

## TALKING FOR PEACE – A KARL KAHANE LECTURE SERIES

The Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue  
in co-operation with the Karl Kahane Foundation  
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# RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO IS A MUSLIM GANDHI POSSIBLE?

Welcome address:

**Patricia Kahane**

Member of the Board of the Bruno Kreisky Forum,  
President of the Karl Kahane Foundation

Moderator:

**Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

Monday | October 1, 2007 | 19.00 hours

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### **Ramin Jahanbegloo**

One of Iran's pre-eminent intellectual figures. Canadian by citizenship, he was born in Tehran, and received his PhD in philosophy from the Sorbonne University. He has been a fellow at the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard, a Rajni Kothari Chair in Democracy at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi and a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Central European University. He is presently an Associate Professor of Political Science at University of Toronto. Ramin Jahanbegloo is the author of 20 books in English, French, Spanish and Persian, including *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (1991), *Gandhi: aux sources de la non-violence* (1998), *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity* (ed.) (2004), *The Clash of Intolerances* (2007) and *Elogio de la Diversidad* (2007). As the director of Centre for Contemporary Studies at The Cultural Research Bureau in Tehran (2002-2006), he has been responsible for bringing scores of prominent Western intellectuals to Iran, including Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, Toni Negri, Adam Michnik, Michael Ignatieff, Agnes Heller and the late Paul Ricoeur acting as a kind of philosophical ambassador between Iran and the outside world. In April 2006 Ramin Jahanbegloo was arrested and detained for 125 days in Tehran's notorious Evin prison on charges of spying and preparing a velvet revolution.

### **Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

Journalist, Editor-in-Chief Dept. Foreign Policy, *Profil* magazine

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### **Patricia Kahane**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am going to be very short. We have a big crowd tonight which is not astonishing because we have a very fascinating speaker tonight and a very fascinating subject. We Europeans know very little about everything that is going on in the Muslim world in reality. We read a lot of stuff and we read a lot of crap about it. I am really very happy that you are here tonight. We should have had this lecture more than a year ago. It had to be postponed. All the more reasons to welcome you tonight.

### **Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

Welcome. It is a great pleasure to present you this distinguished professor from Iran, Mr. Ramin Jahanbegloo. He should have been here in April last year. It was not possible. He was imprisoned for four months. He was accused that he was cooperating with foreign powers, espionage. Ramin Jahanbegloo is a very distinguished, one of the leading liberal philosophers and thinkers in Iran. He studied in the Sorbonne in Paris, he taught in Toronto, now he is teaching in Delhi. He taught at

Harvard University. He published a lot of books, especially talks with Isaiah Berlin. He had a lot of contacts with a lot of the leading philosophers of the world. His special field is the dialogue between the different cultures. His main object is soft universalism. I was very impressed by that term and would be grateful if you could say something about that. When he was in Tehran in the last years he was in himself a think tank. He was inviting everybody of the world who is a great thinker. He invited to Tehran Habermas, Horthy, Agnes Heller, Michnik, Ignatiev, you name it. He really enriched the discussions in Tehran itself. One is wondering how that can be, in Tehran having such a lively debate with such great and Western liberal thinkers. The theme today is “Is a Muslim Gandhi possible?” which is provocative, reading that Islam is always connected with violence and terrorism. Is that really possible?

### **Ramin Jahanbegloo**

Many thanks to Patricia Kahane and Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof for their introductions. I am grateful to Gertraud Auer Borea d'Olmo and the Kreisky Forum for their kind invitation. It is a great pleasure and a great honor to be here tonight and to talk about nonviolence in the house of Bruno Kreisky , a man of peace. I am happy to see so many friendly faces with whom, I am sure, I will have a lively and challenging dialogue.

Is a Muslim Gandhi possible? I would say yes, but. I am here to talk about the “but” to you. But, I am also here to talk about the “yes” with you. Let me start with a quote by Mary McCarty who once said: “religion is only good for good people”. Historically, religious ideas have been used to justify both war and peace, both violence and reconciliation. What remains open to question is whether religion makes anybody good or nonviolent who would otherwise be malicious, or violent and evil. I think human spirit can be at its highest level of tolerance and generosity when it finds itself cloaked in religion, but sometimes also at its lowest level, reduced to highest level of cruelty. The relationship of religious belief to social and political action is certainly very obscure. It cannot be predicted with certainty which religious belief will lead to violence and which to mercy. No one can say with certainty that when he/she reads words of Buddha or the Vedas he/she can always find mercy, In the same way, no one can say that when he/she reads the Koran he/she will always find violence. Islam is not the only religion on earth which produces fundamentalists and fanatics. There are also Hindu fanatics, as there are Christian fundamentalists.

What we will need to understand is how to accept belief as a way of life and not as an ideological directive. We need to know how to consider religion with a critical judgment and not an idolater's compliance. So, it is the question of having the power to distinguish in one's religious psychology between the belief that is pluralistic and integrates diversity and the belief that destroys others through violent acts. Therefore I think that belief is a way of life, but not an excuse to force that way of life on anybody else. I suppose the point I am trying to make is that any religion, if followed by the letter, can be interpreted in a way that is incompatible with a pluralistic way of life. Religious violence actually is a very slippery topic. It tends to be even more problematic than religion itself. Religion is a kind of a mixed blessing. It could promote a sense of community and provide value service to its members, but one should not also be blind to its divisive and harmful effects. So religious intolerance and persecution have been common throughout history and most faiths have been subject to it at one time or another. This is my first point.

