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Ahmed, A. *Journey into Europe: the Specter of Islam, Immigration and Empire.* (film), 2015. (journeyintoeurope.com).

Akbar Ahmed is the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at American University in Washington, D.C.; a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution; and a visiting professor at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, M.D., where he was the First Distinguished Chair of Middle East and Islamic Studies. Ahmed is a prolific anthropologist who was trained at the University of Cambridge and at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. He was also the Pakistan High Commissioner and Ambassador to the U.K. and Ireland. Formerly, he taught at Princeton, Harvard, and Cambridge Universities.

One integral aspect of Ahmed's *oeuvre*, which includes over twenty award-winning books,¹ is his participation in film production. While at the University of Cambridge, he directed and narrated a six-part BBC TV series called *Living Islam*, which presented the complexity and diversity of the religious and political culture of Muslim communities throughout the world. This BBC series helped illuminate and demystify Islamic culture and countered the simplistic "clash of civilizations" thesis of Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington. The 'clash thesis,' especially following 9/11, became the dominant metanarrative that perpetuated and fostered "Islamophobic" attitudes among many people within the U.S., Europe, and the West. Recently, in 2014, Ahmed took his team of anthropological researchers and film assistants to produce, direct, and narrate the film *Journey into Europe: the Specter of Islam, Immigration and Empire* to explore the realities of the relationship between Europe and Islam.² This film project is vitally important and particularly relevant in light of the current political instability and acts of extreme violence occurring in the Middle East and North Africa and the resulting immigration crisis that has flooded Europe with Muslim refugees fleeing war. The film was supported and funded by Stiftung Mercator, a private foundation based in Germany that fosters science, the humanities, education, and international understanding. Specifically, the principal goals of the foundation are to develop and fund projects in order to strengthen Europe by improving pluralism and to reduce inequalities by assisting the integration of immigrants of different backgrounds through equal education opportunities for everyone. These goals coincide with the main purposes of Ahmed's various books, research, and film projects.

¹ Other books by Ahmed include the critically acclaimed *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization*, which discussed Muslim perceptions of the United States and its Western allies. Another book, *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam* detailed the life of Muslims in the U.S. and the views of Americans toward Muslims. Ahmed's *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam* was partially based on his experience as a district officer in Waziristan for the Pakistani government prior to his earned degrees in anthropology. The book describes the Pashtun, as well as many other tribal and peripheral Muslim groups throughout the world encountering globalization and the 'war on terror.' See my review of this book in the *Journal of International and Global Studies*, Volume 6, Number 1: 149-152. Ahmed's forthcoming book *Journey into Europe: Islam, Immigration and Identity*, published by the Brookings Institution Press will supplement the current film.

² Ahmed became involved in another important film project in the 1990s in consulting on the documentary feature film *Mr. Jinnah: The Making of Pakistan*, starring Sir Christopher Lee. The 1998 film was made to help commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of Pakistan by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Quaid-e-Azam.

The major theme of *Journey into Europe* is that Europeans are divided regarding the Muslim presence in their midst. Although it appears that most Europeans desire a plural society and accept the Muslim presence, some express fear and are threatened by Islam. In the beginning of the film, media images that demonstrate some aspects of terrorism in Europe are shown, including footage of news reports of an attack on military barracks in the UK, the stabbing of a British soldier by a Muslim, the famed beheading of a journalist by a British Muslim member of ISIS, the Charlie Hedbo murders, and an image of a Muslim immigrant shouting in English, “We must have an eye for an eye.” These types of media images have helped produce a sort of hysteria among many Europeans regarding Islamic extremism, with a recent Pew Survey finding that the percentage of citizens who reported feeling “very concerned about Islamic extremism in their [countries]” has, since 2011, increased by 38% in France, 29% in Spain, 21% in the United Kingdom, and 20% in Germany (emphasis in original).³ Xenophobic views coupled with notions about how Islam is incompatible with Western civilization have flooded the European media.

The film is divided into three different parts: a portrait of Islam in Spain (in the region of Al-Andalus, also called “Muslim Spain,” referring generally to the portion of the Iberian Peninsula once governed by Muslims) and Sicily; the influence of the Ottoman Empire on Europe, especially in reference to the Balkan conflict in the 1990s; and British and French colonialism and how European colonization of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian nations led to the subsequent Muslim immigration into Europe. The first phase of the film begins in the city of Cordoba, Spain with interviews with the mayor, who describes how Muslims in Andalusia had a deep influence on European culture, through its architecture, philosophy, music, science, medicine, education, poetry, and art. The Spanish term *La Convivencia* (meaning “the Coexistence”) is introduced, referring to the period of Muslim rule in Al-Andalus from the early eighth century until the late fifteenth century when Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived and collaborated with one another in relative peace. Ahmed is careful not to romanticize this period and makes a reference to tensions among the communities and explains how these tensions eventually led to the Spanish Christian regime carrying out ethnic cleansing of the Jews and Muslims in 1492. Current Muslim residents of the Al-Andalus region feel a sense of ostracization—if not fear—in the face of growing European resentment and xenophobia. Outside of a mosque in Granada, Spanish Muslim women complain about how they are discriminated against for wearing their Muslim head covering, the *hijab*, especially after the Madrid terrorist bombing of 2004. Ahmed concludes the visit to Spain with a comment on how desperately contemporary Europe needs a new *La Convivencia*.

