



**Islam In Europe**

**Insult: Fractured States?**

**Part 3: Youth: The Future**

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**South Court Auditorium**

**LIVE from the New York Public Library**

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**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Good evening my name is Paul Holdengräber, I'm the Director of Public Programs here at the New York Public Library. I will be extremely brief because Martin Rauchbauer from the Austrian Cultural Forum is going to introduce the evening. My purpose here, simply, is to welcome to the New York Public Library, to welcome you to this event on Islam in Europe, which is part of a festival which Martin will talk to you about, to welcome all of our European countries. We've worked together with 19 European countries which I've said has made me age by at least 19 years, but I would do it again.

And now it's my pleasure to bring to the stage Martin Rauchbauer.

**MARTIN RAUCHBAUER:** Thank you very much Paul. Good evening to you. I am the Deputy Director of Austrian Cultural Forum in New York, and I would like to welcome you all to the third panel of Islam in Europe, which will focus on the notion of youth. The Austrian Cultural Forum is one of many European cultural institutions here in the city that has joined together with the New York Public Library in order to organize these series of events on Islam in Europe over the course of three evenings, and I hope you will be able to join us tomorrow for the closing events.

Many young Muslims in Europe today are not immigrants. Many were born in Europe to immigrant parents, or grand- and even great grandparents, and often no longer speak language of their ethnic origin. There are also European Muslims who have no immigrant background whatsoever. Their ancestors have been living in Europe for centuries, and I'm very happy that two of tonight's panelists come from Bosnia Herzegovina, and remind us of our own longstanding European heritage of which Islam is an integral part.

Last weekend European citizens voted in elections for the European Parliament. In many EU countries and also my own country of Austria, the fear of Islam and Muslims unfortunately played an important part of the electoral campaign, and the results of the election show that playing with those fears mostly pays off. It may be of little solace that the only campaign theme

that was more successful with voters, at least in my country, than warning of the dangers of Islam, was warning of the dangers of the European Union.

Sometimes when one thinks about the futures in tonight's panel, it makes sense to take a look at the past. Austria, my country, has a long tradition of positive cultural encounters with Islam, and in many ways Islam has become part of our own heritage and tradition. As mentioned before, Bosnians and Austrians used to share the same citizenship, and in 1912, almost 100 years ago, the Austrian state recognized Islam officially as a denomination, right next to Christianity and Judaism, with huge consequences in our religious education system, but also on the self-confidence of Austrian Muslims up until today.

Today the majority of young Muslims in Austria are already third or fourth generation Austrians, and in many cases feel just as Austrian, and certainly just as European, if not more European, than non-Muslims do. I'm sure that when you will hear Farid Hafez, who is from Austria and is one of the panelists tonight, you will share my observation.

I would also now like to introduce you to the moderator of this panel, Moustafa Bayoumi. Moustafa was born in Europe, in Switzerland, raised in Canada, and now lives in New York, in Brooklyn, where he teaches post-colonial literature as an Associate Professor of English at Brooklyn College, City University of New York. He is Co-Editor of *The Edward Said Reader* and has published in many prominent academic journals and magazines. He's currently an Editor of *Middle East Report*. His most recent work, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America*, traces the experiences of seven young Arab-American men and women

living in Brooklyn, home to the largest number of Arab-Americans in the United States. For this work Moustafa was awarded last year with the American Book Award.

I'd like to welcome Moustafa and all the other panelists. Have a wonderful evening.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** Good afternoon, good evening. (**referring to his t-shirt**) For those of you who don't read Arabic it says "Brooklyn."

First I want to thank Martin for his introduction, and I will begin with a quotation. "Not only must the black man be black, he must be black in relation to the white man." Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*.

I also want to thank Paul Holdengräber, Mahnaz Fancy, Meg Stemmler, and the New York Public Library and the Muslim Voices Festival for this event and for the invitation to moderate today's panel on Muslim youth, Youth: The Future.

I am your moderator, which means of course that I am here to keep everybody moderate. And this is a very important thing when we're talking about Islam, obviously. But I am going to break my rule as soon as I've stated it. I would like to begin tonight with a proposition that may or may not be controversial, and it is this: most of the talk of Islam that we engage in when discussing Islam and Europe, or the United States and Islam, is simply wrong, and that there is no such thing, actually, as the Muslim world. Naturally, if this is the case, then what are we doing here? What we are doing here is either misplaced, or in need of complication, so let me explain.

Of course there are more than a billion Muslims all over the world, and there is a religious tradition that's called Islam. There is even an ummah—this is the word, in Arabic, for the world Muslim community—the ummah. But when we talk about Islam, or Muslims, most of the time we are doing something that is terribly reductive, and creating a political category, I believe, where there isn't one. Take the ummah, for example. Rather than existing as a concrete historical fact of the existence of the Muslim world, the ummah is really more of an idea, a consciousness, an aspiration: it means different things to different people and to different groups of people. It is an idea, in other words, that has little analytical force, let alone the ability to describe a culture, or even cultures.

Similarly, when people talk about Europe and Islam, what are they talking about? Europe is a concrete political entity with a mostly unified set of institutions, and largely with the ability to enforce its law. Europe has armies, it has elections, and such things. In other words, Europe is concrete. Islam is not a nation: it is an abstract belief deployed in a billion different ways around the world, sometimes politically, more often not. The comparison, then, is between something that is concrete and something that is abstract.

To talk about Muslims similarly often misses the point. Can we really talk about Muslims as if they were one group? Are all Bangladeshis, Egyptians, Malians, and Latino converts to Islam in the United States all one entity? Well of course not. They don't even speak the same language. And they have so many different histories that have an impact even in how Islam is practiced. To

think of them in only how they practice Islam is similarly reductive. Of course there is diversity in Islam, but at what point does diversity overwhelm even the diversity discussion?

But Muslims now have the distinct honor of being the subject of thousands of poles, studies, colloquia, etcetera. In fact it kind of reminds me of *Heart of Darkness*, the classic work of English literature, where Joseph Conrad writes about Marlowe when he goes to see his doctor before going on his trip down the Congo river, and the doctor says, “Oh if I could just measure your head before you go, it’s very interesting for me to measure the heads of people before they go.” Marlowe agrees, and then Conrad writes about Marlowe, “I felt as if I was becoming scientifically interesting.”