The second point is about the image we have of Islam today. Many around the world consider Islam as a religion of terrorism. Terrorism is a dreadful scourge but it can neither be wished away nor bombed

off the face of the earth. I don't think we could wipe out terrorism by military interventions. Much of it today emanates from various brands of religious fanaticism or religiously masked political extremism. All this is very true. But one needs also to add that in recent times violence and terrorism have unfortunately been associated with Islam and Muslims. Despite the presence of violence in many regions of the world – I mean violence not just terrorism, but violence like the capital punishment also -, ranging from the United States to Europe and to the Indian subcontinent and involving many religions like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism- the Western world associates Islam more and more with violence and not with anything else. Each time people in the West think of Islam, they think of the Middle East. They think of Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria. But they never think of the two main populated and Islamic countries in the world which are Indonesia and India. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. India has a population of 200 million Muslims. Therefore, to understand the relation between Muslims and nonviolence one needs to go beyond the conventional discourses on Islam and violence that dominates the media and also the recent works of specialists in the Middle East. Let us take an example. If you go to the Google on the internet and you type "Islam and violence" you get something like 2 million entries. If you request for "Islam and nonviolence" on the same Google page, you will get no more than five hundred thousand entries, because there has not been enough research on this topic. It is very important to understand how and where we situate ourselves when we are talking about "Islam and Nonviolence". I situate myself in between. I am not trying to do shallow theology, because I am not a theologian. And shallow theology serves most of the time what is written or showed by the mass media. But, I am not also trying to say that Islam is a religion of peace as you see some Muslims talk about it. What I am trying to say is that there is no such thing as good or bad religions. There are only hard readings and soft readings of religious texts. We can find hard readings of religious texts in Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and even Buddhism. I think that hard readings make hard-line visions and take us to hard universalism. This is what we can call the ideologization of religion. Since the title of my talk includes Gandhi, I need to add that Mahatma Gandhi never believed in the politicization of religion. He always talked about the spiritualization of politics. And by that he meant that politics need a great amount of morality and ethics. That is to say, hard reading of religion generates a class of hard interpreters of texts who turn everything of the religious texts into instruments of fanaticism, of hatred, and finally of terrorism. But I need to remind you that Islam is far too varied and too complex to have a monolithic, one-dimensional and single authoritative position on the topic of violence and nonviolence. I think that for every high bounced Taliban zealot who condemns modern rationality, there are tens of thousands of born Muslims who do not necessarily believe in the same way. So it is not correct to say that the Taliban way of thinking is a general Muslim way of thinking.

The third point is that the scholars and practitioners of Islamic studies need to reconsider and constantly re-evaluate their understanding and application of Islam in various historical periods when they consider concepts such as diversity, peace building, and nonviolence in the Muslim world. This is very important, and is really not done, actually. Certainly no one can deny or belittle the existence of radical Islamism in today's world and the threat that it poses not only to Europeans, but to Muslims themselves. I am not trying to suggest to any of you to hide one's head in the sand and not to see the reality and to have no response to the ideology of terrorism. I think that the Muslim community must take extremist acts very seriously because of the negative consequences of terrorism on the future of Islam itself, and the destiny of Muslims around the world. In other words, what I am saying is that terrorism is also a battle within the Muslim community. It is not just a battle between tradition and modernity; it is not a battle between Islam and the rest of the world. It is a battle inside the Muslim community itself, a battle between the life instinct of the many and the death wish of a handful of fanatics. Muslims have a reason to fight and win this battle for the good of their own community also

and the future of Islam. A common refrain today is to say that Islam is always in danger, so this is why we turn to violence. Well, I think that Muslims who have failed to comprehend that Islam like any other religion has by definition a potential for diversity and reciprocity, and for the invention and betterment of moral community among human beings, are proving to be the real threat to Islam itself. Because, they don't want to see the Muslims themselves generated that diversity and dialogue in the history of Islam. Therefore, this is a moment of trial, not just for the moderate Muslims, but also for all categories of Muslims around the world to go beyond what we can call "the clash of intolerances". Because I don't believe in the clash of civilizations and the clash of cultures, I think the true clash is a clash among intolerant people in different cultures. Like in the Danish Cartoons story, we have intolerant people on both sides which are trying to force things without having a dialogue, by staying on their standpoints.

One must not forget that Islam is also represented by this spirit of dialogue. One of the examples that I always give is the Andalusian experience, is the best example of such a dialogue. The result of the encounter between Christian, Muslim and Jewish philosophers was not just a simple dialogue, but also the transmission of Greek philosophy to the Christian world. As a result of this dialogue the Renaissance and the modern philosophy were born. Such a dialogue happens to be a common heritage of Europe and Islam. So there is a possibility of interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural learning inside Islam and among Muslims and non-Muslims. We should think of this potential of dialogue as a work of empathy – of what the Germans call "Einfühlung" – which certainly helps Muslims to redefine Islam in relationship to the principles of mutual understanding and tolerance of differences.

