

Muslim moderate? Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan: Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan

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In 2004 soft-spoken Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan made *Time* magazine's list of the world's top intellectuals; Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies offered him a position on its faculty; the Department of Homeland Security, acting on U.S. intelligence, revoked his visa to teach in the U.S.; and scholars like Daniel Pipes (director of the Middle East Forum in Philadelphia) and Gilles Kepel (professor at the Institute for Policy Studies) waved red flags.

Ramadan, who has taught European philosophy and Islamic studies in Switzerland, is something of a European media star who cuts his own path with a vision of an Islam integrated into European pluralism. But Pipes, claiming Ramadan has links to terrorists, says, "We don't need him in this country." Others, such as Kepel, don't go that far, but do express reservations about Ramadan's aims.

Ramadan's public statements have undermined his credibility in some circles. When challenged during a televised debate in November 2003, Ramadan refused to offer a blanket condemnation of the practice of stoning women for adultery; instead, he called for a moratorium on the practice while the issue is debated among Muslim scholars. Jay Tolson, writing for *U.S. News & World Report*, pointed out that precisely because Ramadan called for the moratorium, "those discussions are now taking place" in Jordan.

Ramadan's radical lineage also comes up frequently. (His grandfather, Hassan al-Banna, founded the radical Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.) Ramadan argues that he should not be punished for his ancestors. "I'm absolutely not an Islamist," he has said. But critics like Kepel see duplicity in Ramadan's career. "He tells . . . Muslims one thing, and he tells *kouffars* [unbelievers] what they want to hear," Kepel writes in *The War for Muslim Minds*. Ramadan, Kepel concludes, is playing an intellectual

“seduction game” in which he hopes to widen his circle of influence.

Perhaps Ramadan is a lightning rod for controversy precisely because he stands on the bridge between fundamentalist and reformed Islam. If so, his more provocative statements must be weighed alongside his views articulated in *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* and *To Be a European Muslim*, which, though written with circumspection, encourage peaceful Muslim participation in the West.