

PRESS RELEASE

Controversy around Homosexuality and Women Enough is Enough

by Professor Tariq Ramadan

I have been silent for six days waiting for the truth to appear and the controversy to fade away. As I am witnessing the exact opposite with some individuals and groups trying to take advantage of the confusion and the lies, I feel obliged to intervene and to put the record straight.

It was reported that I said unacceptable things to Muslims, in closed gatherings, targeting homosexuals and women: this would prove that I have a “double discourse”. Five tapes of my talks (given over the last 15 years), it is said, have been removed from the market, which would be another proof that I have something to hide.

Let us start from the very beginning: all the accusations and the quotations are coming from the same and single book (*Frere Tariq*, by Caroline Fourest) which was a failure in France (and ignored and ridiculed when it was translated into English). Now, it is arriving in the Netherlands where some very specific politicians (such as Bolkestein during our debate on the 11th September 2008: who publicly acknowledged he had not read my books), political parties or homosexual groups are using this book to attack me. Unfortunately without checking the facts, the quotations and the substance of what I have been saying, and still say. Let them come with the tapes, the books and the articles: let us check.

- First, contrary to what was said in the newspaper, all my lectures are on Internet, available to everyone to listen, Muslims and non Muslims alike (on my website www.tariqramadan.com and on www.vert-islam.com). I challenge anyone to come with a “hidden tape or text”: there is none.
- Second, while repeating, for twenty years, that Islam is prohibiting homosexuality (as Judaism and Christianity by the way), and explaining why according to the classical teachings, I have always stressed (“always” means for the last 25 years) that we must respect the homosexuals even if we disagree with their behaviour. No condemnation, no rejection: I said and repeated that everywhere, in front of traditional, literalist or reformist audiences, as well as in Muslim majority countries or in the West. One cannot deny what the religions are teaching to please the audiences: what is essential is the attitude you recommend to the people when dealing with the others. I always rejected condemnation and even took a very strong stand against the Egyptian government when it condemned 20 homosexuals pretending this was “Islamic”. I said “more Islam” in Egypt would be more social justice and democratisation. The *European Muslim Network* I chair organised last year a meeting with five gay and lesbian organisations in Brussels to open a dialogue. I challenge anyone to come with a contradictory statement (without of course cutting my sentences or my reasoning).
- Third, the discussed quotations are wrong, distorted and, at time, simply laughable. The promoters of this campaign should either learn French (or English) or remove the screen of prejudices from their minds that prevents them to listen and understand to what I am saying. “Homosexuals are sick” or “women should look at the ground while walking in the street” are presented as my exact quotations, yet I never said that. These are plain lies and to rely on these so called “quotations” is simply, humanly and intellectually, unacceptable. I challenge anyone to come with such “proofs” of my “double talk”.

It is now a question of justice and dignity. I cannot accept to witness such a flood of lies, slanders and personal attacks without reacting. I am reacting here with calm and dignity. The people who are behind this outrageous campaign are dangerous not only for me (or the Muslims) but for the future of our societies. They are ready to use wrong quotations, to launch baseless media campaigns and even to lie to achieve their goals. Behind, and beyond me, they want to create a “new enemy” (Islam and the Muslims) and they are using me as a symbol to target. This controversy will last for few days but on the long run they will certainly fail: noise is not an argument and arguments must and will prevail.

I am happy to hear that both the Municipality of Rotterdam and Erasmus University want to check the facts and to listen to the tapes. I am happy that there is a sense of responsibility and intellectual honesty here: it will soon appear that I have always been consistent and clear in my statements the last 25 years of my public engagement within and outside the Muslims communities around the world. The same dirty campaign failed in France and it will fail in the Netherlands but it must be a wake up call for every citizen: our societies are fragile and everyone of us must be involved in creating the right conditions for living together, respecting each other, and not letting us drive by ideologies and political forces that are nurturing fears, rejection, racism and xenophobia while using

fallacious pretexts.

I am not involved with the Rotterdam municipality as an “adviser on Islam” (contrary to what was reported) but in order to teach and promote a better understanding of “citizenship” and an appropriate way of dealing with “diversity” in the light of a common “sense of belonging”. With this campaign, we are at the heart of this very topic: I am teaching everyone to get a common “ethics of citizenship” and to avoid the victim mentality. Thus, as a dignified citizen I would never accept to be treated with no respect and with no sense of civility by some individuals or groups. This is necessary, I think, not only for me, but also for the Dutch society as a whole.

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office@tariqramadan.com
phone : 0033149220112

PS: This is what I responded to the UK magazine Prospect in 2006. Always the same answer:

Q But realistically, how far can you go in a non-literalist interpretation of the Koran? Let's take the issue of whether someone can be both gay and Muslim. In Christianity you'll get a variety of answers. Broadly speaking, in Catholicism homosexuality is a sin. But like all other sins in Catholicism, a little bit of penance can get you out of it before judgement day. In some versions of evangelical Protestantism, homosexuality is a complete sin because evangelicals tend to be literalists. But in the Church of England there are a large number of openly gay Anglican clergy. The argument being that the Old Testament has to be contextualised. Is it possible to have a similar reading of the Koran? Or is it that homosexuality is simply wrong. Could you imagine there ever being a homosexual imam in the same way that the Anglican church in the US has just consecrated a homosexual bishop? Would that be possible?

A It could happen if such an imam did not declare that he was homosexual. You cannot expect to see homosexuality being promoted within the Islamic tradition. Homosexuality is not perceived by Islam as the divine project for men and women. It is regarded as bad and wrong. Now, the way we have to deal with a homosexual is to say: "I don't agree with what you are doing, but I respect who you are. You can be a Muslim. You are a Muslim. Being a Muslim is between you and God." I am not going to promote homosexuality but I will respect the person, even if I don't agree with what they are doing.

http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=7571