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## Ahmed, Akbar. *Journey into Europe: Islam, Immigration, and Identity*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018.

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**Ahmed, Akbar. *Journey into Europe: Islam, Immigration, and Identity*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018.**

Despite disagreement among scholars over how precisely to define ‘populism,’ it remains a prevailing feature of European political dynamics, as evidenced by the rise of the right wing National Rally party under Marine Le Pen in France, the Brexit movement in the UK, the rise of the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) in Germany, the landslide re-election of the socially conservative “Eurosceptic” Viktor Orbán in Hungary, the merger of the left and right populist parties and the Five Star Movement in Italy, and the policies of Andrzej Duda and his government in Poland, all of which have engendered far right, anti-immigration tendencies throughout the continent. The fragility of the EU and the steady erosion of the liberal democratic order of Europe is an ominous trend that is shaking the foundations of Western politics. One of the central factors driving these populist movements is the immigration of Muslims from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa into Europe. These Muslim migrants are associated with terrorist incidents in some European countries and elsewhere. Some Europeans also view Islamic culture and civilization as incompatible with the Christian and the Western liberal democratic ideals of their own society.<sup>1</sup>

The most recent work by internationally known poet, playwright, filmmaker, and anthropologist Akbar Ahmed,<sup>2</sup> *Journey into Europe: Islam, Immigration, and Identity*, explores the relationship and friction between Islam and Europe in an in-depth investigation carried out by Ahmed and his assembled team of anthropologists. For several years between 2013 and 2017, the team conducted multi-site ethnographic research in some fifty cities and towns in Europe, interviewing a broad cross-section of people in various socioeconomic strata and age groups, including scholars, students, and religious officials such as chief rabbis, grand muftis, and the former archbishop of Canterbury. Various presidents, prime ministers, members of Parliament, and other politicians, including members of the Far Rightist parties that demonize Muslims, were also interviewed. The team conducted research in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Italy, countries within which Muslim empires once existed; in Denmark and Germany, countries with deep tribal roots and to which Muslims have been invited as guest workers; in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Greece, which claim indigenous Muslim populations; and in Scotland and Ireland, which once constituted part of the former British empire and which are currently revitalizing their nationalist and tribal identities, alongside Britain.

The major theme of *Journey into Europe* is that Europeans are fundamentally divided regarding the Muslim presence in Europe. Although it appears that a majority of Europeans desire a plural society and accept the Muslim presence, a vocal minority expresses fear and are threatened by Islam. The book is divided into three parts. Part one investigates the interpretations of European identity based on its history and culture. On the one hand, Europe can be comprehended as a collective of multifarious countries formed on the bases of tribal or primordial identities, languages, blood lineages, and soil. On the other hand, European identity includes the pluralistic history of ‘la Convivencia,’<sup>3</sup> meaning “the co-existence,” referring to the historical period during which Jews, Christians, and Muslims coexisted and pursued knowledge, science, and humanistic endeavors together. Ahmed is careful not to romanticize the coexistence that developed in Spain, but he views it as an ideal paradigm for interfaith peace and cooperation.

The second part of the book discusses the research findings of the team from the interviews with Muslim migrants, indigenous Muslims in various countries, and converts to Islam. The team also interviewed many Jews and investigated trends in anti-Semitism and the interrelationship

between Jews and Muslims. The second part also discusses the larger questions regarding refugees, terrorism, immigration, identity, multiculturalism, and the emergence of the Far-Right movements. The final part of the book examines and promotes a way forward for twenty first century Europeans, a path to a newly synthesized identity that falls somewhere between the exclusive primordial tribal affinities and the more pluralistic Andalusian model of 'la Convivencia.'

The conceptual framework of Ahmed's work was influenced by Max Weber and Ibn Khaldun. Ahmed discusses how both of these sociologists produced grand narratives of evolutionary developments while living in societies going through dramatic social and cultural changes. Weber observed the rationalization of modern bureaucratic society as it developed in a united German state. Ibn Khaldun viewed the disintegration of the tribal societies in Arab north Africa that were held together by clans, lineages, and *asabiyyah* or social cohesion. Ahmed emphasizes how the models promoted by Weber and Ibn Khaldun must both be understood as ideal typologies rather than empirical, grounded realities. As Ahmed notes, Weber was ambivalent about modernity and believed it would lead to bureaucratic iron cages for individuals. Weber also overestimated the benefits of rationality in a bureaucratic state, as policies based purely upon rationality can be unjust, unfair, and inhumane to minorities. (Weber did not live to see how the German bureaucratic state ushered in Nazi fascism and the Holocaust, but his observations were prescient.) Ahmed notes how the conceptual models of Weber and Ibn Khaldun provide insights into the transformations that are occurring today in both the Muslim communities in Europe and among Europeans. Some Europeans are striving to maintain a more cosmopolitan and rational ideal for identity, while others are reverting to older primordial tribal roots of identity. Some Muslims in Europe observe their primordial identity eroding with assimilation and globalization processes, whereas others are busily retribalizing and emphasizing *asabiyyah* or social cohesion.