Muslims now are almost always discussed as a problem, or a threat, because of their backward faith. As if everyone who were even nominally Muslim were somehow responsible for the actions of every other Muslim in the world through all of history. By way of comparison, is every who even broadly subscribes to the ideas of liberal democracy, are those people complicit in the wars fought in its name, such as of course, the Iraq war? To people like Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch far right Freedom Party and ascendant power broker, at least on the European Parliamentary scene, all Muslims are the problem. “There is no such thing as a moderate Muslim,” according to Geert Wilders. His is an extreme position, but it’s an uncomfortable truth that the racism in his statement is seen as commonplace to far too many people.

Yes, in the religion of Islam there are practices, there are scholastic arguments, there are rituals, there are texts that may be shared, but is the state of “being Muslim” sufficiently the same that

we can deploy it as a useful category? Think about what “being Muslim,” for example, means in India, versus what being Muslim means just next door in Pakistan. In India you are a minority in a nation, 150 million in a nation of a billion, a nation that is often fractured with sectarian conflicts, and surprisingly, religion and lower class background often match. Just next door in Pakistan almost everyone is Muslim, about 170 million, and your Muslimness there is of a much different order. Being Muslim in a Muslim-majority culture is very different from being Muslim in a Muslim-minority culture.

Moreover, what people think about in the United States when they think of Muslim culture, usually is Arab culture, and when we label this “Muslim,” are we doing a disservice to the minorities in the Arab world and their contributions to Arabic culture? Let alone to what secular Arabic culture is?

And then when we talk about Muslims in the United States, or in the United Kingdom or Europe, are we talking about the same thing? When I lived in Germany in the early 1990s, people talked very little about the Muslims around them, and a great deal about “the Turks.” Now, it seems, it’s the other way around.

Perhaps what we are talking about is less about Islam or Muslims, but about identity and ideology in a globalizing world. In fact I would suggest that most of the talk about Muslims in our midst has less to do with Islam, or worse, the threat of Islam, and much more to do with tensions in specific societies. Much of the talk today about Islam is really about local and regional problems. European identity, for example, is premised more and more on not being

Muslim. In other words, through Islam some Europeans find ways not just to label others, but more profoundly, to define themselves in opposition to those others, in opposition to the Muslims in their midst. Hence, “Not only must the black man be black, he must be black in relation to the white man.”

Now certainly there are problems internal to certain Muslim communities. I’m not denying that by any stretch. The challenge, really, is how to approach these issues properly without these abstractions that are overly large.

This is all part of a heady terrain that defines debates around the Muslim world, around Muslims in Europe, and around Muslim youth in Europe, and I suspect it’s part of what we will discuss today. We have here a very robust and incredibly talented group. Our evening will be particularly interesting from my perspective, because the emphasis is actually on the arts, for one thing, and we have several practitioners of the arts as well. We also have an emphasis on countries that are not part of our normal imagination when it comes to these issues.

To speak personally for a moment, I have lived in Switzerland, Germany, and France, I’m familiar with the situation in the UK, but tonight I am incredibly excited, because we will get a glimpse of life in Denmark, Austria, Bosnia, Poland, and beyond. How fascinating, not least because in Bosnia, for example, one doesn’t really talk about the Muslims as immigrants—there are indigenous traditions of Islam in Europe that often get left out of the Islam discussion.

So I would like to ask our panel, then, to think about the question of Muslim youth—and what is youth as well, by the way?—from their perspective, and ask them to think about these questions along the following axis: five words that begin with C—Context, from historical context, Class, Creative Cultures, Conflicts, and Coexistence. I hope that this will help ground our discussion away from the false choices of ideology and into the real world complications of lived experience.

Our first presenter is Nanna Westh. Let me introduce her to you. Nanna Westh is a screenwriter and documentarist for television. She wrote the script for the Danish TV-series *Yallahrup Færgeby*, about two pre-teens named Ali and Hassan and their endeavors to succeed in the urban ghetto and become ‘real gangsters.’ Westh has previously worked for the Danish Public Broadcaster, DR, for seven years, making documentaries for television and radio.

So, Nanna, let me ask you a question. You’ll be showing us a clip from your show, a segment called *One Hundred Percent Danish*. Tell us a bit about it, and also tell us how you got involved in the project, and what exactly that involves.

**NANNA WESTH:** There are a few things I need to explain for you to understand this. First of all, it’s a pastiche really, of a Danish Christmas show. In Denmark we have a television Christmas TV series each year for children. This is not for children, however, it’s for young people, adults. It’s a satire, a pastiche of *Juleferie* which is something I saw as a child. I think my son here as well has seen it, it’s been repeated many times. *Juleferie* was about children in Fairytown, a very idyllic, small community where everyone was looking out for one another. So

I wanted to make a 2007 version of that. The Fairytown has changed a bit, it's now a suburban ghetto. As you said, the lead characters are Ali and Hassan, whose aim is to become real gangsters. Other characters you'll see here are the Headmaster, Hanne, who's very eager to integrate these two kids, and she has her helper, her underdog Morten, who's like the librarian at the school.

'Integrate' in Denmark—we are addressing the problem of what to call these young people. The same discussion could be had on the word 'integration,' because in Denmark that word has slightly changed its meaning, towards 'assimilation.' When Hanne speaks about integration or when the Danish authorities speak about integrating Muslims—which they do a lot, even though we have less than five percent Muslims in Denmark, a lot less—when they speak about integration what they really want is for the Arabs, or the Muslims, to become as us. They want them to become exactly as we are. That's the problem I'm trying to address here.

**(screening of *Yallahrup Færgeby* episode *100% Dansker*,  
viewable on YouTube (without subtitles) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0G6c9EigyOc>)**

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** Thank you that was wonderful. I have many questions already, but I'm going to save them, so that we can work through the panel and engage everyone in discussion.

Next is Ziyah Gafic, who is a photographer based in Sarajevo, and whose most recent exhibition, *Troubled Islam: Short Stories from Troubled Societies*, was presented in Beacon, New York. It is

a series of photo essays on the aftermath of violence in the daily lives of people living from Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Palestine, Iran, and Iraq. He is the author of the book *Muslims of New York*, and he regularly contributes to *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Liberation*, *Le Monde*, and many others. His work has also been exhibited worldwide, in such places as London's Tom Blau Gallery, and New York's "Fovea editions" gallery.

