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Attacks on Arab-American Psychologist Wafa Sultan: Islamist Sheikh on Al-Jazeera Calls Her Heretic; Syrian Sermon Calls Her Infidel

On February 21, 2006, MEMRITV released a clip featuring an interview with Arab-American psychiatrist Wafa Sultan on Al-Jazeera TV. During the interview, Dr.Ibrahim Al-Khouli accused Sultan of being a "heretic" for attacking current aspects of Islamic society.

THE CLIP HAS NOW BEEN VIEWED OVER ONE MILLION TIMES ON MEMRITV.ORG.

Following the release of this clip, Bassam Darwish, editor of the reformist website www.annaqed.com, posted a February 28, 2006 report by AFP stating that a Friday sermon in Damascus had harshly criticized her appearance on Al-Jazeera: "[Syrian human rights activist Anwar] Al-Bouni reports that one of the sheikhs described Wafa Sultan as 'an infidel,' accusing her of 'harming Islam more than it was harmed by the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, recently published in European newspapers.'

"According to Al-Bouni, 'the Syrian authorities began to use the weapon of the official religion as a new tool to oppress society... It is no longer enough for them to arrest activists, to terrorize them, and to prevent them from traveling, but now they recruit against them the pulpits of takfir *[accusing other Muslims of heresy] and* takhwin *[accusing Muslims of treason].' He described this policy as dangerous and destructive." [1]*

The following are excerpts from an interview with Wafa Sultan that aired on Al-Jazeera TV on February 21, 2006. It is followed by excerpts from a debate in which she participated, in a talk show that aired on Al-Jazeera TV on July 26, 2005.

In the past, MEMRI has reported on Islamist threats to reformists, see for example:

***Saudi Doctorate Encourages the Murder of Arab Intellectuals**, January 12, 2006, Special Dispatch Series - No. 1070, http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=subjects&Area=reform&ID=SP107006 .*

***Arab Intellectuals: Under Threat by Islamists**, November, 23, 2005, Inquiry and Analysis Series - No. 254,*

http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=subjects&Area=reform&ID=IA25405.

***Accusing Muslim Intellectuals of Apostasy**, February 18, 2005, Inquiry and Analysis - No. 208,*

http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA20805.

February 21, 2006

TO VIEW THIS CLIP, VISIT: http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=1050 .

Wafa Sultan: "The clash we are witnessing around the world is not a clash of religions, or a clash of civilizations. It is a clash between two opposites, between two eras. It is a clash between a mentality that belongs to the Middle Ages and another mentality that belongs to the 21st century. It is a clash between civilization and backwardness, between the civilized and the primitive, between barbarity and rationality. It is a clash between freedom and oppression, between democracy and dictatorship. It is a clash between human rights, on the one hand, and the violation of these rights, on other hand. It is a clash between those who treat women like beasts, and those who treat them like human beings. What we see today is not a clash of civilizations. Civilizations do not clash, but compete."

[...]

Host: "I understand from your words that what is happening today is a clash between the culture of the West, and the backwardness and ignorance of the Muslims?"

Wafa Sultan: "Yes, that is what I mean."

[...]

Host: "Who came up with the concept of a clash of civilizations? Was it not Samuel Huntington? It was not bin Laden. I would like to discuss this issue, if you don't mind..."

Wafa Sultan: "The Muslims are the ones who began using this expression. The Muslims are the ones who began the clash of civilizations. The Prophet of Islam said: 'I was ordered to fight the people until they believe in Allah and His Messenger.' When the Muslims divided the people into Muslims and non-Muslims, and called to fight the others until they believe in what they themselves believe, they started this clash, and began this war. In order to start this war, they must reexamine their Islamic books and curricula, which are full of calls for *takfir* and fighting the infidels.

"My colleague has said that he never offends other people's beliefs. What civilization on the face of this earth allows him to call other people by names that they did not choose for themselves? Once, he calls them *Ahl Al-Dhimma*; another time he calls them the 'People of the Book'; and yet another time he compares them to apes and pigs, or he calls the Christians 'those who incur Allah's wrath.' Who told you that they are 'People of the Book?' They are not the People of the Book, they are people of many books. All the useful scientific books that you have today are theirs, the fruit of their free and creative thinking. What gives you the right to call them 'those who incur Allah's wrath,' or 'those who have gone astray,' and then come here and say that your religion commands you to refrain from offending the beliefs of others?"

[…]

"I am not a Christian, a Muslim, or a Jew. I am a secular human being. I do not believe in the supernatural, but I respect others' right to believe in it."

Dr. Ibrahim Al-Khouli: "Are you a heretic?"

Wafa Sultan: "You can say whatever you like. I am a secular human being who does not believe in the supernatural..."

Dr. Ibrahim Al-Khouli: "If you are a heretic, there is no point in rebuking you, since you have blasphemed against Islam, the Prophet, and the Koran..."

Wafa Sultan: "These are personal matters that do not concern you."

[...]

"Brother, you can believe in stones, as long as you don't throw them at me. You are free to worship whoever you want, but other people's beliefs are not your concern, whether they believe that the Messiah is God, son of Mary, or that Satan is God, son of Mary. Let people have their beliefs."

[...]