In Palermo, Sicily Ahmed discusses Roger II, the twelfth century king of Sicily and his grandson Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor of the thirteenth century, both of whom were both buried under the Cathedral of Palermo, built over an Arab mosque. These Christian rulers had a great deal of contact with the Muslims of Sicily and spoke fluent Arabic. Demonstrating the influence of Islam in Sicily, we view the Palatine royal chapel, with its Arab arches and its ceiling adorned with Arabic inscriptions, including *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim* (meaning, In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the

³ Pew Research Center July 16, 2015. “Extremism Concerns Growing in West and Predominantly Muslim Countries.” <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/16/extremism-concerns-growing-in-west-and-predominantly-muslim-countries/>

Most Merciful). Various Sicilians comment on how much of their vocabulary, their foods, and many other aspects of their everyday lives have been influenced by Arab and Muslim culture. One scholar notes how Muslims are now coming to Europe seeking knowledge and education, which is something of a “full circle” (if not ironic) development, as innovations in knowledge and education were originally brought to Europe by Muslims.

The second phase of the film moves to the Balkans to explore the role of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. A visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina illustrates not only the devastating conflict there between Muslims and Christians in the 1990s, but also how Islam has influenced Balkan culture. Mustafa Ceric, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, comments on how the region’s multicultural religious communities were cooperative before the Balkan conflict began. In Fojnica, the film focuses on the *Ahd-Namah*, a proclamation of the Ottoman Sultan who recognized the Catholic priests and offered protection to the Christian communities in Bosnia. A Jewish rabbi who spoke Ladino—a language originally spoken among the Sephardic Jews in Spain—remarks on how Bosnia-Herzegovina is free of anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, the film shows how contemporary Serbian films such as “Dracula Untold” clearly reflect Islamophobia and thinly veiled hatred of the Turks. To remind us of the horrors of the Balkan conflict, Ahmed visits the site of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide of some 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys by Serb forces as Dutch soldiers stood by. The Balkan phase of the film ends with a visit to Greece. The Muslims of Greece face the rise of the racist political party Golden Dawn, a Nazi-like group that has been attacking mosques and Muslims.

The third phase of the film investigates French and British colonialism and its context for much of the Muslim immigration into Europe. In Marseille, the film focuses on Algerian Muslims immigrants, who have been moving to France since the end of World War II. The rise of Marie Le Pen’s anti-immigrant party, France’s headscarf controversy, and how debates about Muslim assimilation, and fears of a burgeoning “Euroarabia” dominate the political discourse in France are noted. When 300,000 Muslim residents of Marseille received 22 million Euros to build a mosque, it created open protests by non-Muslim French citizens. One French Muslim scholar comments on how ISIS is able to recruit young Muslims from dysfunctional families, many of whom, she says, are former drug dealers who learned about Islam in prison. She indicates that these young Muslims are alienated and in search of an identity and ‘mother comfort’ within a French society that does not teach any Islamic history or culture in its educational system.

The film crew moves to London and the UK to investigate the role of the British-Pakistani Muslims who have migrated since the end of colonialism in South Asia. Many of these Pakistani migrants have become extremely successful in the UK. One of them, Mohsin Akhtar, has become one of the largest landowners in the UK, and he expresses his love and devotion to English society. Other Pakistanis have become Cabinet Ministers in the UK government. However, just as in other areas of Europe, the visit to the UK shows a mixed picture for Muslim immigrants. In a visit to the Edinburgh Central Mosque, Muslims mention how since 9/11 and 7/7, they feel that they are being scrutinized by the police and discriminated by those Scottish and British citizens who have been influenced by Orientalist stereotypes. On the other hand, a visit to Ireland depicts how some Sufi Muslims visit the shrine of “Sheik Patrick,” and pray with some

Catholic women. An interview with a former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and Bishop Tom Butler of Bradford emphasize how the media in the UK focuses on the sensationalism of Islamic inspired violence while neglecting the majority of peaceful Muslims in their everyday life. This section ends with an introduction to the Islamophobic right wing political faction “Britain First” and its leader, Jim Dowson, who claims that the group is defending the race and culture of the British against Muslim immigrants.

A visit to Germany to explore the situation of the *Gastarbeiter* or “guest workers,” which, in Germany, comprise mainly Turkish immigrants, reveals similar divisions between the majority of Germans, who accept these immigrants, and far right groups such as the “German Freedom Party” or the *Pegida*, who are Islamophobic and instead scapegoat these immigrant communities. The head of the Greek Orthodox Church in Germany suggests that Muslims should be integrated in the same way that they were assimilated. An interview with Cemile Giousouf, a young member of the parliament in Germany has become a role model for Turkish Muslims and working class people. However, an interview with an MTV television star Kirstine Baker, who lost her job because she was discovered to be a Muslim displays a darker side of German society. The film moves to Copenhagen and visits with Danish Muslims who express their differences with other Danes about the concept of ‘freedom.’ In particular, the freedom of the press became an issue with the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper. Ahmed interviews Flemming Rose, the culture editor who was instrumental in the publication of the cartoons to try to get him to understand Muslim sensitivities regarding the cartoons.

In the conclusion of *Journey to Europe*, Ahmed calls on the Muslim communities in Europe to value knowledge and education and to challenge and condemn those who invoke violent jihadist sentiments. Europe’s challenge is to rediscover and promote the Renaissance and Enlightenment ideals of universal humanism and reject racist, tribal, and Islamophobic tendencies. In the film, we hear the voices of everyday Europeans and Muslims in Europe, prominent politicians and leaders, archbishops, chief rabbis, grand muftis, and heads of right-wing organizations. Together, these voices help to paint a clearer picture of what might reasonably be described as a distinctly complex situation. Again, the objective of Ahmed’s film, to help develop an interfaith and intercultural dialogue between Europe and Islam is significant in light of the new immigration crisis that unfolds before us in the international media.

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