Ziyah, looking over your beautiful, deeply interesting work, I was struck by this, and I wondered if you could tell us more. Your own history, seems to me, deeply informs your work. I would like to ask you to speak a little bit more about your interest in photography, what it means to you, and if, in fact, being Muslim has any bearing on your work.

**(Ziyah Gafic's photography displays above the panelists.)**

**ZIYAH GAFIC:** I grew up in Sarajevo, and I was born during the glorious communist times. But as a personality I was developing during the hardship of the siege of Sarajevo. I was too young to be part of the things that were happening—I was too young to take part as a photographer, because I was a teenager, or to fight. Somehow I was someone who was just a victim, or a potential target, like all other citizens. But soon after the war I started taking pictures for local magazines, and somehow by the coincidence that I could not photograph war when it was happening to own country, I dedicated myself to photographing the aftermath of the conflict. Then, when I was working in Bosnia, I realized there are a number of other countries who are following a similar pattern of violence, and genocide—call it ethnic cleansing, whatever you

want. I decided to dedicate a good portion of my professional life to this project that we are seeing bits and pieces of.

When it comes to being Muslim, I do come from a Muslim family, but we are a very secular, and, let's say, left wing family. But obviously, during the war in Bosnia, one of the reasons we were targeted, just one of the reasons, is that we are Muslims. So obviously I became aware of the fact that even if we are not practicing, I still am part of that world, and that definitely made me interested in what's happening to the other people that are going through similar problems and issues. To be honest I somehow felt obliged to photograph this and to dedicate my time to this project and these people, because somehow I felt that by being Muslim I can offer a slightly different perspective. As you know, most of the pictures we see are from western photographers, for many, various reasons—most of the media are coming from the west. So I felt I had something different to offer.

That made it also easier, because photography in my work is all about empathy. For me as a person, it's much easier for me to empathize with those I photograph, partially because we share one thing in common, which is religion. I don't speak Arabic, I don't speak Farsi or any other language, but it's something I can relate to very easily. Also knowing that one of the reasons for all these wars they are going through is partially because they are Muslims. Only partially of course. Petrol has much more to do with it, but anyway.

So I felt I have another perspective to offer, and that made my work easier because for me it was much easier to communicate with these people and be accepted, because believe it or not, where

I went, from Chechnya to Iraq, people were very aware of what happened and what was going on in Bosnia, and that opened many doors.

However, and you mentioned this earlier in your introduction, my first experience of being a foreign photographer in a conflict zone was in Jerusalem, when I went to photograph the beginning of the second Intifada, when I tried to enter into the Al Aqsa Mosque, or the Dome of the Rock. I was stopped simultaneously by a Palestinian guard and an Israeli soldier, who said no, this is just for Muslims. I was dressed pretty much like this, and said, but I'm Muslim. But unfortunately from my name you can't understand I'm Muslim, nor do I have any physical—and that was the point, I don't have any physical resemblance to the usual stereotypes of Muslims. But what struck me was that all of a sudden, these fierce enemies, Israelis and Palestinians, shared this 'You're not part of it, you're out.' Then they actually made me quote a few things from the Quran, the only few that I know, as some sort of login and password. It worked out and they let me in.

That made me really believe that somehow this issue of color and race somehow goes beyond religious affiliation. I feel bad about it, because by size Bosnia is a totally insignificant country of four million, of which probably 51% are Muslims. But, as you said, we are indigenous people. We didn't immigrate from anywhere. Islam came with the Ottomans. However, we are there for hundreds and hundreds of years. Somehow I felt equally unaccepted by the fellow Muslim, and the Israeli guy. That was my first experience of being Muslim but being white in an Arab country, and somehow ever since then—and that was seven years ago—I can't get rid of the

feeling that the color made more difference than the fact that we share the same faith, until I entered the login and password.

Anyway, it works the other way around as well. When I travel to European countries, or when I present my work to editors—and I do it all the time—it's also like a surprise, that my work is dedicated to Muslim countries, though not necessarily to conflict. They know that I'm from Bosnia. So when they ask me about my religious background, I say, yeah, I'm a Muslim. My father's name is Muhammad, and all that. Somehow it's the same facial expression, the same surprise about seeing a European face—although we are not part of the EU—seeing a white person who is definitely not fitting into the stereotypes.

To be honest, at first I thought it was a problem, but now I see it as an advantage. Because whenever I travel to countries where I'm too white, it only takes a few words to login. On the other hand, when I travel here I feel surprised about how difficult it is to understand that I am white, and I am from Europe, and I'm not an immigrant, and yet, a Muslim. At the end of the day it's amusing, yet it's also potentially dangerous. It's possibly problematic because it comes down to the Muslim world being represented only by people of African, or Arab, or Asian origins. I think Bosnians—unfortunately we're too small—but Bosnians can be a nice bridge to show that you don't have to be an immigrant or convert to be a Muslim in Europe. Bosnians have that slightly different perspective to offer. That's something I've been trying to do through the pictures, and so far it's worked.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** Thank you. And thank you for the photographs. They're stunning. I'm seeing certain trends developing, so that's exciting. My next question will be directed to Farid Hafez. Let me tell you a little bit about Farid.

He works at the Institute of Philosophy of Law, Law of Religion, and Culture in Austria and studies at the Institute of Political Science at the University of Vienna. Farid Hafez is also the co-editor of the first volume of *Islamophobia* in Austria. Hafez teaches at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Vienna on "Islam in Austria," and in 1996, Hafez co-founded the Muslim Youth Organization and is frequently interviewed by the Austrian media on issues related to the life of Muslims in Austria.

Farid, Austrian history is obviously rich with encounters all the way from the Ottoman empire, and with various other Muslim populations, and Austria too has its own issues with immigration and far right politics. Could you tell us about your investigations into Austrian politics, and particularly from the angle of young people?

**FARID HAFEZ:** Thank you very much for that very kind introduction. Unfortunately I'm afraid I'm going to be the most boring one, because I have no good film to show, and there's no good photograph that I have made, I'm an awful photographer. But I'll try my best.