Now for my fourth point, I need to say few words on Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi himself used to say that human destiny has constantly been on the move towards nonviolence. I really believe in that. The German philosopher, Kant, also believed in the moral progress of humanity. When we understand the fact that civilization is not only having industrial, urbanized technology, but how morally we can look at ourselves as moral human beings, we can formulate more easily who is civilized and who is not. Most of the time we say people who live in the traditional world are uncivilized people, because they are backward people, and those who live in skyscrapers and with modern technologies are civilized people. I think that if this is the case, His Holiness the Dalai Lama should be a very uncivilized man because he is somebody who lives in McLeod Ganj and this is a very tiny village. You cannot go there by plane or by train, and it is very difficult to get there in the winter season. But the Dalai Lama is with no doubt, after Martin Luther King and Mandela one of the last representatives of moral progress of humanity. That is why many people turn towards him and listen to him when he talks about compassion. Why? Because the Dalai Lama is somebody who is talking about what we need to have, and that is nonviolence. Nonviolence is our only weapon against fanaticism and fundamentalism.

To answer the question: "Is a Muslim Gandhi possible?" we should first understand what is nonviolence and how it works as a social and political action. Nonviolence has a tremendous opportunity in today's world because its failure has not been proven in every case unlike the failure of violence which has been proven in different cases. We can say, the world history is full of "ifs" and "buts". It is commonly assumed that if only a certain action had been taken history would have been different. I am not situating myself on this position because if the "ifs" and "buts" were candy and nuts we would all have a merry Christmas. So it is not about "ifs" and "buts". It is more than that. I think dialogue is not easy and nonviolence is certainly not an easy option. But at the same time we need to be aware of the gulf which separates our everyday violence from what we think it should be otherwise for the reduction of violence.

Very often people in democracies take everything they have for granted. They say, we are at the end of the line, we are a democracy, we are a high culture, and we don't need to learn anything from others. But democracy is self-examination, it is self-critique, and it is an everyday effort. Democracy cannot work without dialogue and it cannot survive if it is not in a dialogical exchange with other philosophies. Democracies, which close themselves like isolated islands, perish at the end of the day or turn into tyrannies. Europe has become a continent of diversity for Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and many people from different parts of the world come and live in Europe. Therefore, there is a kind of a peaceful co-existence among different communities in Europe. But if the political discourse emphasizes on the rejection of this intercultural dialogue there will be no future for European democracies in particular and Europe in general. When we talk about nonviolence, we need to take into consideration the intercultural imperative which is a very important dimension of democracy building. Gandhi and many other nonviolent thinkers and actors like Martin Luther King and Mandela were people who believed in a dialogue between communities. Martin Luther King believed in dialogue between the blacks and the whites. Gandhi believed in the Hindu-Muslim unity and the idea of diversity in India. We need to have this in mind when talking about nonviolence and dialogue of cultures.

Now to my fifth point. I think that all cultures have for ideal the fact that they need to choose morality instead of violence. Almost all cultures and religions talk about it. They talk about morality and they try to legitimize morality. There is another element which appears between the moral ideal of humanity and its history as a violent reality. When we look at human history it is very violent. So we despair and reading about it discourages us about the future of mankind. We should not forget that Europe has gone through a violent history. Stalinism and Nazism are only two examples of violence in Europe in 20<sup>th</sup> century. But one should not situate oneself in the extremes, because there is a middle element. And this middle element is the work of nonviolent individuals who rise from the hearts of violent cultures. This might appear as a paradox for many of us. But this is more a rational and logical paradox, than a spiritual one. This has to do with the fact that nonviolence is more a moral and spiritual development of a faith than an imperative part of it. It is in this context that one can understand why somebody like Gandhi, when he looked at Christians, affirmed that "the only people on earth who do not see Christ, and his teachings as nonviolent are Christians." Gandhi was looking for the principles of nonviolence not only in his own culture, but also in other cultures. This is why he got interested in Islam.

Gandhi's mission unlike what we see today in some Muslim countries was not to politicize religion. It was to spiritualize politics. He wanted the public sphere and morality to be one. For Gandhi, unlike what we see today in America and in Europe, individual rights were not enough. For him, there were no rights without duties and civic responsibilities. He believed in the spiritual dimension of mankind which could take us to truth and nonviolence. According to Gandhi, this spiritual dimension does not necessarily take us to politicize religion, but somehow to bring the public sphere to morality.

What is the point here and why is this so important? As Gandhi used to say, the core of every religion is truth. Any individual can go to any religion and find truth, This is the golden rule. The basic principle of every religion is that killing is a bad thing, "Thou shall not kill". The Buddhists say that, the Hindus say that, the Muslims say that, the Christians say that, the Jews say that. No religion can legitimize violence as a moral rule and a way of life. But organized religion can produce violence and justify violence. And this is why Gandhi was against the hypocrisy of organized religion and he thought that truth is God and that actually we participate as individuals in this truth.

To have a Muslim Gandhi we need to understand how Gandhi himself was spiritually educated. Nonviolence, for Gandhi, was not a political tactic; it was a way of life and an inner voice. His commitment to nonviolence was more of what today the Dalai Lama calls “a compassionate way of living”. To be compassionate is to think of solidarity and humanism. It is to know how to share one’s life experience with other life experiences. This brings somebody like Gandhi to a spiritual dynamic in which he can live with other forms of identity and faith. We have here a soft reading of religion. In a hard reading of religion there is no horizon or fusion with other religions and other cultures. There is no way for hard readers like Osama Bin Laden to be able to enter a cultural dialogue with Europeans or even with other Muslims. Democracy without a cultural dialogue is practically impossible, because democracy is a dialogical institution, not a genetic institution. It is not true that Austrians are genetically well formed for democracy and Iranians or Turks cannot be democratic. It is not true that Buddhists cannot be democratic, while Hindus can be democratic. If people in some parts of the world have invented democracy historically, it is because they have put their efforts to fight against their own evils, weaknesses and injustice.