In beginning his discussion of the primordial tribal identities of Europeans, Ahmed describes the summer of 2014, when Germany won the World Cup football game in Rio de Janeiro and discusses the different reactions of the German and Turkish-German players to the singing of the German national anthem, "Deutschlandlied" (Song of Germany). Turkish-German players were unenthusiastic and passive during the anthem, which puzzled the German players and fans. Although the anthem was sung without the controversial original lines that include the repetition of the phrase *über alles*,<sup>4</sup> the anthem does draw on the adjective *deutsch*, which invokes the German tribal identity. Ahmed indicates that the German tribal identity described by the Roman historian Tacitus (1st century AD) represents an enduring aspect of the "deep structure" of European primordial affiliations. He surmises that the Turkish-German players had reservations about singing an anthem that praises a tribe to which they do not belong and may have been protesting the Islamophobia and prejudice that Muslims face in Germany. Ahmed then discusses how the primordial tribal consciousness of the Germans evolved into the well-known Volk concept of culture, introduced by German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), which had a definitive influence on anthropology through the Jewish German immigrant to the US, Franz Boas. Herder argued that each Volk (people/blood) linked to a specific territory (soil) had a unique culture including its music, folklore, literature, and art. The *völkisch* concept of culture<sup>5</sup> became the foundations of a German romantic nationalism—inspiring the folklorist Grimm brothers and the opera composer Richard Wagner—and became associated with later notions such as Heidegger's *Heimat* (a specific and authentic locale or Homeland) and the so-called Aryan race, all of which were subsequently appropriated by the Nazis for their dark and malevolent aims. Ahmed discusses how these *völkisch* primordial concepts diffused into many other areas of Europe and fostered the modern nationalistic movements among the Hungarians, Serbs, Poles, and others that endure in the present.

Following his excellent analysis of the deep structure of primordial identity in Europe, Ahmed explores the more rational and cosmopolitan identity of Europe that promotes tolerance and

pluralism. He provides an illustrative introduction to the Arab, Jewish, and Christian scholars of Andalusia, as well as a critical evaluation of both the romanticized and more negative historical appraisals of *la Convivencia*. Ahmed discusses the religious and philosophical achievements initiated in Andalusia by the Muslim Arab Ibn Rushd (Averroes), the Jewish Maimonides, and the Christian Thomas Aquinas, which produced the enlightened Aristotelian rationalism of the West. These ideas were promoted by some Western rulers such as King Roger II and his grandson Frederick II of the Holy Roman Empire and became part of the foundational knowledge for further developments in reason and science in European culture. The tolerance and pluralism of *la Convivencia* represented a fundamental contrast to the widespread primordial identities of Europeans. However, Ahmed notes how *la Convivencia* is viewed through contemporary eyes in Spain and elsewhere presently, sometimes in a post-9/11 Islamophobic fog. In addition, Spanish history is usually taught as a subject from 1492, when Muslims and Jews were expelled from Spain, resulting in a selective neglect of its Arabic and Islamic past.

Ahmed critiques the simplistic binary notions of the triumphant imperialism of the “West” against the “Rest” as portrayed by Niall Ferguson with a nuanced appreciation of the differences between the British and French colonial experiences. British ideals emphasized the acculturation of Britain’s South Asian colonial subjects, allowing them to retain aspects of their traditional culture, whereas the French colonial administration demanded from its subjects unequivocal assimilation and the abandonment of their North African identities. This helps explain the varied experiences of Muslim migrants to these countries in Europe presently. The successful assimilation of most Muslims in the UK, as represented by the election of Sadiq Khan as mayor of London; the wealth of Moshin Akhtar, one of the UK’s wealthiest landowners; and the membership of Baroness Sayeeda Warsi in the House of Lords, contrasts with France’s more tumultuous relationship with its Muslim residents and citizens, as evidenced by recent controversial debates about the wearing of Muslim headscarves in public and the banning of the veil; the impoverishment of the *banlieues* (suburbs), where many Muslims reside; the involvement of young Muslims in sporadic violence and rioting; and the French secularist concept of *laïcité*—literally meaning “secularity” and referring to the discouragement of religious involvement in government affairs—which has become a de facto instrument of Islamophobic policies in France. Ahmed and his team also go to the Balkans to describe the plight of indigenous Muslims of Europe, including Bosnian Muslims and the Turks in Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania, as well as other smaller Muslim communities such as the Tatars of Crimea, Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania; the Roma; and the Cham of Albania. Ahmed concludes this section with an overview of the experiences of Europeans who have converted to Islam such as the English Cat Stevens (Yusuf Islam), the Austrian Jew Leopold Weiss (Muhammad Asad), and the German MTV reporter Kristiane Backer.

