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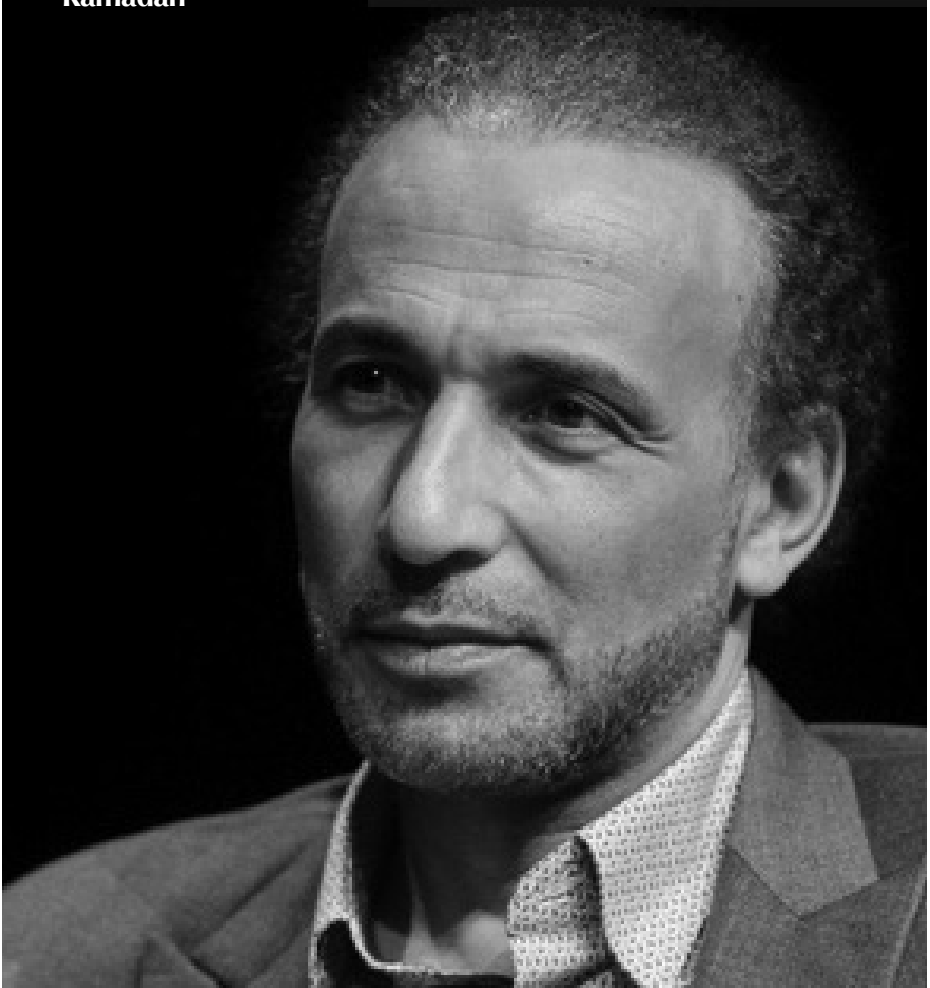
The case against Tariq Ramadan

Alain Gabon

The Tariq Ramadan Case: A Comprehensive Review

Monia Mazighin

The troubling silence of the “Sheikhs” about the fate of Tariq Ramadan



The Tariq Ramadan Case: A Comprehensive Review

Alain Gabon March 19, 2018

Tariq Ramadan, Europe's most influential Muslim intellectual and an international Islamic institution all by himself, has been in preventive detention and solitary confinement in France since February 2nd, 2018. Ramadan's incarceration followed two charges of rape—allegations he has fully denied, calling them a “a smear campaign” coordinated by his old French enemies. Due to inadequate medical care in Fleury-Mérogis prison (Ramadan suffers from multiple sclerosis and another neurobiological disease requiring substantial daily treatment), his health has rapidly deteriorated in jail. It was in an ambulance, under medical escort, that he arrived to his first appeal hearing.

On February 17th, we learned from an Agence France Presse (AFP) news release that Ramadan's first medical examination in prison concluded that his health condition was “incompatible with detention.” The medical document specified: “Since his arrival, this patient has been experiencing unbearable pain in his lower limbs with permanent sensory trouble,” for which the treatments available in jail are drastically insufficient. This official document directly corroborated assessments by Ramadan's private physicians (one in London, the other in Geneva).

