

The Incarceration of Tariq Ramadan, a Travesty of Justice

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The unjust incarceration of Dr Tariq Ramadan, Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford University, demeans and disgraces the French legal system.

Tariq has been detained in a solitary cell in the high security wing of Paris's Fleury-Merogis prison since the 2nd of February 2018. It is alleged that he raped two women in Lyon and Paris in 2009 and 2012 respectively. A criminal investigation is being carried out in order to build a case against him. He has no access to his family and is not even allowed to communicate with them through the phone.

It should be emphasised that it was Tariq who voluntarily went to the police in Paris on the 31st of January to answer the allegations against him. He has cooperated fully with the investigating authorities. And yet he has been treated harshly.

The way he has been treated should be weighed against the scurrilous allegations hurled at him. In the Lyon incident, the accuser alleges that she was raped in a hotel in the afternoon of 9th October 2009. Tariq's attorney has provided the prosecution with evidence that shows that Tariq's flight from London did not arrive in Lyon until 6.35 pm and he was in a hall by 8.30 pm to deliver a lecture to hundreds of attendees. The French police which confirmed receiving this piece of evidence later "claimed that it was "missing" from the case file because it had been lost." This in itself is a gross travesty of justice.

What makes it even more suspicious is a meeting between the accuser and a high-ranking French magistrate, Michel Debacq, in 2009 " with the apparent intention of bringing a case against Prof Ramadan, with the assistance of notorious Islamophobes Caroline Fourest and Antoine Sfeir. Debacq would thus appear to have unethically colluded with Fourest and "Christelle" (the accuser) against Prof Ramadan nine years ago. Debacq who now serves in France's Court of Cassation did not disclose his previous involvement either with "Christelle" or the current case, which is illegal according to French law."

The Paris incident which allegedly took place in April 2012 further undermines the veracity of the claims made by Tariq's accusers. In this incident, the accuser, one Hendra Ayari, "sent Prof Ramadan no fewer than 280 messages via Facebook between June and August 2014," more than two years after the alleged rape. It has been disclosed that

"Ayari recently admitted to French media that she did send these messages through a second Facebook account she had created — after Prof Ramadan

had blocked her first account because she was harassing him — in the hope that she could seduce and entrap him. These recent revelations may be the reason why Ayari did not appear when French police summoned her last week.”

Though allegations from both women appear so utterly baseless, the prosecution continues to detain Tariq with the aim of dragging him to court. The mainstream French media has been complicit in this. Not only does it present ludicrous allegations as facts, it has even gone further and repeated lies about Tariq designed to discredit him. For instance, several media outlets had reported that

“Prof Ramadan has an Egyptian passport, which he might attempt to use in order to flee to Egypt. Prof Ramadan does not have an Egyptian passport, and is a citizen of Switzerland only.”

The French media’s smearing of Tariq Ramadan and the legal system’s skewed attitude reflect a larger problem. Dominant French society does not take kindly to those who have the courage to criticise its bias against Islam and its followers. This is what Tariq has been doing for a long while. He has been forthright about how French state and society have discriminated against Muslims. Islamophobia in Europe as a whole and the increasing marginalisation of the poor and powerless in the continent have also been abiding concerns of the man. Tariq has also been vocal about the dogmatism of ultra-conservative Muslims and the authoritarianism of Muslim regimes.

In other words, there are different groups that would want to nail Tariq Ramadan to the wall. This is why his persecution in France is not just about antagonism towards Islam and Muslims and the determined drive to stifle rational voices that seek to expose French prejudice and bigotry. It also reveals the hypocrisy that surrounds the noble French and European ideal of the right to dissent, especially when it comes to certain fundamental issues. Or, is Tariq’s ordeal also obliquely related to Muslim authoritarianism and its ability to reach far beyond its own shores?

Given all these forces at work, how can we expect a fair and just trial for Professor Tariq Ramadan? Hence the demand of the Free Tariq Ramadan Campaign and other civil society groups and individuals for his immediate and unconditional release.

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