You spoke about the question of history, and in fact I think we have to go into history to understand the question of how the Austrian society and the Austrian government deals with its Muslim population, because it is deeply rooted in the history of Austria. I don't want to go as far

back as to the Ottoman Empire, because the Ottoman Empire, and the relation to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire—at that time it was kind of, there were good days and there were bad days. We had the Crusades on one side, and we also had some collaboration between the Austrian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. So different images of Islam occurred during that time of history, that led to different images afterwards, that were reproduced in the causes of the political elite. But what is very important to mention here is that Austria is the first country to recognize Islam on a legal basis as a religion. That is very unique until now in the member states of the European Union—it's the only one in that sense. We have in Austria 14 recognized churches and denominations. The Islamic Council is one among these. It was established in 1979, after Islam was recognized by law in 1912.

This leads to very important consequences, one of which is also important when we deal with the question of youth: in Austria we have for example, religious Islamic lessons in public schools. This is not only the case with Muslims, it's the case with every church and denomination. I know Austria is a small and tiny country, it's not like everybody knows about it. Austria has 8.6 million inhabitants, out of whom six million are of Catholic belief, in that sense they are part of the Catholic church. The second largest religious minority we have is the Muslim group, with 420,000 people, followed by the Protestant church with about 380,000 Protestant believers. So to have Islamic lessons in your public school means for a young Muslim, his religion is not regarded as being very strange, being something not part of society. Because it is institutionalized in your everyday school life. By that it also gives a kind of identity, so your Austrian identity as a student is in harmony with your Muslim belief in your everyday school life.

Another consequence, just to mention one of the few, but on the political level is one of the most important ones, is that the Austrian government has a clearly defined partner with whom to speak. That's also a very great problem when we talk about Germany, France, or Britain—the government very often says, we don't know whom to speak with. Why? Because there are so many Muslims. We have very different organizations, a heterogeneous group of Muslims, but in Austria because of legal recognition, we have a clearly defined partner. In fact, we can say that about 90% of all Muslim organizations are part of this Islamic Council, which is legally recognized.

That's one thing, the political recognition. I would like to speak about another point, which may give us a bit of a contradictory image of Islam in Austria, but I think that's important to understand which issues are dealt with when we talk about young Muslims in Austria. As you may all know, in the 1980s and especially the 90s in Western European countries in general, right wing parties were growing. They were growing around the issue of being a native or a foreigner. These racist popular movements and political parties stressed upon the foreigner problem. After 9/11, and especially what happened on the European continent, Madrid, London, and Istanbul, the issue became more European—the issue of Islam as threat to our Western civilization. Especially in Austria, the right wing parties switched from being anti-foreigner to becoming Islamophobic.

I'll give you one example. The current chief of the Austrian right wing party was in 2006 or 2007 in Serbia, meeting the nationalist party over there, and when he returned he was asked by

an Austrian newspaper, “Are you not against foreigners? Haven’t you for the past two decades spoken about the bad people from Eastern Europe?” He answered, “Actually, I’ve never been against foreigners, I’ve only been against Turks and Muslims.” And for sure, the Turkish population, 90 to 95% of them are Muslims. So in fact he’s saying, I’m only against Muslims. And that’s what we also see in the election campaigns since 2004 until today. Just to give you one of many examples I could show you, last weekend we had European Parliament elections, and one slogan of the Freedom right wing party, which came out of the election as the fourth strongest party, was a slogan called “Accident in the hands of the Christians.” So that’s how identity politics is made by the Austrian right wing parties. In fact, the main problem is that then the other parties have to react in some way on these identity politics. Unfortunately, in some Austrian parties you always find, be it left or right or centrist it doesn’t matter, you find lots of functionaries starting with this right wing identitarian, anti-Muslim resentments, speaking about them and establishing this discourse—making it mainstream and not letting it remain right wing only. So that’s another challenge we have besides the political recognition.

To understand what it is to be Muslim in Austria, I want to go back to the question of immigration. Although we have so-called native Muslim citizens, especially those who joined the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and stayed there for a longer time, in general masses of the Muslim population immigrated in 1966 when the Austrian government had a treaty with the Turkish government to bring cheap labor workers. These people stayed instead of going back, and the problem of the government that it did not plan that they would stay, but rather that they would go back. So in the long term perspective, there wasn’t a lot done for their integration into society. And because of that, nowadays we can say that, unfortunately, the Muslim youngsters

are by majority at the bottom of society in terms of economics and social recognition. So that's also a big challenge we have nowadays.

I want to make a slide now to the question of the Muslim youth. You introduced me as being one of the co-founders of the Muslim Youth Austria. This youth group was established in 1996. Looking back, I think we had one main message to give—we also called it afterwards, the Austrian Muslim identity. This message was for two groups: it was for the major society that viewed Islam as something strange, something foreign, as being the other, and was also meant as a message for the Muslim population that did not really participate in the major society. At that time all the Muslim organizations were organized in their ethnic environment, so you had Turkish organizations speaking the Turkish language and discussing parliamentary elections not in Austria but in Turkey, and we as people from the second and third generation, regarding ourselves as Austrians, did not feel comfortable in these kinds of organizations. So we established our own group, and today it is the only national, German speaking, multi-ethnic youth organization, having more than 30,000 members all over Austria. It's funded by the state, part of the Austrian National Youth Council.

To give you one practical example of this work and how it is influencing this discourse on Austrian identity, we had two floods, three and six years ago in Austria. These floods destroyed lots of areas where people were living. The Muslim Youth Austria organized some auxiliaries to go here and there and help people to rebuild their destroyed houses. When some groups went here and there, two interesting experiences were made. First, so-called native Austrians, how we say, were a bit astonished. People maybe with dark skin, maybe dressed in another way, some

Muslim women with the headscarf, came from one or two hours away to help them. So this was something new for them, people participating. And the other interesting experience that was made was with the Muslim population. Because here and there, you have a mosque in every small town in Austria. When these Muslims saw that other Muslims came from another city to help other people in these areas, they were very much ashamed. Ashamed, because in traditional Islam the question of neighborhood is a very important one. And they were ashamed that they would not have the idea to help their fellow citizens, their neighbors in fact, but rather that other people had to come from far away to help them. This example very much shows the problems we are facing and the challenges we have.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** Thank you. In some ways it reminds me of the United States as well. In a lot of ways the Muslim communities, and the organizations that represent them in the United States, matured a lot in the period after September 11<sup>th</sup>, and engaged American society with a lot more coherence and force and confidence. It sounds like something similar in the Austrian example.

