it was the major plank in my campaign platform. For eight years, I did the work of politicians everywhere: my days were days of negotiations and compromise, I endured the spotlight of the media with a hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach as I waited to see how what I had said would look to my constituency, regretting, hoping, trying, failing, occasionally prevailing, but all the while being part of a very real, living sociological lab.

With Pim

Just one year before I was reelected to Parliament in 1998, I had a fax exchange with a popular newspaper columnist named Pim Fortuyn. The exchange was prompted by my critical review of his now famous book, *Against the Islamization of the Netherlands*. He asked me to meet with him for further discussion of the book,³ which I had opined was not a productive dialogue with Muslims. I did not realize then that Pim Fortuyn, and the legend of Pim Fortuyn, would come to play a much bigger part not only in the life of the Netherlands but also in the life of all of Europe.

One of the worst days of my own life and certainly the most tense, awful day of my political career occurred about four years after that fax exchange on May 6, 2002. Just minutes after 6 P.M. and just a week before the election that would change the country forever, Pim Fortuyn was shot five times in the parking lot of a broadcasting company in Hilversum following a radio interview. He was shot

in the head and the chest. At 7 P.M. he died. I, like most Dutch citizens, was glued to the TV, wondering how this could have happened in a nation where the prime minister biked to work and the Parliament building had no metal detectors.

The next day, there was what looked like a revolution in the streets. On the sidewalks, the atmosphere was electric with shocked grief and simmering anger. At Parliament, the atmosphere was downright frightening. In the cafeteria, two guards from Surinam, who were Hindus, told me anxiously that they hoped the killer was not a migrant. The killer, as it turned out, was a Dutch animal rights activist, but the fact that he was not a migrant would be, for all intents and purposes, forgotten in the months that followed. The next day, I went to Rotterdam, Fortuyn's hometown, where a large demonstration was taking place. The *BBC News Night's* anchorman, Jeremy Paxman, asked me live, on camera, about the atmosphere of hate that was so unusual in the traditionally tolerant Netherlands. For the first time, I felt real panic about what I should say. I felt for the first time in my life—despite all of my years of devotion to the Dutch system and culture, despite my public service to Holland, despite my very real, official citizenship—that my Dutchness was questioned by the crowd. I knew that when they looked at me, they saw a Moroccan.

A little later, just before I was interviewed live by Nick Gowing on *BBC World News*, the same tension was still evident in the crowd. I was rattled. I had a drink with a columnist from the Dutch newspaper *Trouw*, who thought that Fortuyn was the best thing that had ever happened to the Netherlands, and then I went back to Amsterdam, thinking about how easy it is to destroy social cohesion and how vulnerable societies are to populism. The Netherlands, this little paradise created by the Dutch and not by the gods—this little country that had built one of the greatest empires in the history of the world (and the Dutch had never been as prosperous as they were at the time of Fortuyn's emergence), as well as one of its finest intellectual legacies—had, within days of a national tragedy, it seemed to me, descended into social anarchy.

This was all the more shocking because everything is so well designed in the Netherlands: the water system, the levees, even the land itself is divided so neatly it looks as if it had been carefully drawn with a ruler. The Dutch are not accustomed to riots; they are accustomed to negotiation and the politics of accommodation for all minorities. When Pierre Bourdieu had visited me in 1995 in the Dutch Parliament, he had been flabbergasted: "This is the democracy of proximity," he had said with visible admiration. "In France, we talk about it, but the Dutch do it."

And yet, less than a decade later, and in the space of less than three years between May 2002 and November 2004, the Netherlands witnessed the murders of first Pim and then Theo van Gogh and was rocked by riots. Mosques

were burned, and Muslims were openly reviled by the public and the media. It was, perhaps, a sort of democracy, but certainly not the orderly kind that had won Bourdieu's praise.