So, is a Muslim Gandhi is possible? We have had examples in the Indian subcontinent like Mulana Azad and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who worked closely with the Gandhian movement. They were both religious and believed in Islam. They were believers, but they were also nonviolent figures. Gandhi himself learned about Islam through these people.. They both showed Gandhi that Islam could be a religion of dialogue and nonviolence. As a matter of fact, the reading they had of the Koran and of the historical and cultural Islam was a reading of peace and pluralism. Mulana Azad believed that there is unity and diversity in Islam. He believed in the oneness of God, but also in diversity. Abdul Ghaffar Khan reinterpreted his Islam to be based on nonviolence. For both Gandhi and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, nonviolent social transformation was a matter of faith. Abdul Ghaffar Khan’s belief in the truth and effectiveness of nonviolence came from his own personal experience of Islam. For him Islam was selfless service and love. He took this interpretation of Islam to his community of Pathans, who were considered as warriors.. Today, when we are referring to the idea of nonviolence in Muslim cultures, Mulana Azad and Abdul Ghaffar Khan appear as important models..

The life stories of Ghaffar Khan and Maulana Azad illustrate how Islam has always been used both for nonviolent and violent purposes. Therefore, there is no denying that the life stories of people like Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Mulana Azad is the history of the challenge of the Muslims with violence but also with nonviolence. We have the same challenge today among many young Muslims around the world. It also proves that nonviolent action could be consistent with Islamic principles. However, what is important to understand is not only that we have a very broken image of Islam and Muslims today with the terrorism that we see around the world - but also nonviolent thinkers who have been working the dialogical bridge between tradition and modernity. Most of the nonviolent thinkers that I have been talking about believe in a dialogue between tradition and modernity. They might come from a traditional or a modern background. They might have studied abroad, or might have been educated in traditional countries like India, Turkey, Iran, Syria, or Egypt. But they don’t believe in clashes. They believe that there could be a dialogue between their traditions and the symbols of the modern civilization. However, those who reject such a dialogue believe in violence and they try to destroy one or the other. Some ultra-conservatives in the West believe that traditional Muslims are background and dangerous people, so there are no ways you can have a dialogue with them. This is an extremist way of being modern and to think that there are “savages” living beyond the frontiers of Europe. If this is the case, we are back to the controversy between Las Casas and Sepulveda in Valladolid concerning the conquest of America. This time the controversy does not concern the Indians of South America, but the Muslims in the Middle East.

The point that I was trying to make was that in every religion, in every culture there is a civilizational potential. It is a kind of social and political modus vivendi. And it helps us with our moral judgment. It helps us with our philosophical arguments And it actually helps us to fight against fanaticism. The other dimension to fundamentalist movements which is an external element rather than an internal is that Muslim fundamentalists perceive the West and its allies to be responsible for imperialist policies directed at and politically and economically suppressing Muslim populations. This is the discourse we always get. Because there appear to be no effective responses to the suffering of the people in Iraq, in Palestine, in Afghanistan Muslim publics are easily convinced that violent strategies are the only solution. Therefore, those who suggest otherwise lose their public legitimacy. These are two extremes. We need a third element to be between the two. The message of Gandhi and that of all people who have been working for peace and nonviolence in our world is to invite us to have another look at our cultures and at ourselves and to understand that tolerances, is about common search for truth. In other words, this is a truth that emerges in a dialogical encounter. It is a truth which emerges in an intercultural exchange. In this process the future will also involve Muslims as any other members of religious communities in more interfaith and intercultural dialogue. It is true that dialogue is a difficult task and it is always overshadowed by moments of doubt and despair. But doubt and despair yield to hope when we remember these lines written by the poet and philosopher Ibn Arabi in the 12<sup>th</sup> century:

*My heart is open to all winds, it is a pasture of gazelles and a home for Christian monks, a temple for idols, the black stone of the Mecca pilgrim, the table of the Torah, and the book of the Koran. Wherever God's caravans turn the religion of love shall be my religion and my faith.*

Thank you very much.

### **Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

Thank you very much. You said the core of religion is truth. Isn't that also a problem, especially in monotheistic religions? Every religion thinks the truth is their religion. History shows that fighting different truths means fighting against each other very often with arms. At the moment the rise of religious feelings in the world or the renaissance of religion we experience now in a certain way produces or makes bigger the community of hard readers of the holy texts. Isn't it the problem itself of all the religions that when they rise there is violence?

### **Ramin Jahanbegloo**

If by religion we understand spirituality, I believe that religion like philosophy, literature, and art in general plays an important role in the moral making of humanity. Destroying religion is like having a swimming pool without water. You cannot swim in it. So it loses its meaning. Life is a search for meaning and therefore, by definition a spiritual task par excellence.

### **Georg Hoffmann Ostenhof**

Europe is secularized.

### **Ramin Jahanbegloo**

Being secular does not mean necessarily putting an end to one's quest for meaning. Secularism and laïcité are two different things. Indian secularism, as you know, constitutionally but also by definition is a secularism of diversity. The Dalai Lama is a spiritual man but he talks about secular ethics. For him, secularism means diversity. It means put on equal basis all religions and having respect for all of them. For some people each time you talk about religion they imagine a man with a beard and a turban or a woman with a head scarf and they feel that their values are endangered by these individuals. Well,

I suppose Indians can come to them and say, we have Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Shiites and Sunnis living together and, yet, we try to make our secularism and diversity function it as well as we can. There are some communal riots from time to time, but people continue living together and they can choose a Muslim or Hindu or a Sikh as Prime Minister or President of India. They don't have a problem with that and nobody comes and try to shoot that President or the Prime Minister because he or she is a Muslim or a Hindu.

**Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

Sometimes.

**Ramin Jahanbegloo**

Yes, I agree this problem also exists. I think it has to do with the way that you look at religion and you feel endangered or not by religious people. If you feel endangered by religious people, religious people are going to feel endangered by you. When people get older they go towards spirituality because death for them becomes a big issue. They cannot accept death very easily. Not everybody is an existential philosopher who can deal with death very easily. So religion is a spiritual dimension for ordinary people much more than philosophy which is a critical way of thinking. But it all depends on how we deal with it. Once again I choose a Gandhian way to deal with it. Gandhi used to say, we have as many religions as we have individuals. Why? Because if there is something which is called Oneness or the divine, or what Tagore calls "Personality", or you name it, we can share it among ourselves. There is space for everybody. You don't need to possess it for yourself and say, God is only mine, I want it all for myself, I am not going to share it with you. If there is God, it is supposed to be for everyone. It's like a piece of bread. You can say, this piece of bread, I can divide it and I can give a piece to the Palestinian, a piece to the Israeli, a piece to the Iranian, a piece to the Austrian. Solidarity and the art of caring have to do with our way of looking and sharing things. We have to know, human heritage is a common shared heritage with common shared values. It does not belong only to one culture.

**Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

Isn't there a problem in the Islamic history that separation of religion and politics did not take forms as it was in Christian societies in Europe? The enlightenment we had did not happen. There was an Islamic enlightenment, but then it was buried under the historical developments.

**Ramin Jahanbegloo**

It is a problem, of course. I am not trying to close my eyes on it. But it is like a married life shared between a man and a woman. In a household it takes time for people to understand each other and to make this empathy work. They might go through a lot of divisions. They might go through a lot of struggles. They might go through a lot of shouting at each other. But at some point they might get to a point to create a synthesis. Islam is also like this household. It is part of the human heritage. We had a period of Islamic Enlightenment, but we also had autocratic regimes in the Middle East. The work of democracy in Europe has helped to bring the balance, the equilibrium between religion and politics, which we did not have the chance to have in the Middle East. But it also worked out in India. India is also a Muslim country and you have this balance between politics and religion. Why? Because you had people like Gandhi, Nehru as Hindus and on the other side you had Muslims like Ghaffar Khan and Mulana Azad who understood each other and prepared the politics of diversity and dialogue in India. They did not need to shoot each other. They worked together for the benefits and the betterment of the country. So my point is that: Firstly, we have a common destiny in the world. So we have to look how things have been done brilliantly in other parts of the world and try not just to imitate them, but try to see if we can do the same exercise of thinking and practice of political life in our countries. Secondly,



we live in geographical zones which are not only geographical, but also zones of empathy and of cultural exchange. For example, Iranians have always been very attentive toward the Turks. Not just because Turkish dynasties invaded Iran or we have an Azeri population inside Iran, but also because we have been very attentive to the modernization à la Turquie. The Turkish “Tanzimat” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is what the Iranians imitated. In the Qajar period they imitated the Turks. They did not imitate directly the European because they discovered modernity through the Ottoman Empire. And after that they started their own way of doing things. Today Turkey as a Muslim country prepares itself to enter the EU. I think the Arabs and the Iranians cannot stay indifferent toward this process. What is happening today in Turkey is not only an interesting experience happening in a Muslim country, but also an important experience for the whole Muslim world.

### **Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

So you see in Turkey a sort of Gandhian phenomenon.

### **Ramin Jahanbegloo**

Not necessarily Gandhian. But I think that in Turkey there is a lot of this dialogical effort or intercultural effort, that I talked about. This is so amazing and so complex and so paradoxical. The Islamic party and not the Kemalists have done the judicial reforms, but also the political reforms. Europeans might think that Erdogan or his ministers are dangerous islamists because their wives wear a headscarf. I don't think the headscarf is the issue. The importance is the reform that is happening in Turkey. There are liberal reforms in the economy, politics and the abolishment of the capital punishment. If tomorrow Turkey enters the EU, when you open your windows in Tehran or in Baghdad, you have Europe next door as it used to be in the case during the Ottomans. This is very important. It is a game of diversity instead a game of isolation. What kills people and makes them terrorists is isolation and borders. We have to engage ghettos in a debate. We should not underestimate the power of dialogue.

### **Question**

Sie haben einen ganz wichtigen Aspekt nicht angesprochen. Das ist die Macht. Es geht in Wirklichkeit um einen Kern und eine Peripherie der Macht, und es geht um Teilung der Macht. Dialog hat dann einen Sinn, wenn Partner auf gleicher Augenhöhe einander anschauen können und miteinander diskutieren können. So wie die Situation derzeit auf der Welt ist, wo die westliche Modernität den anderen Ländern aufgedrungen wird, Ländern, die nie eine Chance hatten, eine eigene Modernität hervorzubringen, so kann doch kein gleichwertiger Dialog geführt werden.