Our next presentation is from Krzysztof Czyzewski—you'll have to excuse my bad Polish pronunciation. He is a social activist, theater producer, essayist, and publisher, and the founder and president of the Borderlands Foundation. I actually have the name for that, Borderlands Foundation, in Polish, but I'm not going to try it. In 1990 the Borderlands Foundation was founded to memorialize, rebuild, and sustain the rich cultural diversity in central and eastern Europe. Czyzewski has brought the foundation's model to regions of ethnic tension around the world. Since 2003 he has been an active member of the European Cultural Parliament, and in

2008 he served as the Polish Ambassador to the European Commission's European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. And he's an absolutely fascinating artist and essayist. I would encourage you all to check out the website of the Borderlands Foundation.

(<http://pogranicze.sejny.pl/archiwum/english/found/found.htm>)

So, Krzysztof, my question to you—the Borderlands Foundation is indeed on the vanguard of the arts scene globally. Gail Kimberling, for example, of *The New York Times*, has written of you that you “have based your life's work pushing the limits of borders, whether it involves going beyond the acceptable, bringing the past to the present, or bridging one country or culture to another.” You've also been called a “multi-nationalist,” a term I find endearing as well, by Czesław Miłosz. With your interest in minority cultures and tolerance, and also in the abuse of power generally, how do you see the positions of Muslims in Poland, or in Central Europe more generally? And does the quote unquote, “Muslim question” inform your own work?

Incidentally, this is something I should have mentioned earlier, just a brief aside. Many people in this audience may not be aware that the first mosque in New York City was actually a Polish Tartar Mosque in Williamsburg. So this history actually goes back quite far.

**KRZYSZTOF CZYZEWSKI:** The Tartar mosque was one of my first experiences of Islam. You see in these glorious times, as Ziyah called the communist period in Central and Eastern Europe, we were taught that we live in a homogeneous country, that we were only Poles, Catholics, and so on. My generation started to rediscover somehow the multicultural heritage of our country. And Islam, Muslims, were one of these discoveries for us. To oppose the system in

communist times was, among other things, to discover Islam, or Muslims living in our country, in the past being an important part of our cultural heritage. Though I remember that when I traveled to the eastern part of Poland, I was at the time living in Poznań in the west part of Poland, and I saw for the first time two beautiful, really astonishing, wooden mosques, built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and still surrounded by a Tartar community, keeping the customs for 13, 14 centuries. So this is one picture of our country, as Ziyah said, like in Bulgaria you have Pomac people, you have Albanians—in this part of Europe as well as Bosnia, you have indigenous Muslims still living with us. Tartars were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was in union with Poland, so they live also in Lithuania and Belarus until today.

The second thing was that we had immigrants during communist times, from the Middle East, mostly from Iraq and Lebanon. We have in Gdańsk a mosque which belongs to, we call them new Muslims in Poland, which are interestingly in discussion with the old ones. You can face the discussion of two completely different, what you said at the beginning in the introduction, there are many cultures, much diversity within the Muslim world. You can see it in Poland, this mosque, the architecture is like the Saudi Arabia style of mosques. And you have different Muslims living there. There was a very nice incident in 9/11, when the mosques in Gdańsk started to be attacked by some Polish right wing groups. Jewish people living in Gdańsk offered to guard the mosques at that very moment.

And then the wave of new immigrants to Poland during the Bosnian war. This my first personal contact with the tragedy of Muslims in our part of Europe—but I will come back maybe later referring to your second question about Europe, because it was for me a life experience somehow

with this. Then Chechens, Kosovars coming to Poland, an interesting change, which is something significant. We didn't know that Chechens were Muslims. We knew Chechens as freedom fighters for independence, fighters against Russia, so a kind of solidarity with Poles. They were heroes for us. It happened also at the beginning of the 90s, when the first Chechen war started. But in the meantime they became Muslims in Poland. And the same for Kosovars. And at that point I would say, welcome in Europe. So we are not anymore in Poland, we are suddenly in Europe. So there is no Chechen-Pole solidarity, in fighting for independence, there is the problem of Muslims within the European context. This happened overnight, this shift from solidarity with these people to seeing them as a problem, a European problem. Mostly Chechens. During the Kosovo war there was this solidarity with our "brother Slavs" against these strangers or barbarians—suddenly we rediscover that we are the "defenders of Christianity" in Europe in the context of the Kosovo war.

So when you're asking me about my activity or my thinking about Europe today, it is very much to this new situation we have. The Bosnian war for me was like being "born again European." I often call myself the Bosnian generation, or my friends who were engaged in the Bosnian conflict, the Bosnian generation. Because we, from a Sarajevo perspective, we saw a completely different Europe than we knew before. We saw a big crisis going on in Europe, which once they marginalize the Balkan war as something from another world and not touching us at all in Europe, but we knew, at that very moment, that was not true, that it was a European crisis—that it was a European big problem which would very soon appear in Paris, in London, in Warsaw, in other parts of Europe. Because we didn't solve it in Bosnia, because we couldn't help, could not engage ourselves in defending the common Bosnian, and in defending, I would say, Agora

people—in Sarajevo they would say Charchia, people who belong to the common thing. They could be Serb Orthodox, Catholic Austrian origin living in Sarajevo, but there is a space we can share together which is in common for us, and we belong also to that space and we can stand and defend it as citizens. So *this*, this collapsed. This was destroyed in Sarajevo. The Agora people were the main loser of this war. But not only for Bosnia, for all of Europe.

So for me, when you ask today about Islam in Europe, the root of this question is in the Bosnian war, the former Yugoslav war. It's a generation issue. And when you ask about youth, for me, what youth means is the future. Of course we are all occupied with the past—as you mentioned, I work a lot with the past. In the Polish case, when we started to rebuild our country after 1989, I was mostly focused on the Jewish issue, on the Polish-Jewish relations. Because of the past it was the most painful issue for our society—anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, all these things. So in that context, Islam was somehow a part of that. But when I became a European, Islam went into the mainstream of my thinking, and of creating a new Europe—feeling that we are on the threshold of building something new in Europe, which will be devoted to the main challenge which is Muslim neighbors, cultures, immigrants—everything that makes us Europeans now very disintegrated.