After being voted out of Parliament in 2002 in the antimigrant furor that had engulfed the Netherlands, I, like so many immigrants before me who were seeking refuge from political turmoil, went to the United States. It seems a silly thing now to have worried about at the time, but my full name is Oussama. It's a fairly common Muslim name, but one that has become quite loaded with connotations since 2001. Coming to the United States, I was worried about how people would react to my name, and since some of my family members and friends had long since gotten used to calling me Sam, I simply took that nickname as my name.

It turned out to be an unnecessary precaution. My students and colleagues at Emory University have been absolutely wonderful. And while it is true that at border control in the first year after 9/11, I did get more than one SSSS on my ticket (that means "severe control"), I was treated properly. It is also true that since 2004 I have not endured any profiling at customs because of my Arabic name and face.

But the dynamics that led to the unrest in the Netherlands were also clearly in evidence even in the United States. The renaissance of fundamentalist Islam is ubiquitous. You will find it around the world.

A few years after my arrival in the United States, on that particular morning in February 2007, the *Times* headline served as the final catalyst in resolving my own internal debate. I knew I could no longer avoid writing about how deeply my own life and struggle for personal freedom has been entwined with the evolution of Islamism and the bittersweet relationship between Arabs and the European cultures that they so often inhabit. My Moroccan origin provides me with a vantage point from which to view this tender, passionate, and perilous relationship—Morocco's relationship with the West, after all, is a microcosm of Islam's relationship with the Judeo-Christian world.

Islam from the Hypersecular Perspective: The Shadow of Voltaire

I grew up in Kenitra, Morocco, which in the 1960s and 1970s was home to the Mehdia U.S. Naval Air Station, the largest U.S. military base in Africa until it was effectively closed, along with many other U.S. military bases, during the Carter administration. (An agreement allowing the United States to retain some use of the base was hashed out with the Reagan administration in 1982.)

Many of my memories include the Americans who worked on the base and lived in my neighborhood. Their books, donated by the thousands, lined the shelves of the municipal library where I spent my days reading, and their music, broadcast from a radio station run by the soldiers on the base, provided an eclectic soundtrack of rock, jazz, blues, Motown, and the venerable Frank Sinatra for my evenings. Yet, beneath the charming oddities of an imported American culture was a local economy that was almost entirely dependent upon the base's business. I remember the day the base endured its largest budget cut—that day was like a day of mourning for the thousands of people who benefited from subsidiary employment as servants, cleaners, chauffeurs, babysitters, and schoolteachers for the Americans. We never really thought of the base as a military installation, although clearly that's what it was. Today, things are often too simplistically dismissed as "imperialism," without a thought for what such seeming imperialism might mean in practical terms to real people. For me, my family, and my friends, for example, the American base was a business that brought our community many positive things—among them, quite frankly, economic stability and educational opportunities beyond those offered by the French. I have maintained friendships with some of the Americans I met then, even after all these years. Strange as it may seem, even now, while attending meetings with former President Jimmy Carter, whose center is just a few minutes from Emory University, I still find myself fighting the urge to ask him how he could have closed down an economic generator on which a whole town had become dependent. But that question is really only an introduction to a much bigger question: why, in the wake of independence from European colonizers, were we and other Arab states still lagging behind the West to such a degree that we remained dependent on Europeans and Americans?

I came of age in Morocco about twenty years after it assumed its liberty from France, at a time when religious questions were limited to those dealing with the problems posed by modernity and progress, problems familiar to Christian scholars. By contrast, the most important and passionate question posed in Islam's academic circles was "What went wrong with us?" Centuries before Western Europe's Renaissance of classical Greek ideas, the Arabs had reveled in an almost unequalled dominance. Our language was the *lingua franca* of scholars, particularly of scientists and philosophers, and our technology provided us with a standard of living far beyond that of Europeans. So how was it possible that the Europeans had managed to eclipse us in terms of learning, technology, and quality of life in the centuries that followed? These questions are still asked. Reading Bernard Lewis's *What Went Wrong* prompted me to ask: Was it really Islam that kept us backward? Or was it our evident