### **Question**

At the beginning of your lecture you mentioned the clash of intolerances. Isn't the notion of tolerance already a negative one? Because by tolerating someone you mean you sustain him, you suffer from his existence. The approach that is currently at stake is that in particular when we look at the Islamic hierarchies that we have on one side and the one Christian hierarchy in the guise of the Catholic Church on the other, both strive for universalism. Again, here it is about power.

### **Question**

You talk about morality as a fundament for nonviolence. Morality is not something absolute. It is culturally defined or in a historical context. In Iran they are stoning people having sexual relations. But the punishment of these people is justified by the morale in the country. The morality is not something absolute in the world, there are different moralities. Maybe we have a kind of morality which is determined by the Declaration of Human Rights. But it is probably not enough. It does not cover all parts of life. You used spirituality and the spiritual dimension of nonviolence. As I understand it

spirituality is mostly associated with religions. What about the people who don't believe, who don't have a belief? Are they not spiritual? What is your explanation that right now in the last decade Islam has been radicalized? 20 years ago we did not have that violence within the Islamic countries. You talked about the conflict between modernism and tradition. Is that really enough to explain radicalism?

### **Ramin Jahanbegloo**

Let me start with the idea of dialogue. I said that democracy is a dialogical experience, and democracy cannot exist without dialogue. Believing in dialogue in general in a society and in a public sphere is a way of reducing violence in our lives. We all have multiple identities, and there is a permanent dialogue between our identities. We have this dialogue with ourselves on an every day basis and we try to reconcile our self with all the different identities that we have. In a democracy we also have this kind of plurality and we have to engage in a dialogue. That is why one of the issues which has been brought up in Europe for the past twenty years is multiculturalism. It is an issue of how one nation deals with the others. How do Germans, Austrians deal with Turks who come and live with them? How do the Spaniards deal with the Moroccans, for example? When there are terrorist acts in Spain or in England there is a crisis of multiculturalism and people start thinking twice and say: "No, this is not possible, we cannot have a dialogue, we have to try to invest our efforts, and invest our wealth, and invest our energy on ultra-conservative governments who can come and throw all these people out of this country and so we can once again live among ourselves." This is a wrong policy in general but it is mainly a wrong policy in Europe that has the experience of fascism. I think that the permanent dialogue that we can have with others is actually a dialogue that we are having with ourselves. We are trying to define it one way or another. I am very interested to see how Nazis defined their identities as Germans. When a German like Heidegger becomes a Nazi and goes to the Nazi party and signs in, he is grounding his judgment on the fact that there is only one way of being a German and that is by being a Nazi. In the Muslim world it is the same thing. If Muslims believe that joining Al Qaida is the only way of being a true Muslim, that is the end of Islam. All this civilizational potential of Islam as one of the religions will be destroyed. This is where I think that there is a clash of intolerances. You have extremists on both sides who monopolize the discourse and the political sphere.

As for the second question. By tolerance, I do not mean indifference. Tolerance as indifference means exactly, live and let live. What I am suggesting is to engage the Muslims in your own community. Let them participate in the democratic life. Don't push them to the suburbs like in France. Don't humiliate them as people of the third generation with French passports. These are people who are pushed towards the wall. This is why they turn to fundamentalism. That is why they turn to extremism. It is not indifference which is tolerance. Tolerance is celebrating diversity. Europe is a continent of diversity. It has always been a continent of diversity. And Europe should be even more multicultural than Canada and the United States because of these different cultures having lived together and created this continent. Hard universalism unlike soft universalism is to go and destroy another culture. We have the good ideas, we teach you. We are the good guys and you are the bad guys. Democracy does not function like that. I suppose the best way to do it is to say: "who in our community believes in soft universalism?" Do all Muslims, Christians or Jews believe in hard universalism? No. I think there are also people who are trying to engage in soft universalism.

To answer your three questions very quickly. I think that you have to make the difference between "morality" and "moralizing". When you come and you push people around in a society and you say, this is the way you have to get dressed, this is the way you have to eat and drink, this is the way to behave sexually, this is the way you have to behave at school, in university, this is a moralizing process. This is not ethics and morality. Ethics and morality is a shared imperative. It is like the golden

rule. It is something that is related to our common sense. It is not related to some kind of ideological repression. It is not a repressive imperative. I am talking about common shared values that all human beings have. That is why I mentioned that if you read the Bible, the Koran or the Vedas, you find the same reflection on killing in general being a wrong thing. People who wrote those books knew exactly that there is a golden rule because human beings need ethics to live together. I think that spirituality is very important, and spirituality is not related to religion. This is why Gandhi was against what he called organized religion. He thought that you can go and read the Sermon on the Mount without asking the Pope if I can read it or not. The book is there and you can take the moral lessons you want out of it. You have TV evangelists in America who do the same reading of the same book as Martin Luther King did. But Martin Luther King as a Baptist preacher took the concept out of the New Testament used it as a weapon, and he ended up with a beloved community as his goal.

### **Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

What about the spirituality of the people who have no holy books, who don't believe?