There is a famous myth, the first one of our culture, I mean Greek, about Medea. About the outsider coming into our society. Caught by the Greeks, but in this Corinthian society she was betrayed, she was marginalized, but her behavior was because of this disintegration, this mistreatment of a person by her society. This myth, for me, it is a very real situation for us today in Europe. Again, we have Medea in our own society, and again we have this threat that we will

not stand this otherness within ourselves, that we will be too weak to integrate it, to face it justfully and truthfully. That is the challenge for us today.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** Nebojša Šeric Shoba is our next presenter, let me introduce him. He is a visual artist, who has shown work most recently at Warlord, Smith Stewart Gallery, here in New York City, the show called “Neo Constructivism: Art, Architecture & Activism.” He has also shown at Rutgers’s Paul Robeson Gallery and the New Jersey School of Architecture Gallery, in Newark. A project called, “Now is the winter,” showed at Proekt\_Fabrika, Moscow, Russia, and “Greater New York,” at P.S 1/MoMA, here in New York. His work has also been exhibited in the Venice Biennale, Italy. His work has appeared in “Political Minimalism” by Claus Biesenbach, in Flash Art Magazine.

Can I call you Shoba? I hear they call you Shoba, and that’s easier for me. Shoba, what does being an artist actually mean, to you? And what does being Bosnian mean to you. And then, let me put those two separate things together: does Islam, or being Muslim, have any bearing on those two different questions?

**NEBOJŠA ŠERIC SHOBA:** Well, it’s a very complicated situation. I became an artist when war broke out in Sarajevo, my native town where I was born. I actually came from a mixed family. My father’s side is Muslim, on my mother’s side my family are all Orthodox Christians. But it’s also very interesting that my notion of the world, before the war, in a communist society, was totally—I had no special feelings about any particular religion. We were all kind of the same. We share the same playground. I never knew who was my neighbor—is he Catholic,

Muslim, Protestant? I never had a clue about it. So when war broke out suddenly the differences actually became crucial, especially when fighting started, when cities were bombed. Somehow the entire world went upside down. Art became some sort of survival for most of the young people who live in those circumstances. And of course everything after was just trying to survive, trying to survive, trying to explain what happened to you, what is your real identity, what is your real background, but at same time you're witnessing really terrible events.

It's hard to do. I've seen some really incredibly exhibitions happen in the siege in Sarajevo, and I've seen some really incredibly theatre pieces, photo exhibitions, everything was just so fruitful because circumstances were so bad that we wanted to emphasize—there are so many stories to tell of what happened. But I would like to go back a little, into history. There are so many events happened in the European past. For instance, the Berlin Congress, the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 was basically a disaster for the entire Muslim population in the Balkans, which basically was faced with terrible exodus. Hundreds of thousands of people fled to Turkey. History was never, let's say, on the side of the Muslim population in Bosnia. It was like when Austria annexed Bosnia Herzegovina—after Turkey left, it created a very unfavorable situation instead of really fully understanding the problem. People have been starting leaving, because it's not so simple. Even this last war has a lot to do with all the past.

Right now it's really hard to talk about, for example, the future of art. Especially younger artists now in Bosnia, nowadays facing isolation and pretty much a situation—pretty much during the war and after the war was great, because attention was huge, and curators and gatherers were literally flooding to Sarajevo, and you can't turn these people back from your studio. There was

too many of them—can you please wait in line? Even the Soros Foundation put so much money into the local art scene and suddenly everything started to become some kind of real city, like something it had never been before. But, after a couple years, things started slowly going back into its own boredom, and now the situation is getting, I think, even worse. There is no attention, so no visibility, so therefore no one cares.

To emphasize what I'm saying I want to present here an art piece by a fellow artist from Bosnia, his name is Damir Niksic. This video is seven minutes but I think it's going to tell you more successfully what I was trying to say. I think this video really says something much more.

**(screening of *If I Wasn't Muslim*, by Damir Niksic,  
viewable on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYpqOIWKWhQ>)**

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** That was fantastic. And of course that songs going to run through my head now for the rest of the night. But really, even that performance raises a bunch of issues that have come up in common with many of the panelists.

For one thing, the novelty of a necessary identity you never knew you had seems like a common theme among these presentations. The newness of Islam as a category, and even then, of these religious nationalisms in confrontation with new Muslim populations within the spaces of Europe is also a commonality. But one of the things I am struck with, and one of the reasons why I am really in love with this panel so far, is the specificity by which we are talking about very concrete locations, and particularly when we're talking about Central Europe which has come up

here often, the relationship to anti-Semitism and Jewish communities, which also came up in the last presentation as well.

So maybe I can throw out a beginning question for whoever wants to take it, or however many of you want to. Which is, what do you see as the relationship between anti-Semitism and anti-Muslimism? I hate the term Islamophobia, for my own reasons. How would you think about those two terms, how they're in common, or how they're different, from where you sit?

**KRZYSZTOF CZYZEWSKI:** One thing that comes to my mind is that when you have a crisis and you are very weak—that's my understanding of Europe today—you need a scapegoat. We know it from the history, that we had Jews very often, particularly in a special moment of our history, as a scapegoat. More or less, you can face it again in Europe, towards Muslims. Populist politicians—you see how Europe is turning to the right, and they use this card, the anti-Muslim card, as new scapegoat. In the previous panel our guest from Sweden, the ambassador said he wants to compare the situation in Europe today with the situation you had with 19<sup>th</sup> century US. That is an optimistic view. But you can compare it also with the 20s and 30s in Europe, and this is different then.

**FARID HAFEZ:** Actually, the film that we were looking at together, it was funny on one side definitely. We also have in Austria a young theatre group stressing on these issues of identity, of being Muslim and European. But on the other side, how should I say, I was feeling a bit in a bad mood. Because lots of what you said is really—that's the point. That's how a lot of young people

feel. I think it's very much about this question of identity, and I think that's at the center of the debate.