inability to make a distinction between the political and the religious? Can we still continue to blame colonialism even now, decades after Arab and Islamic states were granted their independence by European colonizers? Why have we not been able to reform our societies and civil codes, and adapt the role of religion to our modern lives? Why do the Muslim establishment and religious elite still refer to the time of the Prophet Muhammad as the ideal time period that must be re-created in the future? Why is it that the religious establishment deems an agnostic or, for that matter, a nonpracticing Muslim to be a pernicious influence rather than simply a neutral, unrelated presence? Why is the great diversity of thought within Arab society—the presence of liberals, Marxists, conservatives, reformists, and counterreformists—never acknowledged?

When I was a student at the University of Rabat, there were more Marxists and Communists in academia than there were comparatively moderate liberals. It was a time when the neo-Marxist theories explained by Samir Amin in *Underdevelopment and the Impasse of the Third World* were popular. In 1980, in Europe, Louis Althusser strangled his wife, and therefore his career—and a notable cadre of the French intelligentsia—died soon after: Nicos Poulantzas (1980), Roland Barth (1980), and Michel Foucault (1984). A French Algerian named Jacques Derrida was left to pick up the pieces, put them back together, and take them apart again, something he made an art of doing. His ascension also marked the beginning of the intellectual detachment of the Maghreb from the Arabic hegemony of the Middle East that North Africans called “Machrek”—a culture and heritage that had its center in Egypt. For decades, all cultural goods had come from France or Egypt. In the 1980s, when the literature of Jacques Berque and Naguib Mahfouz was popular, North Africa finally started to produce its own intellectuals again, among them Mohamed Jabri, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Fatima Mernissi.

What we think of today as “Islamists” were virtually nonexistent, and those who did exist were rare and timid creatures. I remember an incident in Morocco in 1982, when a bearded student wearing a Moroccan djellaba asked for more inclusiveness of dissident Islamic voices in the student community. The student organization’s response was that as long as he did not begin his presentation with verses from the Koran, he was welcome to share his group’s opinions. Only six years later, while I was studying in Europe, did the Islamic movement become the most dominant at numerous Arab campuses, not exclusively in Morocco, but in all of North Africa. Shortly thereafter, beginning in the early 1990s, at the end of what is commonly recognized as the North African migration period, the Islamic movement spread to Europe. At about that time, as part of my study in sociology, I interviewed Moroccan guest workers. Each interviewee recounted a story similar to that told to me by Aziz, a Moroccan

waiter: “When I left Morocco in the late ’60s, I was wearing jeans and listening to American and European music. Twenty-five years later, I returned to Morocco on vacation. The customs officials were astonished to see me with a beard and a djellaba. . . . The customs officials said to me, ‘We sent you to Europe with jeans and you’ve come back more Muslim than us.’”

Many Muslim scholars say that when compared with Europeans, who seem to have, for the most part, successfully carved out separate places for the religious and secular in their lives, Muslims appear to cling to their religious identities as their central identities. This may be a way of demonstrating that they are distinct and will continue to live with a religion that has persisted without interruption for centuries. Most Muslim academics attempt to approach the gap between religion and philosophy from a perspective that emphasizes the reconciliation of religion and rationality. This identity association is evident in the trend of reinterpreting ancient Arab philosophers, like Averroës, so that their work appears to be more within the boundaries of orthodox Islam. It amounts to an exercise of balancing between reason and the religious dogma without giving an inch for the primacy of reason.⁴

Clearly, the tense relationship between Islam and secularism is not new. It has been a cause for debate throughout history, as intellectuals have sought to minimize the impact of religion on politics and society. It was the European colonizers who first sought to separate religious—in this case, Islamic—influence from the political process. One major obstacle to their plans was the traditional status of some Arab rulers, such as the Moroccan king who is also “the Commander of the Faithful” because of his descent from the Prophet Muhammad. He has both religious and political authority. Because of the European occupiers’ efforts, religious laws have not been the basis of legal order in Morocco since the colonial period. Instead, Morocco’s legal order is a combination of customary law, Napoleonic law, and a small part of sharia, the last applied only to inheritance and marriage. This model was widespread in most Arab countries except those on the Gulf, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Yet even in those countries, the “divine right”—the practice of propping up royal regimes with the Koran—found its way into legislation.