Despite this, the judge decided to prolong Ramadan's detention and solitary confinement. Further, his wife and children were again denied visitation rights with neither explanation nor justification, a radical measure that falls well outside of French judicial norms, as even confirmed murderers are routinely granted visitation rights. For these reasons, the handling of Tariq Ramadan's case involves not only the denial of basic legal rights (how could anyone properly prepare a legal defense in such conditions?); it also represents a case of human rights abuse.

In what follows, I suggest that the truly odd legislative developments in the Ramadan case—the justice of exception we are witnessing at work, which will be addressed in the second half of this article—may be explained at least partially by the national (and to a lesser extent European) context in which they are occurring: a culture characterized by intense and pervasive Islamophobia in general (whose varied manifestations and links to France's colonial history are beyond the scope of this piece) and more specifically, an already old French campaign to eliminate Ramadan from the intellectual, social, political and religious landscape of the nation. That campaign long predates the recent charges of rape for which Ramadan is in detention. Anyone familiar with the French political landscape knows that for years, since at least 2003, the Swiss Islamic philosopher has been the ruling elites' Muslim Enemy Number One.

This being said, none of what follows implies in any way that Ramadan is either innocent or guilty. It is actually important that the accusations of Henda Ayari and “Christelle” have been fully considered and heard empathically by all—media and the courts included (though one may question how they are already being treated as proven facts). While allegations of rape are frequently disregarded or taken lightly, this case has demonstrated a rare exception to the rule: the charges against Ramadan have become the center of global attention— for Islamists, Islamophobes, and everyone in between.

The French Context

In order to understand the Ramadan case, it is essential to contextualize it without assuming either innocence or guilt. At this point, anyone doing otherwise can only do so out of bad faith, prejudice, or disingenuity.

The passions around Ramadan, both positive and negative, friendly and hostile, admiring and heinous, are most intense in France. For this reason it may be surprising for a non-French audience to witness the combination of contradictory emotions and reactions elicited by the Swiss Islamic intellectual: on the one hand, the immense clout, awe, gratitude and admiration he has for years enjoyed in France among much of the Muslim youth (and many of the not-so-young as well), especially the so-called “reislamized” third-generation, which often gravitates around the Union of French Islamic Organizations (UOIF)—France’s biggest umbrella federation, which hosts Europe’s largest annual Islamic Fair, where Ramadan is every year the star speaker for impressively packed audiences in the thousands. On the other hand, we observe visceral hatred against him from the quasi totality of France’s ruling establishment including governments (both left and right), political parties (all of them, from the far right of Marine le Pen to the far left of Jean-Luc Mélenchon), state institutions, mainstream media, talking heads, and influential public intellectuals, with rare exceptions.

In the past several decades, few individuals have been the object of such spite and hatred, the target of such violent hostility by the ruling elites, the *bête noire* of so many individuals and sworn enemies. The worst of whom being Caroline Fourest, a freelance journalist, essayist, media figure, and laïcist activist-feminist. Since at least the early 2000s, Fourest has made it her mission in life to discredit Ramadan by whatever means possible. Fourest has built her media notoriety and presence almost entirely around her personal crusade against Ramadan, and is herself a favorite of the political and media establishment, which has been generous in providing her with talk show host positions on public radio channels and a columnist position at the daily newspaper *Le Monde* (as well as commissioned work such as documentaries for the public channel Arte).

In France, the violence against Ramadan has reached such a level that if one wishes to discredit someone else, say, a political opponent, all one has to do is claim that the adversary is a friend or “ally” of Tariq Ramadan, that s/he has talked to, worked with, or simply shared a stage, forum, or seat in a debate with Ramadan, or that s/he has signed a petition also signed by Ramadan. This is no exaggeration and three examples, gleaned from what are now hundreds of similar cases, aptly illustrate this reality:

In 2013, Prime Minister Manuel Valls and Minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem withdrew their participation in a European forum in Italy after they learned Ramadan had also been invited. In 2003, three top leaders of the Socialist Party, all ministers at some point (Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Vincent Peillon, and again Manuel Valls), published an open call to the organizers of the European Social Forum to cancel their invitation to the theologian, accusing him of antisemitism on the basis of ludicrous pseudo-evidence from an article he had published about a few well-known Jewish intellectuals.

In 2011, the pressure and intimidation tactics of conservative party leader Jean-François Copé pushed Socialist leaders and former ministers Martine Aubry and Laurent Fabius to withdraw their signatures from a petition denouncing the conservative party’s Islamophobia. The only thing Copé had to do to force them to cancel their support for that campaign was point out that Ramadan too had signed the petition. His two political opponents did not even argue, they simply quit—sheepishly and effectively shamed. Outside of such examples, even having a photo taken with Ramadan on a stage (even if one were debating him as an opponent) is in France enough to seriously discredit one’s reputation.