When I came to the United States for the first time in my life, I was very astonished. The first woman I met was in a bank, and I tried to change my currency. Firstly she was black, secondly she was wearing a headscarf, and I got in a discussion with her. She said she was in the US for ten months or something like that. And I thought, wow. Because in Austria, firstly you would never see a black person sitting behind the desk of a bank, not even behind the desk in a supermarket to sell you goods. And you would never see, too, a woman with a headscarf. Besides that, the migration law is so bad in Austria, you could not imagine to work after ten months, but that's another issue.

What I want to say is, this is the question. How inclusively do our respective nation states in Europe, and maybe also here in the US, define their national identity, or how exclusively? I think it's not a problem to say, I am this or I am that, because every definition and every construction of identity always deals with the question of "Who am I not," that's not the problem. The problem is when we come to the point of saying, "who I am not, and who don't want the other," that's the problem. And therefore, I think this is one of the main problems now. Because of your question of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, my PhD was in Islamophobic discourse and I dealt with this question, and so for everybody who reads German, there is a new book by Sabina Shifa, making a comparison with anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. I haven't read it, it's going to be published in the next few weeks, she told me when I met her last time.

In fact, many many scholars in Austria, and I have lots of Jewish friends too, who have a long history also in Austria, they themselves say in some way we have very equal or parallel developments coming up these days in our countries. And that makes some Muslims a bit afraid. I mentioned these slogans before of the Freedom Right party. One of the very famous ones, and it was the first of these specific Islamophobic slogans they had, it was: “Vienna should not become Istanbul.” By Istanbul for sure they meant, because Ankara is the capital of Turkey, not Istanbul, but Istanbul is historical capital of the Ottoman, and by that, the Muslim empire of those days. We had a very similar quotation, not by the Nazi regime but before in Vienna, which said: “Vienna should not become Jerusalem.” Because at that time half of the Jews within the Austrian empire were located, living in Vienna, 200,000. So, in the rhetoric, and also because our right wing has a tradition and some connection to the Nazi past also in its organizational structures, there is some parallel. I would not say it is an equal thing because the environment is different, the political environment—we are living in a very much in a pluralistic political system and social life is completely different from what we had 100 years ago when this issue of anti-Semitism was hot.

And I just want to make a very small remark on one thing you were talking about, because I had a very similar experience when I was in Jerusalem and I was going to the mosque. And maybe I can just resolve this problem. They also asked me to recite something from the Quran because we don't know if you're Muslim or not. And I said ok, but why do you ask me? The guy said, because there is a rule, no people younger than 40 years are allowed to go to the mosque, and if somebody who is very young comes to the mosque, they always check him. And myself, I think I am very much looking Arab in some way, so I think in this specific case it was not really the

question of ethnicity, but rather their style of dealing with people, and with young people in general.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** We'll get to that in a second, because I want to talk about ethnicity versus race versus religion. But Nanna, you had something to say?

**NANNA WESTH:** I think it's a wonderful panel, but we are from very different countries obviously, and I feel like a spoiled child compared to what you've experienced in Bosnia. And of course you can compare anti-Semitism with Islamophobia. In Bosnia, for instance, what happened with the cleansing is the same thing. I think actually that Austria and Denmark are probably the most nationalistic governments right now, where the debate is very racial and very harsh at the moment.

So there are a lot of grounds for pessimism, but I'd like to maybe bring a touch of optimism to the debate. I don't entirely agree with you Krzysztof that these times that we are facing now can be compared to the times before Hitler went into Germany and all that. I think that the Danish racism and the Danish Islamophobia was way before the financial crisis, when things were going great, we didn't really have any problems. I don't think that's the case here, I don't think that's why we became racist. I think it's something else. Times have changed.

My optimism comes from working with young Muslims. I've done some documentaries with young Muslims, and I have a son who's in school with I think 20% Muslims. And I'd like to remember what you said Shoba, that even a few years ago, 15 years ago, you didn't even notice.

You didn't care who was what. And I think my son is the same. I don't know if he knows who's Muslim, or whatever.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** You should ask him.

**NANNA WESTH:** Well I think you know, but you don't care that much. **(Her son confirms from the audience.)** Good. Good answer. That's what I've experienced.

Also I'd like to say that my Christmas show was meant to be a tribute to a special kind of youth culture in Denmark, and it's not necessarily Muslim. I don't think it's Muslim really. It has some Arab notes, but they are also fans of Che Guevara and other big idols of—Muhammad Ali or whatever, different kinds of idols. They are Arab youth in Denmark, they have a strong youth culture, and they've dragged some white kids over. So they are making their own kind of integration, being completely unable to be a part of the Danish society, they have made their own culture. I see that as a very creative, fun, life affirming sort of thing.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** But it seemed like your episode, which was funny and beautiful at times, was shocking, particularly at the end, with the violence. That seemed to almost represent the opposite message.

**NANNA WESTH:** Well I think Henna needed a slap at that point.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** While we're on this topic just for a second, obviously in my reading of the episode, the cartoon controversy was alive in it as well, is that true? I don't know when you made this, and if you can talk about that relationship.

**NANNA WESTH:** Yeah, I can talk about that. The brief history of that show is I was making a documentary series about Ramadan, in an attempt to show Muslims during Ramadan in Denmark. I just put up some cameras in the corners of people's homes, and didn't move around the camera, just placed the camera and let it show what goes on in a Muslim home. And the fear of Muslims in Denmark is that great that people were, and I was admittedly, totally surprised that they were so normal. And that was the point of it. I wanted to show that there's nothing really to be afraid of, because people are extremely afraid.

Then during that time the cartoons came out. In Denmark we don't call it the cartoon crisis, but the Muhammad Crisis, suggesting that what's really the problem here is Muhammad, not the cartoons. They came out, people were of course hurt because this is something important to them, but they couldn't really be bothered. They thought, let's just quiet this down, let's not jump into that thing, they are obviously trying to provoke us, it's a very conservative newspaper let's just ignore it. But then five Imams almost six months later decided to go to the Middle East to show these drawings, and the whole thing went crazy. One hundred and fifty people died in violent demonstrations. But what I think is interesting here is that it wouldn't have been a conflict had these five Muslims not already felt that they were being disrespected in Denmark. That's what they wanted to show the Middle East, that this is how they treat us in Denmark, they don't care about us, they provoke us.