Another complication of attempting to separate the religious from the political arises from the definition of *secularism* itself. The translation of the Arabic word for “secularism,” *ladiniya*, which means only “nonreligious,” shifted over time to *ilmaniya*, which means “worldly.” The separation of church and state and the perception of secularism as a worldly experience devoid of spiritual value are two significant factors among many others that explain the rejection of secularism in the Islamic world. Bernard Lewis explains that the relationship between Caesar and God in Christendom fostered the notion of a

separation of church and state, which consequently made it easier for citizens of the Roman Empire to accept secularism alongside Christian doctrine. Gayatri Spivak asserts that one of the reasons secularism is rejected by Hindus and Muslims is because it is viewed as an extreme aspect of Christianity (although Spivak also notes that it is necessary for Hindus and Muslims to adapt to modernity by devising their own secular ethics).⁵

As a high school student in a country recently freed from French domination, I was impressed by two related ideas: Cartesian doubt and the passionate egalitarianism of Rousseau, Diderot, and Voltaire, the philosophy underlying the French Revolution. If Descartes himself had erected a sort of wall between the spirit and the body, and if God himself did not play favorites but instead endowed humankind with the capacity for self-determination, then it was reasonable to me that a Jeffersonian wall could be built between Arab political institutions and Islam. I was not the only one thinking this. A whole generation of Moroccans understood that secularization for European societies had been achieved through a painful process during the pinnacle of Christendom's power, and with that as our model, we moved forward, determined to intellectually do for our country what others had done for theirs. At the university in Rabat, this movement centered on ideas about how to create a secular space free of religious dominance. We believed that our secular utopia was possible because up until the late 1970s, there was no religious student movement at Moroccan universities. We daydreamed about the French advanced notion of secularism—*laïcité*, a total separation of church and state made possible by the subversion of the church.⁶ At the same time, many students were chased by the police and jailed, not for their secular ideas but for their belief in Marxist revolutionary ideals. Many were members of a Qaeda or Qaidyyin movement that was communist, not extremist Islamic as the one associated with Bin Laden. I personally was not a member of any student organization.

The Extraordinary Moroccan Case

Religion came to my family exactly as Salman Rushdie would later say it came to his own, “like an ache in their bones”—a rheumatism at the end of their lives.⁷ My parents never imposed a particular religious ethic upon anyone at home, though I sometimes would see my mother discreetly praying. My father used to distrust anyone who used “Allah” or other Islamic references in conversation when buying something in the *souk*, the marketplace. He even distrusted those traders with the so-called religious beard, and he would say to us, when one of them would begin to grow out his beard, “Now it’s time to find another vendor.”

Islam, as practiced in Morocco in the 1970s and early 1980s, was basically tolerant, despite some rigid social codes and laws that were common in the more traditional, and usually rural, areas. Clifford Geertz says most Moroccans “alternate between religiousness and what we might call religious-mindedness with such a variety of speeds and in such a variety of ways that it is very difficult in any particular case to tell where one leaves off and the other begins.”⁸ Most Moroccan city maps, even as late as the 1970s, showed a French quarter or a European section and a Muslim section called the *medina*. The European section allowed bars, and women were seen freely going about their business, but in the *medina*, the public sale of any alcoholic product was prohibited, and there were more forms of social control designed to diminish the freedom of girls and women. Most North Africans lived in this atmosphere of dual-personality dichotomy, in a world of two constantly conflicting ideological forces, modernism and traditionalism, crammed into a shared physical space. Symptoms of this cultural split personality are evident in the nature and use of their language. Moroccans allow themselves to say certain objectionable things in French but not in the overserialized Arabic.