These few cases are enough to demonstrate that many years before the two recent accusations, but also long before the emergence of ISIL or the first jihadist attacks of Mohammed Merah in 2012 and Charlie Hebdo in 2015, Ramadan had already been turned, through systematic vilification, relentless conspiracism, and smear campaigns (Fourest looms large here), into such a toxic figure—a “dangerous Islamist,” a “radical fundamentalist,” an insidious “preacher” practicing “double language,” a stealth agent of the “global Islamist plot”—that mere proof of contacts of any type with him has been enough to scare away even the most established and powerful politicians.

Ramadan's Powerful Adversaries

In 2016, Ramadan made public his decision to apply for French citizenship. Given his stunning accomplishments, marriage to a French citizen, French children, permanent activities in France where he has offices—but also his superb mastery of the French language, history, literature and philosophy—he fully deserved it. Further, he has demonstrated respect for France's institutions throughout this whole ordeal (despite his inhumane treatment by the French state).

Yet, as soon as he made his intention to apply for citizenship known, France's Prime Minister Manuel Valls (a notorious islamophobe obsessed with banning hijabs everywhere) himself went public, red with rage, to declare that Ramadan's application for naturalization was "a provocation against the French Republic" and that he would "personally make sure it gets rejected"—not hesitating, incidentally, to violate French institutions since it was not in his prerogatives as PM to do so.

Ramadan responded by emphasizing how ironic it was for Valls to describe his citizenship application as being incompatible with "the values of the French Republic" shortly after giving the Legion of Honor (France's highest official state honor) to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy which does not recognize the core values France claims to uphold: freedom of religion, gender equality, and freedom of expression. Ramadan's rhetorical acumen silenced Manuel Valls, who had nothing with which to respond.

In 2003, in another epic "Ramadan vs. French State" confrontation, it was Nicolas Sarkozy himself, then Minister of the Interior and soon-to-be Presidential candidate, who personally took the theologian head-on, making it his personal business to demonize Ramadan's international call for a moratorium on "corporal punishment, stoning, and the death penalty in the Islamic world" on prime time live.

One could forever multiply such examples. In short, France's most powerful government members, Prime Ministers and Presidents like Sarkozy and Valls, backed by the mainstream media and its cohort of "anti-Islamist" columnists and talking heads, have escalated their permanent anti-Ramadan campaign, moving from mere vilification or simply avoiding any contact with him to active attempts to take him down, put him out of business for good, and destroy him politically, socially and even religiously. But, time and again, they were not able to best him in intellectual debate.

It is also important to understand that Ramadan's critics also seek to delegitimize anything they associate with him: "Islamism," "Salafism," "political Islam," the Muslim Brotherhood, the Union of Islamic Organisations of France, independent and critical journalists like Mediapart's Edwy Plenel. In a recent column, Algerian writer and journalist Kamel Daoud³ even claims the allegations of rape against Ramadan (which he takes for granted as proven facts) are "symptomatic of the miserable humanity of all preachers," who "dissimulate" a similar predatory sexual perversity "behind their religious commerce." Unlike Ramadan, Daoud is the kind of Arab intellectual the French media and political establishment absolutely adore: the easily instrumentalized type who thinks naively that he is paraded and celebrated on all television, newspaper and radio forums because of his smarts and literary talent, rather than the function he serves (that of a useful tool for Islamophobes).

In particular, by discrediting Ramadan, by putting and keeping him in jail for as long as they can by whatever means possible, they want to end his whole project for European Muslims and roll the clocks back to the 1970s, a time when, as the French sometimes say with nostalgia, "les musulmans rasaient les murs" (Muslims would lower their heads, try not to be seen, out of shame and intimidation). More than anyone, Ramadan has incarnated this groundbreaking tide of the Euro-Islam "Muslim Pride" movement, especially among the youth. Adam Shatz aptly summarizes his powerful message:

In the nineteen-nineties, Tariq Ramadan attracted a following among French Muslims, both in the banlieues and in the professional middle classes. His message was simple,

revolutionary, and electrifying: Islam was already a part of France, and so Muslim citizens were under no obligation to choose between their identities. They could practice their faith freely, even strictly, and still be French, so long as they respected the country's laws. French Muslims, he argued, should overcome their "victim mentality" and embrace both their faith and their Frenchness. By the same token, France should recognize that Islam is a French faith; Muslim citizens are scarcely in need of "assimilation" into a country to which they already belong, a paternalist notion with roots in France's colonial history.

