“Any self-knowledge worth the name tells you that others are as real as you are, and that your life is not just about you. It is about accepting the fact that you share a world with others, and about taking action directed at the good of others,” Nussbaum explains about the message she hopes to convey in the book.

In *The New Religious Intolerance*, Nussbaum explores religious prejudice through the lens of philosophy, literature, history, and law. She argues that in order to “uncover the roots of ugly fears and suspicions that currently disfigure all Western societies,” Europe and the United States need to reassess the strength of their principles of equal respect, evaluate their narcissistic responses, and develop “inner eyes” to more easily imagine the lives of others.

Fear with no basis in evidence leads to dubious exclusions, she writes. Many examples of this are now occurring across
They remain fragile, however, in times of fear,” Nussbaum writes. “Like railroad tracks, they guide the train well until some disaster, whether a system failure or an earthquake, causes it to go off the tracks. And today we see all too many cases in which panic is causing derailment.”

Nussbaum has seen attitudes toward Muslims spiraling downward in both Europe and the United States in the last decade after years of relative religious tolerance. Although Europe’s history has been peppered with events such as the Crusades, the Wars of Religion, anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, and Nazism and the United States has in the past been less than hospitable toward Native Americans, Roman Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses, Europe and the United States had begun to pride themselves on its openness and acceptance. That tolerance is now being jeopardized.

Nussbaum’s book grew out of a column she penned for the New York Times on the proposed burqa bans in Europe and a later response to the hundreds of passionate comments she received. Her book, in addition to being an intellectual exploration of the subject, challenges people to remain true to the time-honored ideals of the United States Constitution. These changes must be made not just at the political level, but also through individual reflection and imagination about the minority experience. The author also discusses the gunman behind the fatal attacks in Norway in 2011 that killed more than 75 people at a government building and a Labour Party youth camp. The killer explained his actions as a fight against Islamization.

This resistance to Muslims is not confined to Europe. In the United States, there are numerous examples of a growing suspicion. In Oklahoma, a law was passed forbidding the use of “Sharia law,” or Islamic law, an unnecessary redundancy of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment that prohibits enforcement of religious legal codes. In New York, a Muslim community center near “Ground Zero” in New York City has caused a major outcry, although neither an existing nearby mosque nor the neighboring strip clubs, liquor store, and off-track betting parlor have caused any backlash.

“It’s not rational to dismiss the fear of Muslim terrorism. That fear is rational in the light of history and current events, and that rational fear ought to guide sensible public policy … but it’s simply not reasonable to believe that all one’s neighbors are fiends in disguise.”

Nussbaum says that for the most part, Europe and particularly the United States understand what good political principles of equal respect should look like, but those principles remain vulnerable.

“Europe and North America. European countries have taken aim at everything from what Muslims wear to where they worship. France, Belgium, and Italy have all passed laws banning Muslim burqa, an outer garment worn by very few Muslim women in Europe to cover their whole body, while many communities have even banned the headscarf, which only covers a woman’s hair. Tellingly, the same restrictions have not been equally applied to other religious dress such as nun habits and Christian crosses.

Nussbaum explores the reasoning behind these and other slights against Muslims. Switzerland’s ban on minarets, a tower sometimes built on mosques to help call Muslims to worship, is a result of an irrational campaign of fear, according to Nussbaum. Out of 150 mosques in the country, only four have minarets, and yet 57 percent of the population voted to ban their future construction. The European countries have taken aim at everything from what Muslims wear to where they worship. France, Belgium, and Italy have all passed laws banning Muslim burqa, an outer garment worn by very few Muslim women in Europe to cover their whole body, while many communities have even banned the headscarf, which only covers a woman’s hair. Tellingly, the same restrictions have not been equally applied to other religious dress such as nun habits and Christian crosses.

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