Morocco’s relationship with modernism is very complex. After forty years of independence, French is still the second language of the country and the language used by the elite, the bourgeois, and those who would like to be elite but achieve only being bourgeois. In many ways, Paris remains the intellectual hub for the Maghreb (the North African community). Morocco’s proximity—it’s only fifteen kilometers from Gibraltar to Spain—makes it the gateway to Europe for all sub-Saharan citizenship candidates and an unavoidable stop in their clandestine migration. Geographically, Morocco resides on the line between two cultural influences, and because of this, as Clifford Geertz explains in *Islam Observed*, Morocco is a deeply religious country despite its relative modernity. The Moroccan sociologist Paul Pascon spoke of his own country when he spoke of a composite society where tradition, superstition, animism, and modernity can all reside in one place. Morocco now is at the crossroads of Europe and Africa—Europe, with its dreams of modernity and welfare, and Africa, with its problems of poverty and youths fleeing to Europe through Morocco. This crossroads comes into view against the rise of Islamism in the Islamic world and among some of Morocco’s own children—the children of émigrés living in Europe.

*From Radical Secularism to Humanistic Secularism:
The Echo of Spinoza*

During my studies at the University of Rabat, I summered in Amsterdam with my uncle’s family, who had lived there since the 1960s. Upon completion of

my bachelor's degree, I made the decision to emigrate from Morocco because of the wealth of opportunities to be found in Europe. Besides the familiarity that came with having spent time in the Netherlands, I was fascinated by the country's cosmopolitan intellectual heritage and its traditions of tolerance. My undergraduate degree, in fact, was in philosophy. The seventeenth-century French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes found refuge in Amsterdam, as did his contemporary, Baruch Spinoza, who was born in Amsterdam to Portuguese-Jewish parents. As a liberal secular Moroccan, I firmly believed, like Descartes, in a separation between the physical and the spiritual. Like Spinoza, I also believed in the separation of religion and the state.

For many years, I worked in the Descartes House, a center that functions as an interface between migrants and the City of Amsterdam. Prominently displayed in my office bookcase was a book titled *Descartes Is Not Moroccan*.⁹ I was well aware of the difference between Descartes' metaphysical rationalism and the Enlightenment's idealist rationalism. But my fascination with Spinoza grew when I read his writings against the intolerance of religious authorities in his own era, whether Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant. Spinoza, like other descendants of the Marranos, Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin, was tolerated in Holland and, upon his rejection of Judaism, was tolerated more in Dutch society than within his own Jewish community.¹⁰

At the University of Amsterdam, I learned from great thinkers, including Norbert Elias, Johan Goudsblom, Abram de Swaan, Mohammed Arkoun, and Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu and I became close friends. He was my mentor and a member of my PhD committee. My dissertation was an analysis of the sermons of Arabic-speaking imams in Europe and their views on Western society in the early 1990s.

It wasn't until 2001, while I was serving as a member of the Dutch Parliament, that I realized that those sermons had been a big part of the mosaic that paved the path toward extremism for some Muslims in Europe. In the first few months after 9/11, tensions were very high between the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in the Netherlands. It was important to address this rumbling pressure, and so I brought together rabbis, pastors, and imams at a public forum at Amsterdam's Felix Meritis, the Netherlands' cultural debate chamber.

What I had learned from my research in the 1990s was that imams in Europe had a strong online presence that encouraged interactions between computer-savvy young people and religious leaders on a variety of topics, including marriage, sexuality, rituals, and problems pertaining to integration and assimilation. European Muslims also used call-in radio programs and live

television broadcasts on local cable stations to disseminate their messages. I found that because of this interaction with various publics, both Muslim and non-Muslim, Islamic religious leadership had become more visible, accessible, and transformable. After the events in the United States on September 11, 2001, these forums, which had formerly been casual opportunities for cross-cultural discussions, became sensitized.