### **Ramin Jahanbegloo**

This is the spirituality of people like who believe in art or philosophy or believe in the metaphysical dimension of human beings. Art is an important metaphysical dimension of humanity. Art, as painters like Kandinsky or Rouault used to say, is a spiritual dimension because it is a quest for the inner meaning of life. Many musicians, many philosophers, many painters believed in the spiritual dimension of life without being a member of a church or a theologian. When they created a painting or composed music, they were doing something spiritual. What is important is not the oil and the canvas but the inner meaning of the painting. The work of art talks to us as a spiritual entity. I think even the provocative paintings of Egon Schiele represent a spiritual entity. Don't look at what he is painting, look behind the painting. As Andre Gide affirms: "Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does the better." The spiritual dimension of human beings helps us to have the moral progress of humanity, to reduce violence. Let us take for example Picasso's "Guernica". When you look at Picasso's "Guernica" and you take the historical event you see a great difference. You have a cruel event which is the bombardment of the city of Guernica by German aviation. Picasso's Guernica talks about the same event, but in a very different way. The historical event is pure violence and Picasso's art is the condemnation of this violence. Picasso's idea was to show that art could fight against violence. So it is not only religion that could fight against violence. I think the task of philosophy is to condemn violence. These are all spiritual dimensions that are very important.

To answer your question, I think that religions in general have been radicalized and ideologized because they have been somehow modernized and secularized and have lost their traditional essence. Ideology is a dimension which has been added to all religions. And you have that not only in Christianity but also in Hinduism and Judaism. So it is not only proper to Islam. When Hindus fanatics assassinate Gandhi, you find the ideological aspect of Hinduism. It is a radical way of looking at the Vedas which costs the life of somebody like Gandhi who is a peace keeper and a prophet of nonviolence.

### **Question**

You started out with, religion is only good for good people, by Mary McCarthy. The more I thought about it it impressed me. Basically it turns things upside down. It is not religion who makes good people, but the religion who requires good people. And this, of course, leads me to the totally opposite conclusion than you. I am really afraid of religious people. When you say belief is the way of life and not to impose the way of life on others. Can religions afford to be as modern, as good? This is a very

modern conception of religion. Most religious people would not share it. And even if most people would share it, it is enough that a small minority of fanatics or intolerant people likes to impose their own view on others. I think there are many non-negotiable things in religion. Take one example all of us share. I respect holy days. Of course, Christians have the Sunday, and Jews have the Shabbath, and Muslims have the Friday, and anarchists have the Wednesday. But this is non-negotiable in a culture like ours which claims to be a modern one because the Christian hegemony imposes the holy Sunday on all of us regardless whether we are Muslims and would like to work on Sunday and keep the Friday free. Isn't this a very beautiful conception of religion you assume which is not real? You say we should not be afraid of religious people because then they are afraid of us. I am very much afraid of them for the reasons I mentioned.

### **Question**

When the Indian Muslims ... for nonviolence and not to divide the Indian subcontinent. His opinion was not taken into account then. Why would you want to reservate his spirit once again? For what?

### **Question**

You were saying that people would not accept each other and that is why there was the assassination of Gandhi for example. How do you enlighten others to accept others? Sometimes I would like to hear a solution or a suggestion of a solution.

### **Ramin Jahanbegloo**

I don't have recipes. Philosophers are not cooks and they are not supposed to have recipes. Philosophers think about reality but they cannot change the reality. Most of the time the problem with politicians is that they pretend to have recipes and to be able to change reality. Some of them change our lives, but most of them create problems for our present and our future. There is no way you can solve problems once forever. We live with problems. We live with challenges. The challenges, problems, and differences are there and are supposed to be there, because we belong to the human race and the human race is problematic. We have to try to reduce the problems, but we cannot abolish them from our lives. I don't believe in an ideal human history. That is why I talked about a middle way. Stalinists, Nazis, Pol Pot and all those who pretend that there is an ideal future take us not to paradise but directly to hell. This is the story of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its wars, genocides and massacres. The issue is not only of enlightening people, but giving them the capacity to enlighten themselves. A philosopher like Kant asked about the Enlightenment in an essay entitled "Was ist Aufklärung?" His answer to this question was that the Enlightenment is to get out of one's minority and to become mature. For Kant, Enlightenment is maturity. But others cannot hand maturity to you on a plate. The Europeans, the Africans, the Middle Easterners and the Americans have to become mature by and for themselves. This is a continuous every day effort It is not a question of giving lessons or taking lessons. It is a way of how we handle things in our own small spheres. And after that we try to enlarge it to a bigger sphere like the society and the world. If we cannot tolerate a Christian, a Jew, a Zoroastrian, to sit with us in class, if an Armenian cannot tolerate that his daughter marries a Muslim or be in love with a Muslim man, how can you think that we can have democracy in a country where Muslims and Armenians are living together? At some point there is going to be a minority, not a constitutionally written minority, but a minority which has no rights because they are completely excluded from everyday life of that society. So the issue here is not only rationality or secularism but maturity.

You say that you are afraid of religious people. I am also afraid of non-religious people. Don't forget that Stalinists, Fascists, and Nazis were not religious people, but they were ideologically secular. The totalitarian ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were against religion, but as Raymond Aron said they were

secular religions. Sometimes religious people do things that really amaze you. And they don't do it only as religious persons; they do it as individuals who believe in another dimension of life which I called the spiritual dimension of human beings. For example, when a Christian priest in Auschwitz gets killed instead of another person this is an act of humanity, but also a spiritual act. You can explain it this way. There have always been good people who have been fighting against the evil. And the good and the evil are two dimensions that we all have. It depends how we elaborate them. This has been the great work of people like Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, and Martin Luther King to work out the good against the evil in human beings. That is to say, religious people are good as they can be bad. There is no such thing as good or bad religions. It is the way you interpret a religious text that creates the good or the evil. The Dalai Lama is also a religious man, but it is amazing how he takes the lessons of Lord Buddha and translates it for our world as a lesson of compassion. Somebody else might do exactly the opposite.