In a nutshell: Ramadan has been cast as the Devil. The AntiChrist of the French Republic, declared by many a supreme danger to State and Nation. He has been in the crosshairs of the powerful since at least 2003 (the key moment of his first frontal confrontation with Nicolas Sarkozy). Ramadan has no friend or ally in any state institution, only hostile enemies who would be thrilled to see him disappear for good—preferably in shame.⁴ From this standpoint, it is clear that the castigation of Ramadan has been less about supporting victims of rape, and more about disempowering European Muslim populations.

Even France's publishing industry has made it its mission to destroy Ramadan: recently, the journalist Ian Hamel, himself a sworn adversary of Ramadan who wrote a book against him, revealed during an interview how Flammarion (France's famed publishing house) commissioned a book from him about Ramadan, which was supposed to be a fierce attack against the theologian. Hamel wrote the book, but when he sent his manuscript to the publisher, they declined it: they wanted him to describe Ramadan as a terrorist, too. Hamel declined as he did not want to publish outright and obvious lies. For that reason, Flammarion rejected his manuscript, which he had to publish elsewhere.

The fact that one of France's oldest, largest and most prestigious publishing houses would commission a book to an author with the specific objective to attack Ramadan and lie about him being a terrorist speaks volumes too.

The Legal Process

Due to the decision to keep Ramadan in prison despite a medical record demonstrating he was in no condition to sustain incarceration even for a few days (and it has been a month since February 2), Ramadan has for weeks been rendered unable to adequately tend to his own defense. That should have been reason enough to release him on February 22nd, when his case came again under review.

Further, Ramadan has been denied the possibility of bail. This decision even surprised some of Ramadan's adversaries, since incarceration is supposed to be a measure of last resort when other options including house arrest, or the wearing of an electronic bracelet are not available or realistic. Ramadan and his lawyers themselves suggested such alternative options, but they never were considered. The authorities justified this by arguing it would keep Ramadan from pressuring his accusers—a ridiculous excuse, as it would be foolish for Ramadan to do so, knowing full well this would further aggravate his case. Authorities also claimed Ramadan may be trying to escape to some foreign country—an even more ludicrous excuse, considering Ramadan's full cooperation with the state (something no one denies), however awful and inhumane it has been to him.

Outside of these factors, Ramadan has also been confined to an isolation cell, and denied visitation rights and calls from his wife and children, another gratuitously cruel measure for which the authorities have provided no explanations.

Then there is the incomprehensible fact that though the first complaint against Ramadan was filed at the Public Prosecutor's office of the provincial city of Rouen, the case was sent to the Paris Prosecutor's office and transferred to Prosecutor François Molins, who typically works on cases of Islamic terrorism with national jurisdiction. Molins, now in charge of Ramadan's case, has become a familiar figure to the French through his (abundant, lengthy, and dramatic) live updates on the Charlie Hebdo case, the Nice attack case, and a few less deadly cases that followed. For the French, François Molins has thus become the main face

of counter- terrorism—the “Prosecutor of French Jihadists” as some fondly call him.

Lost Alibi

In a further aggravation of these legal injustices: on December 6, 2017, Ramadan’s lawyers filed a key piece of evidence with the Paris Prosecutor’s office. This legal item was actually Ramadan’s hard alibi against one of the two charges. It contained travel documents including a London-Lyon plane ticket showing that around the time the second accuser (the anonymous “Christelle”) stated Ramadan was raping her in his Lyon hotel room shortly before a conference, the man was not even on French soil. If formally validated, this may have called into question at least one of the women’s accounts.

The problem, however, is that this crucial piece of evidence, Ramadan’s hard alibi for one of the two cases, was “lost” as soon as it was filed, and disappeared for two months while the investigation was being conducted.

It was only on February 1st, 2018 that Ramadan’s lawyers realized that this most important piece of exculpatory evidence had actually never been added to his court file nor transmitted to the investigators, and had therefore never been considered and verified, despite the fact the Paris Prosecutor’s office did formally confirm on December 6 (the same day they filed it) that it had indeed been sent to the proper authorities for inclusion in the investigation.

Clearly, the document was never actually lost, since it resurfaced on February 1st, immediately after the lawyers realized it was missing and asked what had happened over the past two months. But the harm was done: it was too late for formal judicial consideration of the travel document and verification of Ramadan’s alibi. The next day, Ramadan was incarcerated. To this day, no explanation for that prolonged “loss” has been offered by the Paris Prosecutor’s office. Though the document was added (again) to his file on February 1st, to this day, it has still not been verified by the police and court authorities!