Yet, it was bound to happen. September 11 may have hastened the realization by Muslim and non-Muslim Europeans alike that their social landscape was dramatically altering, but it is unlikely that they would have been able to ignore it much longer. The evidence was all around them. When you take the train from Amsterdam to Paris, through what the French call the *banlieues*, you can see the poverty of the old housing projects, the lasting scars of violence in graffiti and destruction increasing as you travel south from the Netherlands to Belgium and France. Because these were, and are, the neighborhoods of Muslim immigrants, the passing landscape also serves as an indication of how exclusion based on religion or ethnicity emerges in even the most secular of societies. The European Union is seen as a constructed space of Europeanness with its own historic, cultural, and political solidarity, and a crucial observation involves recognition that different models of integration, based on soft or hard versions of secularism, shape policies and expectations and claims of minority groups. Just five hundred kilometers from Amsterdam, where in certain Islamic schools teachers and students are obliged to wear headscarves, Parisian schools ban headscarves entirely, and Islamic schools are not funded. This is a telling commentary on the meaning of citizenship and unity in the European Union.

Perhaps more important, these measures are themselves measures of how illiberal theocratically oriented Islam has transformed what most of the world thinks of as Europe. After all, Europe is not simply a landmass—it is an idea. The idea of Europe is one of openness, tolerance, and a secularism that is open to and tolerates religion while resolutely denying it the power of government. Is this still the case? Has not the European fear of Islam and its obsession with Muslims driven it to impersonate the very culture it despises? Has fear and fascination with Islam shaped Europe's laws over the past decade to the point that France and Holland do a credible imitation of countries where religion requires that certain dress be eschewed, that certain types of education be prohibited, that certain people be treated as suspects? Isn't this the very spirit of extreme Islam, and hasn't it thoroughly possessed the body of Europe? If these violent and virulent Islamists destroy Europe's *joie de vivre*, its moral courage, its devout determination to live openly in a suspicious world, then they will have no more need for bombs.

After Pim: The Echo of De Tocqueville, or the Triumph of the American Model

After the 2002 election in the Netherlands, when the far right revolution inspired by Pim Fortuyn was achieved, the media's continuous drone against Muslims accelerated into a Dutch nationalist xenophobia. At that time, I was married to an American, and we moved to her home country. I took a position in the sociology department of Emory University, where I was impressed with the campus and facilities that made European universities pale in comparison. I was even more fascinated by the fact that Emory is a Methodist university located in the historically conservative South, and yet posters that admonished students to "Get a Faith" were posted next to posters supporting sexual diversity and organizations for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals. There is even a campus organization called "the All-Faith Church," and its services begin with recitations from the Bible, the Koran, the Talmud, and various other scriptures.

My office is located in the basement of Emory's Tarbuton Hall, a building that bears the name of an old Southern family who made their fortune in the railroads that served middle Georgia's kaolin mines. Yet, it was here one Friday at noon, on a campus scattered with such family names and canopied by towering oaks, that I heard something I hadn't heard in many years. It was the Muslim call to prayer. It transported me back to the *medina* of Fez, where I had awakened to it each morning at my grandmother's home. It was emotionally overwhelming. I followed the sound to the Quad. It was coming from the clock tower, the school's best-known landmark. Muslim students stopped and gathered while they listened, and non-Muslim students reacted with deference while going about their own business. It was Ramadan, and the university was showing its respect for the faith of the Muslim students during the holy month. It occurred to me that a scene like this would probably not be tolerated on the campus of a European university. But as part of a broader picture, U.S. presidents have an even more integrated connection between the secular and the religious. Former President Jimmy Carter is a self-described "born-again Christian." Yet, in his book *Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis*, he cautions the reader to be wary of the erosion of the Jeffersonian wall that separates the church and state in the United States.¹¹ President George W. Bush, whose public image is at least partly entwined with America's religious right, has made a point of reaching out to the country's Islamic community and, when put on the spot regarding his religion, usually demurs by saying only that he believes in God and prays for guidance.