I am not trying to resurrect Gandhi. I think Gandhi is resurrected by himself. He doesn't need me to be resurrected. Gandhi even if he is read less and less in India is read more and more outside India. It has to do with the fact that people like him always talk about something else which all of us need to hear. They always show us that there is always hope because where there is violence there could also be nonviolence. And this is not idealistic because it works. It works with Mandela, it works with Havel, it works with the Dalai Lama, it works with Burma today. Look at Burma. Look at Tibet. This is where the message of Gandhi is alive. The message of Gandhi is in all places where people live in truth against lies. This is morality. Nonviolent thinkers and activists show us that we are not just human beings, cultural beings, social beings or political beings. We are mainly moral beings. When I say people are moral beings I mean by that they refuse to hear lies and to say lies. They don't want politics to be surrounded by lies. This is how nonviolence works. Nonviolence might be defeated many times and for many centuries, but it does not mean that nonviolence cannot work. This is why Gandhi is still alive today and his message is still alive. I am not trying to make a religion around Gandhi because even he himself said that Gandhism is something that which goes against his point of view.

### **Question**

I wanted to go back to your question in the title, "Is a Muslim Gandhi possible?" Generally you talked about nonviolence and Gandhi in terms of a philosophy. Of course, the potency of that type of nonviolence was that it was also a weapon. Not only was it a weapon, but it was a mass weapon. My two questions are connected to that. The first one is in relation to pluralism. Gandhi also had this famous saying, "I am a Hindu, I am a Christian, I am a Muslim, I am a Parsi, I am a Jew". This, in a way, was very popular in India. A politician saying the same thing today is also likely to be popular. ... against the backdrop of a polytheistic society rather than the monotheism of the Abrahamic religions so that even when you talk of dialogue, dialogue in a polytheistic society like a Hindu majority society, there is no dialogue. It is people talking at the same time and somehow through that chaos achieving a kind of tolerance. To be a bit flippant, would you say that people descended from these Abrahamic religions would find it genetically difficult to be tolerant? And the second question is that Gandhi to achieve his mass appeal played a lot with symbols. These symbols had nothing to do with religion, but they had a lot to do with spirituality. And in a sense they did evoke the majority religion which was Hinduism. It is interesting that at the same time as Atatürk was throwing off the Fez Gandhi was putting on the loincloth. But it is ironic that today for a Muslim Gandhi to try to play with these symbols, have a beard, a hat, advocate the abstinence from alcohol, have some eccentric ideas about sex, at best he would be laughed at, at worst he might be a potential terrorist and be put into prison. You have talked about Gandhianism in terms of cementing civil society. But you have not said so much about Gandhism as a weapon let's say in relation to fundamentalism etc.

### **Ramin Jahanbegloo**

I actually did about nonviolence as a weapon. I talked about nonviolent actions and strategies. Nonviolence is not just a philosophy. It is a way of action our everyday life. Please do understand that for me nonviolence is also an instrument of political action. I don't like the word "weapon" because men used historically weapons to intimidate and to kill. Nonviolence is an instrument not only of thought but also of action. What you are saying is very interesting and very true about polytheistic societies versus monotheistic religions and societies, but is not enough. First of all I don't believe that people of some religion are genetically less tolerant than others because as I said previously I don't believe that the capacity of dialogue or democracy making is genetically oriented. They are social, political and cultural institutions. You can work them out in different generations. But there are elements which have helped Gandhi to become Gandhi. Not everybody who has been working in a nonviolent way is necessarily like Gandhi. And it does not need to be that way. We have strategic ways of being nonviolent and we have convictional ways of being nonviolent. People like the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi are religious people. They have a convictional way of being nonviolent. People like Mandela and Havel have a non-convictional way of being nonviolent. They have a strategic way of being nonviolent. They know that nonviolence is a political instrument that is for the benefit of everybody and brings peace in the community. For that reason they refuse to practice violence in politics. One can drink and smoke, like Havel does, but at the same time be a nonviolent politician. Nonviolence is not a question of imitating Gandhi, to be half naked and to fast like him, otherwise your nonviolence is just an imitation. First of all, nonviolence is a challenge because it is not very easy to be nonviolent in all the spheres of your life. It is very difficult to accept one's errors. Communities which do not accept their errors and have this arrogant way of rejecting the truth perish with their own lies. There is no way you can be a nonviolent in that way. To be a nonviolent society is to reject lies and accept the mistakes made. It is having a self-examination and a self criticism. To say it in one word, nonviolence is about tension management. Tension management in our public sphere, tension management in the global world. If we manage to solve the tensions, and to moderate our actions in life, we have succeeded a step towards nonviolence. And those who have succeeded like Mandela in South Africa have been good tension managers. Mandela knew that after 28 years of imprisonment he should not to practice hatred and violence against South African Whites. The Committee for Truth and Reconciliation was a great innovation both in South Africa and in Chile to stop violence in these societies. And I hope that in the Middle East at some point we arrive at doing this. We need to think of our children and of our grandchildren. If we do things with bloodshed in the Middle East, what kind of society are we preparing for the future of our children and our grandchildren? A society, which starts with violence, ends with violence. Thank you.

### **Georg Hoffmann-Ostenhof**

It remains to me to thank you Professor Jahanbegloo for your very brilliant performance. You are a very powerful answer to Huntington's Clash of Civilizations. Thank you very much for the discussion.