This so far unexplained disappearance also does not square well with the fact that the authorities in charge of the case have repeatedly declared they are aware of the sensitive character of this affair, adding that this was even the reason why they put three judges on the case.

A Travesty of Justice

The French judicial process, here a travesty of justice, has been so unusual that even some of Ramadan’s adversaries are worried this may durably affect the integrity of the institution and the confidence people can place in it. Take for example French attorney Régis de Castelnau, by no means a friend or ally of Ramadan, who disparagingly and contemptuously calls him “a preacher” and a “guru.” He has been one of Ramadan’s consistent political opponents and a man very much engaged in France’s crusade against “Islamism.” His concern, however, has been that the extreme perversion of the judicial procedure in this case might actually backfire against those who, like him, want and need to keep using this institution to fight so-called “radical Islamism.” His legal analysis of the Ramadan case is sobering and concludes—upon close examination of all the documentation and data available so far—that the denial of due process has been severe and constant. And he came to that conclusion on February 9, before recent developments, such as the news of Ramadan’s collapsing health under state custody.

In his article, “Ramadan in Prison: What Now?” De Castelnau begins by reminding us that according to French law, the preliminary “investigation” (the one that never considered Ramadan’s alibi for one of the two alleged rapes) was mandated by executive powers, and that investigators are actually in no way obligated to follow standards and protocols of impartiality. De Castelnau concludes that the entire investigation leading to Ramadan’s preventive detention on February 2nd was conducted entirely and exclusively “à charge” (meaning exclusively against the defendant), and “severely so.” He also observes with surprise that none of the inconsistencies and contradictions in the testimonies of the

plaintiffs were raised by the judges, while Ramadan's lawyers, who at that time still did not have access to those court files, were thus not able to use them for his defense.

Henda Ayari and "Christelle"

At no point were the judges interested in some frankly surprising declarations by alleged victims Henda Ayari and "Christelle"—especially their own admissions (reiterated to the press and now proven further by documentation including e-mails) that long after the alleged rapes, they pursued Ramadan with great insistence on Facebook. They also traveled from conference to conference seeking encounters with Ramadan.

Henda Ayari declared to the press that she had "a sexual epistolary relationship" with Ramadan for at least a year, and that in June 2013, fifteen months after her alleged rape, she herself attempted to resume a relationship with him through a cordial and warm e-mail starting with "Hey it's been a while I wanted to have some news of you." Ramadan, surprised, blocked her from his Facebook page but on June 6, 2013, she reopened a second account and reached out to him once more, asking (begging actually, from the transcript) that he "let her in," stop blocking her, and refrain from depriving her of at least "his Facebook page and his beautiful books." While Ayari testified to having finally stopped all attempts to contact Ramadan in mid-2013, Ramadan's lawyers uncovered and formally submitted nearly 300 e-mails sent by Ayari to Ramadan between June and August 2014.

Furthermore, none of that—now admitted by Ayari herself and her lawyers—squares in any way with her initial testimonies of being so "traumatized" and "scared" of Ramadan that she remains unable to even pronounce his name—a claim she made in her first high-profile interview in 2017. Ayari, who now has her own "laïcist and anti-Islamist" association, declares at every opportunity that "for Ramadan, women must either be veiled or raped"—a crude and cynical account, since the Islamic theologian certainly never said, wrote, or suggested anything of the sort. Rather, he has consistently spoken forcefully against violence done to women, which he has repeatedly presented as unjustifiable under any circumstances.

The second alleged victim ("Christelle") declared that after being raped, she stayed in the room all night, waiting for Ramadan to return after he left for his conference. After being asked why, first she claimed he had taken her clothes and phone with him and left her dress on top of the room's closet. Due to her handicap, she could not grab it as it was too high. Then, though that is hardly a point of detail, she changed her story in her testimony to the judge and declared that Ramadan had also taken her dress with him "in a large white bag"—the dress that she initially said he had "suspended too high" for her to grab. Even assuming she was traumatized and in shock following her rape, it is difficult to see how one might be confused about such a thing. This, incidentally, also contradicts Caroline Fourest's affirmation that "Christelle never deviated from her initial declarations including in the most sordid details of her story."

Further, the two women first stated they did not previously know each other. Then, when faced with evidence from Ramadan's lawyers, they suddenly remembered that they had talked to each other years ago. Apparently they both forgot. In addition, both have admitted to having long and sustained contact with Ramadan's greatest adversaries—especially his worst one, Caroline Fourest (see above), who actually "coached" Christelle and presented her to the judge. Fourest herself has since been formally charged with witness tampering after she readily admitted prolonged and sustained contact with both women.