As De Tocqueville stated clearly, American society is religious, but the federal state defends the core political principles of secularism. From this American example, I learned how the United States is better equipped, as the French writer and philosopher Bernard Henri Levy admits, to ensure a superior form of secularism, one that tolerates religion, than is the case for France or other European countries.¹² A secular society should not obstruct those who view religion as a temporal enforcement of a private spiritual contract. Secular society presents, however, a great obstacle for those who see religion as a mandate ordained by God regarding what should happen, not simply for them within their own private spiritual devotion, but for a country or even the planet. For these people, religion is not a personal experience but the basis for public policies. However, between such adherents and their secular American counterparts, there is a growing rift, something that almost mirrors the chasm between secular Europe and its community of devout Muslims. This divergence in America's view of the religious and the secular is evident in the 2001 American Religious Identification Survey, which found that the three categories with the greatest membership gains since 1990 were evangelicals ("born again" Christians) with a 42 percent gain, "non-denominationals" with a 37 percent gain, and "no religion" with a 23 percent gain. This would seem to indicate that as a nation, the United States has moved toward becoming more polarized, with a combined gain of 60 percent for those who do not adhere to any particular religion or no religion at all, and a gain of more than 40 percent for those who view themselves as evangelicals, a group that is usually self-identified as fundamentalist. So we see the developing gap throughout the West.

This polarization makes the role of secularism even more critical to religious equality. Secularism, a condition that is neutral to religion as opposed to antireligious, provides a decompression chamber for religion, ensuring that antireligious factors or those factors that play favorites among certain religions cannot act to galvanize potentially violent sects. It seems to me that real religious equality can exist only within a secular environment. Any society that recognizes religion beyond its right to exist and to conduct itself peacefully must favor one creed over another—a situation that necessarily marginalizes minority religions. When we speak of a society that is religious, we are really discussing a theocracy. My colleague at Emory, Abdullahi Ahmad An-Na'im, explains: "Religion needs secularism to mediate relations between different communities (whether religious, antireligious, or nonreligious) that share the same political space or space of public reason."¹³ That is why Europe's secularism, to a certain extent, also acts as a buffer between its historically Christian society and its newer, numerically significant Muslim community.

Living in the United States has given me the necessary distance to reconsider dynamics in Europe. When I look at it today, from across the pond, what I see is an ideological bullfight—an appropriately Spanish oeuvre, considering that nation’s densely mixed religious history that owes so much to Islam. In this bullfight, Islam is the bull, goaded and provoked by politicians and pundits who want to make themselves famous matadors by exaggerating the fierceness of the bull against whom they have chosen to pit themselves. He can be dangerous; he is, after all, a bull. He is also no match for their intellect; he is, after all, a bull, and this is their arena, their game, about which he knows little and appreciates less. That is not to say that Islam or its adherents are without guile, but Islam is only a religion, just as a bull is only a bull. By focusing so much on this religion, and indeed on religion in general, we lose sight of our responsibilities as individual human beings, while the matadors make their reputations on a beast of their own creation.

As Sartre says, human societies don’t need to be atheist or religious in order to have the same norms of honesty, humanism, and progress.¹⁴ The thing that might well bring greater understanding and peace between the West and Islam is an understanding of the role of secularism in the Islamic world. Consider this: imams in tenth-century Baghdad were more open and liberal than twentieth-century imams in London and Amsterdam.¹⁵

As Descartes would say, I read the grand book of the world, and I was fascinated by the European history of ideas and recognized in it the contribution of Arab Islamic thinkers like Al Mutazillah, Averroës, Al Kindi, and later Ibn Khaldun. In the *lingua franca* of their time, Arabic, their philosophies reflected the diversity and richness of their civilization. The fate of peace in our world rests with the fate of such Muslim intellectualism, preserved in the decompression chamber of secularism.