Ahmed initiates his final section with a discussion of how the German primordial identity resulted in anti-Semitism and eventually the Holocaust. He describes the circumstances of both Jews and Muslims in Europe as they encounter similar developments regarding the recent emergence of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. In describing the connections among immigration, terrorism, and Islamophobia, Ahmed uses a case study from Bradford, England in which Far Right members of Britain First confront a tight knit conservative community of Muslim Kashmiris. The city of Bradford has been associated with terrorism, as some of its residents were involved in the London Underground bombing, and some of the city’s Muslim girls have joined ISIS. A second case study focuses on Melilla, Spain, which is also associated with jihadist cells and whose relations between its European and Muslim residents are complicated by asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. In the final case study, Ahmed examines Brussels, Belgium, from which many young Muslims have departed to join ISIS, and the adjacent city of Molenbeek, which has produced many terrorists in Europe, particularly after the Belgian government directed an unfair

offensive campaign against the entire Muslim community.

In discussing the roots of terrorism, Ahmed divides Muslims in Europe into three different categories. One category consists of immigrants with a tribal background devoted to defending their lineage and religious identities. Another category comprises Muslims who were raised by parents who had a modernist Islamic background. Ahmed describes one young woman in this category who rejected her parent's beliefs and joined ISIS, motivated by social media and the perceived grievances of Muslims facing injustice throughout the world. The third category is made up of European converts to Islam who were exposed to rigid fundamentalist forms and had a shallow Islamic education.

The final chapter begins with Ahmed in attendance at a lecture in 1993 by Prince Charles at Oxford on Islam and the West. Charles discussed how much Muslims had contributed to the West, mentioning Andalusia, Averroes, and the great city of Cordoba, with its thousands of books in its libraries outnumbering the volumes in any other European library. After that speech, along with other developments, Ahmed concluded that the Andalusian model of coexistence would once again succeed in Europe. However, this glimmer of hope was dashed by the events of 9/11 and the subsequent exponential growth of Islamophobia and increase in the number of vicious attacks on European Muslims promoted by the Far Right. Yet, after reviewing some of the Islamic contributions to literature and science from European thinkers such as Dante, Da Vinci, and Descartes, Ahmed makes hopeful recommendations for Europeans and Muslims to abandon their primordial and predatory identities and revitalize an Andalusian model for a path towards a pluralistic and universalistic form of European identity. This tremendous contribution to understanding the dilemmas of European and Muslim identities ought to be digested by both academics and policy makers in assisting improvements in interfaith coexistence.

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<sup>1</sup> This was the famed controversial thesis of the late Samuel Huntington, who promoted the 'clash of civilization' perspective that has influenced both many Westerners and Muslims.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed is the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at American University in Washington, DC; a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution; and a visiting professor at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD, where he was the First Distinguished Chair of Middle East and Islamic Studies. He is the author of over a dozen award-winning books including a quartet of works that examines the contacts between Islam and different societies since the tragedy of 9/11. The quartet includes *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Civilization*, *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam*, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam*, and the *Journey into Europe*. The major goal of this quartet is to describe the realities of Muslim communities so that a true interfaith dialogue can develop between America, the West, and the Islamic world.

Ahmed belonged to the senior Civil Service of Pakistan and was the Pakistan High Commissioner and ambassador to the UK and Ireland. Ahmed earned his MA at the University of Cambridge and a PhD in Anthropology from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies. Ahmed has taught at Princeton, Harvard, and Cambridge Universities. Ahmed is also a promoter of interfaith dialogue and an international peace activist. Prior to his PhD in anthropology, he was a civil service official and political agent in a number of tribal zones, including South Waziristan in Northwest Pakistan, where the Taliban and Al Qaeda sought sanctuary.

<sup>3</sup> La Convivencia roughly encompasses the period from the eight to the thirteenth centuries, until 1492, when Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain. The co-existence was particularly noted in Andalusia, Spain, as well as in Sicily and part of the Balkans.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase *über alles*, meaning "more than anything," has been understood by some to mean "above all" and has been interpreted to be a reference to Germany placing itself above all other states and peoples.

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<sup>5</sup> Ahmed astutely notes the resemblance of the Volk to Ibn Khaldun's conceptualization of *asabiyyah* and the rural Arab tribes discussed in the *Muqaddimah*.