Both accusers were also in close contact with Fiammetta Venner, whom they called hundreds of times, as phone records now demonstrate. Fiammetta Venner is the founder/manager of a "laïcist and anti-islamist" website, Ikhwan Info, a conspiracist blog dedicated to exposing the "Islamization" of Europe and the so-called global "Islamist plot." The website especially demonizes the Muslim Brotherhood, but also other Islamic organizations including benign Islamic feminist associations like Lallab. The Fourest/Venner dynamic

duo also blacklists anyone—journalists, intellectuals, or scholars—they deem to be a “collaborator” of the “Islamofascists” (namely anyone not trying to destroy Ramadan as they themselves have tried for 15 years). Besides being a declared adversary of Ramadan, Fiammetta Venner is also Caroline Fourest’s lover and companion in life, as well as her book’s co-author and personal photographer.

Even more troubling, it appears that “Christelle” may be using forged evidence. After losing her cell phone (which supposedly contained incriminating evidence) for three months, she claimed to have found it. She then showed a text thread between her and Ramadan on the talk show of star journalist Patrick Cohen, one of the worst enemies of Ramadan, who, among other things, declared on television that Ramadan should never be invited by any media and then proceeded to attack anyone still inviting him on their own shows.

The “incriminating” text thread produced from “Christelle’s” newly-found cell was shown on the Cohen show, and can clearly be seen here. Yet, this thread is more than a little problematic. Far from incriminating Ramadan in any way, it actually contains clear proof that it is forged: Ramadan could not possibly have called her “Christelle” as he supposedly writes here on October 10, 2009, since as is now well known, “Christelle” is a pseudonym that was given to her by the French media like BFM TV on November 2017 (8 years after that thread) to protect her identity when she pressed charges against Ramadan. But none of this seems to bother the judges or the media.

Of course, none of that adds up to discrediting the two women’s testimonies. The possibility they were indeed raped remains despite all of the above (which is only a partial exposé). But at the very least, those facts, now fully confirmed and publicly admitted by both women, should raise some serious eyebrows from any judge. Yet, at no point so far have any authorities in charge of the case been bothered by any of it.

Double Standards in Justice and Government

The exceptionalism with which Ramadan has been treated, itself a violation of France’s constitutional obligation to guarantee equality before the law (especially for a country whose elites pompously brag 24/7 about “the values of the Republic”) becomes even more obvious when we compare it to similar charges against other high-profile figures. Among dozens of such cases of rape that have come out in France (and elsewhere) during the Ramadan case and in the wake of the #MeToo movement, Ramadan’s has been the only one to result in jail time in the conditions outlined earlier in this essay.

The most blatant examples of France’s differential treatment and two-tier justice system (one quick, zealous, merciless and cruel against people like Ramadan, another slow, gentle, merciful, and soft against the real Powers that Be) has been on display for weeks through the cases of two star ministers of the Macron government similarly accused of rapes (each by two women, like Ramadan): Budget minister Gérald “The New Sarkozy” Darmanin and Minister of the Environment Nicolas Hulot, a former ecological activist, journalist and immensely popular television figure (in France a true cultural icon since the 1980s). Besides some embarrassing media attention, about which they complained at length in deeply empathic and compassionate interviews, during which they could also defend themselves (unlike Ramadan), the worst for them has been a brief police interrogation as is obligatory in such cases.

In these cases, as soon as the rape charges were made public and the normal legal procedure began, the totality of the Macron government including Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and President Emmanuel Macron himself immediately rallied around Darmanin, then Hulot. The most striking moment in this unanimous show of support was without a doubt when Darmanin entered the French National Assembly the day after the first preliminary investigation against him was opened. There, the MPs of the Macron majority even gave him a standing ovation (after the man had actually admitted he had sex with the “call-girl” accusing him of rape, in exchange for granting her a legal favor!

The Case of Marlène Schiappa

But the most hypocritical behavior has been that of France's "Minister of Women's Rights and the Family," Marlène Schiappa. While before the Darmanin and Hulot cases, Schiappa was ceaselessly praising the #MeToo movement every chance she got, celebrating the "liberation of women's voices," lamenting the lack of mediatisation around related issues, and exhorting other women to "break the law of silence," she suddenly performed a spectacular and radical about-face the second charges of rape targeted two of her governmental peers.

While earlier, she denounced how women are doubted when they disclose instances of sexual assault, now she articulates her "full confidence" in her male colleagues' words (who were denying the accusations) over those of their accusers. Before, Schiappa declared:

One can no longer tell women how they should express themselves...if social networks can help in this liberation of the victims' voices, it's extremely positive. Of course Twitter is not a justice court and can not replace tribunals, but you have to encourage all initiatives who favor exposing these problems...the social networks are an echo chamber that can also become a weapon for us. Besides, I myself use them that way.