So we wanted to do a show. We made a Ramadan calendar in the tradition of Christmas calendars, we made a documentary episode each day during Ramadan to show people celebrating Ramadan or just doing whatever they do, leading normal lives during Ramadan. We wanted to do that the following year as well, but for the masses. We wanted more people to care about Ramadan, and give Muslims in Denmark something similar to what we have during Christmas. Then as we got into it we realized that it wasn't about Islam at all, it was just about kids trying to survive, trying to grasp some identity as gangsters if they couldn't get anything else from our society. And it would be enormously wrong to show during Ramadan, because it had nothing to do with Islam.

And that was a point for me that I didn't want it to be about Islam, because I don't think it's funny. It's not. I don't see the need to bring that up. It was actually supposed to go on air during Ramadan, but we delayed, pushed it until Christmas. Some of my colleagues thought that was a kind of self-censorship, that it was wrong. Danish people, as you know, are very into freedom of speech, but I don't see it that way at all. Of course you need to respect, and as a writer I want to be very precise in my communication, so of course I didn't want that side effect.

**MOUSTAF A BAYOUMI:** Shoba you had something you wanted to say?

**NEBOJŠA ŠERIC SHOBA:** I lived in Holland for some years, and over there, actually in general in Europe, it's very easy to spot a Muslim neighborhood. You see thousands of satellite dishes on top of the buildings, and that's an indication of a very isolated community, some kind of ghetto within any single town in Europe. But with other communities it's not the same thing.

I've noticed second generations of Moroccans who lived in Holland, they barely speak Dutch. They don't feel really a necessity to integrate into Dutch society. At the same time they are not allowed to approach higher cultural levels, but at the same time they are also keeping themselves from it. Sometimes there is this balance within societies, people can really get confused. For example I felt very weird becoming part of a Dutch association of artists. I thought, gee, you know, what am I going to do here? I'm not like them. So there are a lot of these misunderstandings very often.

For example, look at the European art scene now. There are very few people who are Muslims who are not engaged—99% it's politically engaged art cases. So it's not just fine arts, happy situations—all these people are talking about their problems. There is some sort of, there is a problem, and it's not really articulated. There are only a few artists, we could say like Shirin Neshat, who get out and become a superstar of the art world, and also she's politically engaged. So there is this kind of—I believe there are supposed to be some more mechanism for including the youth, the Muslim youth in Europe, into higher circles. The art world, for example, there is just no access to the high intellectual levels. I believe that is also a huge problem.

**KRZYSZTOF CZYZEWSKI:** Just a short response to Nanna's remark. I didn't want to go so far as to compare this situation in Europe with Hitler, but to compare two scenarios, which was one, this optimist scenario that we can follow in Europe what happened in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were many tensions, many conflicts between different groups of immigrants coming to the United States, and after all, there was no war, but a very strong democratic society. But, recalling the 20s and 30s in Europe, I want to just say that this is not

obvious for me, that this American scenario will be repeated in Europe so easily. It could be something which, again, we will not solve in Europe. As it happened in the 30s, that we needed American interventions and so on. We forget it in Europe.

So I am always thinking of that—not to be pessimistic, it's not my nature. I don't believe that will help anything, but to be really critical, which is lacking in Europe today. You mentioned that I was the Ambassador of Intercultural Dialogue. We have in Europe this beautiful term “intercultural dialogue” and things like that. Honestly for me it was very hard, launching this year of intercultural dialogue without any criticism of what's going on in Europe. It was just praising what beautiful Europe we have, what diversity we have, and so on. Thinking about building something new, thinking about youth in Europe—I'm thinking about a really critical approach to what we have in Europe today. This is another use for me, a really critical context.

**ZIYAH GAFIC:** I would just say one thing that we might talk about when we are talking about integration. I think somehow we don't speak about time spent. The cartoon showed it very well, we somehow—both Europeans and also people who come to live in Europe, and by that I mean also Muslims—we don't consider the time that it actually physically takes to integrate into society. We grew up impatient. There is no recipe to speed it up, and it all comes down to a feeling that we should somehow speed it up. And also when you mention second and third generations, that is also a relatively short period of time. Unfortunately it is. It may not be in our lifetime, that's what we always say, but we are still talking about a relatively short period of time. The differences are there, and they are huge or big, but let's just say that we should talk about patience, rather than solutions. Patience may turn out to be the only solution. I just don't

know who has to be more patient, the people there or the people that come in. It has to go both ways.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** Farid, you want to react to that?

**FARID HAFEZ:** Yes, a very small point. I agree partly with what you said, but here again the question comes, and you pointed it out at the beginning of your statement, the question of what do we mean by integration? In general everybody means something else, that's a problem. How I understand integration is that people are part of the society, they already participate. The question of integration, in my opinion, speaking of many European countries, it's done. People are speaking about it. It's no issue anymore.

You have the third, fourth generation of young Muslims and their grand-grand-grandmothers and fathers came to the country and they are socialized in their respective national state, they speak the language better than they do any other language of their grand-grand-grandparents. And so it's no more a question of the question of integration, of speaking the language, of going there to school, of forming, construing their own identity, because it is neither the identity of their grandparents, nor is it the identity of the people whom their grandparents met in this country. They are creating their own understanding of identity.

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** So why do we have all of this talk about—

**FARID HAFEZ:** It's about discourse and it's identity politics. In my opinion that's the point.

We are construing the problem on a discourse level, while in fact there are some problems, concerning education, concerning economics for sure, but we are making the problem bigger than it is in fact, and people are gaining power through that. As a political scientist, that's my perspective. I think it's more about construction of problems, and not problems in fact.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** That's a fairly optimistic point of view to end this evening on. I would like to thank you all, unless Moustafa you have some kind of wonderful concluding comment. Or should we say, as some of you may or may not know, the two lions in front of the Library have a name, their name is Patience and Fortitude. Fortitude is closer to fortieth street so you'll always remember that. These are qualities I aspire to very much. Moustafa, do you have a sense of wrapping this up in some way?

**MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI:** I don't think I can beat that. So, besides patience and fortitude, I would offer peace and justice.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** And maybe even hope. Thank you very much.