

Book “Tariq Ramadan dévoilé” (Tariq Ramadan Unveiled), by Lionel Favrot, Lyon Mag Hors série, 2004



Reviewd by José Pedro Teixeira Fernandes

1. The name of Tariq Ramadan is almost unknown for the Portuguese public. On the other hand, for the public of several countries of Western Europe and Northern America, he gained notoriety as a Muslim intellectual and thinker, and perhaps some kind of celebrity. In Switzerland, where he was born, the Ramadan family, who live in Geneva, is well known by his fellow countrymen: Hani, the elderly brother, is the leader of the Islamic Centre of the Swiss city (famous in the past for its tradition of freedom of thought and tolerance). In France, his notoriety to the

general public came principally after a TV debate in 2003, with Nicolas Sarkozy, when the use of the Islamic veil (*le foulard*) in public spaces was in debate. Currently, in the United Kingdom, he has the position of invited professor at St. Anthony’s College at Oxford University. In late July 2005 (i.e., after the terror attack of 7/7 in London) he was invited by Tony Blair to join a task force created to analyse the roots of terrorism. Some years ago, the American Time magazine classified him as spiritual leader and one of the innovative thinkers of the XXI century, who «links his Islamic values with the Western culture».

2. With his success and credentials, is hard to believe the Ramadan comes across Lionel Favrot’s book (“Tariq Ramadan unveiled”) as a very different person. Perhaps the first reaction is to treat the book as a post-9/11 sensationalist

publication, trying to denigrate a respected intellectual, and exploiting the Western phobias about Islam and the Muslims. In fact this kind of literature exists, trying to profit from the international context to put out some racist and xenophobic feelings. This is not the case with this publication. The book raises serious questions about this «spiritual leader and innovative thinker of the XXI century». Before speaking about the content, we must introduce the author of the book and the publisher. *Lyon Mag* is an independent magazine founded in 1995 and the journalists own the majority of the capital of the magazine. Since its inception, the magazine invested in several investigative journalists and published important articles, mainly about the actions of the Islamist groups in the Muslim communities of the neighbourhoods (*banlieus*) of the major French towns. It was *Lyon Mag* who published the interview with Abdelkader Bouziane, the *iman* of Vénissieux, who ended up being

deported by the French authorities in 2004. The main reason behind the deportation was the activities of radicalization of the young Muslims and the call to violence against women, denounced by the magazine.

3. Now analyzing the content of the book, we must begin by noting that the preface contains interesting remarks that merit our attention. It was written by Soheib Bencheikh, one of the most erudite theological experts among the European Muslims who was *mufti* of Marseilles. He obtained a theological degree from Al-Azhar University in Cairo and has been a member of the French Council for the Muslim Cult. Bencheikh is a Muslim who promotes an open Islam and makes true efforts to adapt it to the realities of the European societies (see the book *Marianne et le Prophète/Marianne and the Prophet*)¹. As Soheib Bencheikh puts it (p. 13), “it is not Islam that is at stake when we speak

about Tariq Ramadan, but 'Islamism', i. e., the political religious ideology which takes the Muslim faith hostage". Further, he says: «what I can state personally, without any kind of hesitation, is that Tariq Ramadan is not a moderate. It's enough to see the meetings where he places the Muslim women veiled on one side, while on the other side the bearded men, to understand of what kind of society he aspires to. His aim is to isolate the young Muslims from the rest of Western society. Incidentally, he takes his discourses from the politicized literature of the Muslim Brothers». For the reader not familiar with the subject we must note that the Muslim Brothers (or Muslim Brotherhood) was the first Islamist organization founded in the first half of the XX century (1928), by Hassan al-Banna, grandfather of Tariq Ramadan. Nowadays the Brotherhood is a powerful organization present almost in all Muslim (Sunni) countries and also in Europe and North America. Through

¹ <http://soheib.bencheikh.over-blog.com/article-3261559.html>

national groups and other organizations related with them, they try to propagate its ideology and place themselves as the voice of the «Muslim community» and the «true Islam». The strategy is to put down other versions of Islam, mainly the liberal Muslims and the secularists who are opposing its actions, trying to control religious and educational activities through faith «schools», social and religious activities, etc. (activities that seems harmless, from a political point of view).

4. An important remark: all the great thinkers of Islamism, as an ideology (al-Banna, Qutb, Mawdudi, etc.), always invested in the educational and social activities as the best way to propagate their ideology and to obtain long term gains. For this «soft» strategy, the violence and terror of the islamists-jihadists of Al-Qaeda have gave them, indirectly, an important help. Post 9/11, the bewildered European governments are desperately seeking representatives from the «Muslim

community», and the Muslims Brothers and their proxies have quickly appeared with the face of a «moderate Islam» which condemns terrorism. This is an intelligent strategic work on the part of the Brotherhood, patiently developed during several decades with success. In the last decades, Europe has been transformed into an important field of action for them (see the article in the *Guardian* newspaper 29/01/2007², about the growing support of young generations of Muslims for the Islamic Sharia and the veil). Ramadan has always denied any kind of liaison with the Muslim Brothers and its ideology but the evidences shows that his actions are converging, to a greater or lesser extent, with the strategy of the Brotherhood. As far as reasons for move to the UK are concerned, we can find, probably, the fact that he understood (correctly) the window of opportunity given by the British multiculturalist ideology and policy. British multiculturalism gives more

²<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/thinktanks/story/0,,2000984,00.html>

«freedom of action» than the French *laïcité*, which represents a formidable barrier to his objectives, namely the islamisation of society and propagation of Islamist ideology (and, of course, gives more international visibility because of the prominence of the country and the English language). Perhaps his academic stay, during the year 1998, in the Islamic Foundation of Leicester, with its proximity to the Jammāt-e-Islami from Pakistan, functioned as a sort of «revelation» of this path. In sum, Favrot made an import work of investigative journalism about the discourse, thought and activities of Ramadan that merits a careful read and reflexion (and the translation into the main European languages, Portuguese included, for a larger public). Finally, for those who are not convinced by the arguments of Favrot's book, try listening to some extracts of Ramadan's cassettes, available from the site of *Lyon Mag*³.

³ <http://www.lyonmag.com/spip.php?article9722>