Now, it is Schiappa herself who is leading a campaign against the media for having outed Darmanin and Hulot, calling the magazine who published the first initial investigative report "irresponsible," and asking this "excessive mediatisation" be stopped on the grounds that this "media lynching may condemn innocent men." In her account, the cause of women is not served in the media but "in secure places" far from the limelight, where alleged victims' words can be heard by "specially trained professionals." Schiappa is now even attacking as "abject" those who are encouraging the victims to contact the media, as she herself was enthusiastically doing a few weeks ago.

Double Standards in Media Reporting

The same double standard can be observed in the media's treatment of Ramadan compared to that of Darmanin/Hulot. While the best Ramadan got was feeble and occasional lip service to the presumption of innocence, since the Darmanin affair emerged, popular media has suddenly switched to a much more "embarrassed" tone, and to a new theme: that of "media ethics" that need to be reaffirmed to avoid the "excess" of the "out-of-control" coverage of the Hulot case.

French mainstream media is suddenly practicing a critical self-examination, deploring the unjust "lynching" of Hulot, describing as "dérapage" (a bad mistake) the coverage of that affair (already so mild, cautious and "professional" compared to what Ramadan got), and forcefully reasserting Hulot's presumption of innocence. They are now even campaigning against the "tyranny of transparency." In apparent opposition to the #MeToo movement, sensationalist magazine covers and headlines are everywhere asking: "Should we expose everything" in our "media tribunals."

Oddly enough, Ramadan is never evoked in these debates and remains utterly absent from such crises of conscience, which seem to benefit only Hulot, Darmanin, and a few others. And the same national news media that yesterday were featuring Ramadan's accusers in the most empathetic, compassionate (and of course uncritical) manner are now using various methods of character assassination against the women who pressed charges against the two ministers!

None of this is to suggest Ramadan is either guilty or innocent. What all of these inconsistencies do suggest, however, is that the public intellectual cannot and will not receive fair judicial, political, or media treatment in France, and that the abuse of power and differential treatment against him have been great, and systematic.

Conclusion

Beyond Tariq Ramadan himself, three other things are being gravely damaged in this

case: first, the justice system itself, since in addition to the highly variable and flexible justice demonstrated above, the whole burden of proof—the cornerstone of “freedom” in the French Republic—has been turned upside down, replacing innocent until proven guilty with guilty until you prove yourself innocent. Second, the public perception of Islam. French commentators now cite unproven information as fact, and more freely present Islam as “a religion of rapists.” Third, the #MeToo/BalanceTonPorc movement is being derailed and hijacked. The long overdue and valuable campaign against sexual violence is being instrumentalized as a means of stirring hatred against Islam and Muslims. Popular discourse surrounding Ramadan’s case assumes and forces a dichotomy between the critique of sexual violence on one hand, and critiques of Islamophobia and racism on the other. It is our responsibility as critical thinkers to consider what is being effaced and (re)produced in these unidimensional narratives.

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Postscript

On February 22nd, a French appeals court denied Tariq Ramadan’s request to be released on medical grounds. The court solely considered the assessment of a physician whom that court had itself appointed and who declared after a 15-minute examination (and without Ramadan’s medical record) that he could sustain further detention. That physician’s note also seemed to deny the reality of Ramadan’s multiple sclerosis and neuropathy, for which he has been treated for years by numerous physicians in France, London, Geneva and elsewhere. The court decided to ignore four other medical records, including one from prison medical services themselves, which had all concluded that Ramadan could not sustain incarceration. The judge ordered Ramadan, who had refused to come to court after being denied a medical escort, to remain incarcerated for an indeterminate amount of time. The court denied his lawyers’ requests to end the preventive detention and rejected all alternative options they offered, including daily appearances at the police station, surrendering his passport, a substantial bail, wearing an electronic bracelet, and living in a communal house under police surveillance. The judge justified these decisions, which are well outside French judicial norms, by saying that even under these conditions, there was “a real risk” he would rape again. On February 27th, Ramadan was re-hospitalized again. He had already spent the previous weekend at the prison hospital. After he was taken back to his cell, a prison psychiatrist diagnosed “a grave anxiety- depression syndrome,” on February 20th. The justice has since asked for yet another medical report, which should be available by the end of March.