"The Jews have come from the tragedy [of the Holocaust], and forced the world to respect them, with their knowledge, not with their terror; with their work, not with their crying and yelling. Humanity owes most of the discoveries and science of the 19th and 20th centuries to Jewish scientists. Fifteen million people, scattered throughout the world, united and won their rights through work and knowledge. We have not seen a single Jew blow himself up in a German restaurant. We have not seen a single Jew destroy a church. We have not seen a single Jew protest by killing people. The Muslims turned three Buddha statues into rubble. We have not seen a single Buddhist burn down a mosque, kill a Muslim, or burn down an embassy. Only the Muslims defend their beliefs by burning down churches, killing people, and destroying embassies. This path will not yield any results. The Muslims must ask themselves what they can do for humankind, before they demand that humankind respect them."

July 26, 2005

TO VIEW THIS CLIP, VISIT: http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=783 .

Wafa Sultan: "Why does a young Muslim man, in the prime of life, with a full life ahead, go and blow himself up? How and why does he blow himself up in a bus full of innocent passengers?

"In our countries, religion is the sole source of education, and is the only spring from which that terrorist drank until his thirst was quenched. He was not born a terrorist, and did not become a terrorist overnight. Islamic teachings played a role in weaving his ideological fabric, thread by thread, and did not allow other sources - I am referring to scientific sources - to play a role. It was these teachings that distorted this terrorist and killed his humanity. It was not [the terrorist] who distorted the religious teachings and misunderstood them, as some ignorant people claim.

"When you recite to a child still in his early years the verse 'They will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off,' - regardless of this verse's interpretation, and regardless of the reasons it was conveyed or its time - you have made the first step towards creating a great terrorist..."

[…]

Bin Muhammad: "The guest from America asked how a young man could blow up a bus. If only she had asked how a president could blow up a peaceful nation in Iraq. How does a president help the arch-killer of occupied Palestine? Why doesn't she ask where Hitler was brought up - Hitler, who murdered 50 million innocent people? Why doesn't she ask where the people who dropped two atom bombs on Japan were educated? Who killed three million innocent Vietnamese? Who annihilated the Indians? Who has maintained imperialism to this day? Who waged the Spanish civil war, which exacted a toll of 600,000 in 36 months? Why don't we ask these questions? Who has over 15,000 nuclear warheads - Muslims or the non-

Muslims? The Muslims or the Americans? The Muslims or the Europeans? We want an answer. Where was Bush educated - if education is really what makes a person a criminal?..."

[…]

Wafa Sultan: "Murder is terrorism regardless of time or place, but when it is committed as a decree from Allah, this is another matter..."

[…]

"The Crusader wars about which the professor is talking - these wars came after the Islamic religious teachings, and as a response to these teachings. This is the law of action and reaction. The Islamic religious teachings have incited to the rejection of the other, to the denial of the other, and to the killing of the other. Have they not incited to the killing of Jews and Christians? If we had heard that a tribe in a distant corner of China has a holy book and religious teachings calling to kill Muslims - would the Muslims stand idly by in the face of such teachings?

"The Crusader wars came after these Islamic religious teachings. When these Islamic teachings were delivered, America did not exist on the face of the earth, nor was Israel in Palestine...

"Why doesn't he talk about the Muslim conquests that preceded all the wars he is talking about? Why doesn't he mention that when Tariq bin Ziyyad entered Andalusia with his armies, he said to his people: 'The sea is behind you, and the enemy is in front?' How can you storm a peaceful country, and consider all its peaceful inhabitants to be your enemies, merely because you have the right to spread your religion? Should the religion be spread by the sword and through fighting?..."

[…]

Bin Muhammad: "Who invented slavery in recent centuries? Who colonized the other - us or them? Did Algeria colonize France, or vice versa? Did Egypt colonize England, or vice versa? We are the victims..."

[…]

"I am not saying that killing innocent people is nice. I say that all innocent people should be protected. But at the same time, we must start with the innocent among the Muslims. There are millions of innocent people among us, while the innocent among you - and innocent they are - number only dozens, hundreds, or thousands, at the most..."

[…]

Wafa Sultan: "Can you explain to me the killing of 100,000 children, women, and men in Algeria, using the most abominable killing methods? Can you explain to me the killing of 15,000 Syrian civilians? Can you explain to me the abominable crime in the military artillery school in Aleppo? Can you explain the crime in Al-Asbaqiya neighborhood of Damascus, Syria? Can you explain the attack of the terrorists on the peaceful village of Al-Kisheh in Upper Egypt, and the massacre of 21 Coptic peasants? Can you explain to me what is going on in Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt, even though these are Islamic countries which opposed the American intervention in Iraq, and which don't have armies in Iraq, yet were not spared by the terrorists? Can you explain these phenomena, which took place in Arab countries? Was all this revenge on America or Israel? Or were they merely to satisfy bestial wild instincts aroused in them by religious teachings, which incite to rejection of the other, to the killing of the other, and to the denial of the other. When Saddam Hussein buried 300,000 Shi'ites and Kurds alive, we did not hear a single Muslim protesting. Your silence served to acknowledge the legitimacy of these killings, didn't it?..."

[…]

"What do you want from me? To speak evil of American society? I've never said that America is the eternal city of Plato, but I did say it was the eternal city of Wafa Sultan. The idealism of American society was enough to allow me to realize my humanity. I came to this country with fear."

Bin Muhammad: "Along with the Indians? Along with the Indians? What was left of the Indians? What do you have to say about the Indians?"

Wafa Sultan: "Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492. America was founded in 1776, approximately 300 years later. You cannot blame America - as a constitution, a regime, and a state - for killing the Indians."

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[1] http://www.annaqed.com/article.aspx?article=10910.

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BRIDGING THE LANGUAGE GAP BETWEEN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE WEST

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