On March 7, 2018, a third woman (pseudonym: “Marie”) pressed charges against Ramadan for multiple rapes in various European cities between 2013 and 2014. She also accused Ramadan of blackmail. Her extremely graphic descriptions are a cut-and-paste, quasi word- for-word account of those from the second anonymous accuser (“Christelle”), themselves widely circulated in mainstream media. Like “Christelle” before her, “Marie” declared she has abundant “material evidence.” Yet, something needs to be noted here: despite those repeated claims, to this day, not a single piece of evidence of rape (or for that matter, wrongdoing of any kind) has been shared by anyone. As a matter of fact, though those media outlets claimed for weeks that “Christelle” had some hard proof and a “medical certificate,” they are now admitting reluctantly they actually have nothing.

The troubling silence of the “Sheikhs” about the fate of Tariq Ramadan

Monia Mazighin

I stopped going to the Revival of Islamic Spirit (RIS) years ago. I found the event super commercialized, and less and less intellectually challenging for me.

It became a big fair of many self-proclaimed sheikhs who are carefully chosen and who lined up according to certain criteria that is more linked to their gender, celebrity and popularity status.

Those same scholars were more interested in the pursuit of their “religious careers” and the building of their “fans club”. The topics were asepticized, superficial and the speakers were very careful in the choice of their talks so as not to ruffle any political feathers.

Aside from few speakers, the majority would come there and maintain a very shallow and fluffy talk about good manners, good behaviour, and most of all would avoid criticizing or denouncing unjust policies in a North American context or in the Middle East where a large part of the audience is originally from.

Not a single word about Guantanamo, not a single word about the dictatorship of the Gulf countries. No fiery political speeches, no thought provoking conversations. Just a preacher and good listeners who would come back home feeling good that they spent few hundred dollars on a hotel package and entrance fees. This is of course not to mention the shopping discounts of boxing day (the event usually takes place during Christmas period).

One of the rare speakers at RIS who defied these almost implicit rules was Tariq Ramadan. He challenged the audience with his opinions. He stopped them when they were trying to clap when he said something appealing, encouraging the crowd to be rather rational instead of emotional.

In 2014, he rightly decided to stop participating in this big fair of “halal entertainment”. My understanding of the rational behind his decision is the problematic positions of some invited “sheikhs” who kept silent, or even worse, sided with the counter-revolutions of the Arab Spring.

Indeed, in 2011, when the Arab Spring traveled from Tunisia to Egypt, to Libya, to Yemen, to Bahrain and to Syria, a new era was about to open in that region. An era of fearless populations who were ready to put an end to dictatorship and arbitrary rules, the start of an era towards building a new life full of dignity.

No wonder that one of the slogans branded at the numerous demonstrations that went through the streets of Sidi-Bouزيد in Tunisia or Dara’a in Syria were “The people want the system to fall”. The “system” (or the regime) means the government running these countries and the corrupt regime suffocating the lives of all the citizens.

This new era wasn’t accepted with wide arms by all. It was actually stopped with arms and blood. Among the countries that were so frightened of the changes were Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Both of them, with a long history of oppression and flagrant absence of civil society, had a lot to fear from this change that not only threatened their thrones but “the system”.

The whole world watched these political and social changes unfold. Youth were especially excited and optimistic. Many of the societies of these countries were composed of young population with no serious opportunities like jobs or even marriage prospects.

During this period of turmoil, very few “sheikhs” sided with the change. To the opposite, many of them sided with the statu-quo, reminding the youth of the importance of obedience of the parents and of “those who are in charge of their lives”, aka the “system”.

At the RIS, the year after the start of the Arab Spring, nobody spoke about the events in those countries. Only Tariq Ramadan did. He even wrote a book about it. Even though, I disagreed with some of his opinions about few matters, I still thought that his voice

was needed and relevant. The whole world was anxiously watching the change, so why shouldn't he be speaking and discussing it.

But the RIS organizers invited the "Sheikhs" who are officially close to the United Arab Emirates or other similar monarchies. These "Sheikhs" kept silent about the tragedies happening in the Middle East and the dawn of change that was stopped with a fierce military intervention in Bahrein and Egypt and with literally bloody wars in Yemen, Libya and Syria.

This was a shameful and problematic position. The history wouldn't forgive whoever sided with the oppressors. The "sheikhs" who are supposed to have a duty to support the oppressed and speak out for their rights, sheepishly took the side of the oppressors,

acknowledgements to the authors

you may find the original article posted on the following website

<https://www.milestonesjournal.net/articles/2018/3/19/the-tariq-ramadan-case-a-comprehensive-review>

<https://moniamazigh.wordpress.com/2018/03/23/the-troubling-silence-of-the-sheikhs-about-the-fate-of-tariq-ramadan/>



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