

Tariq Ramadan and Hush Money

by Hugh Fitzgerald



A few months ago, Tariq Ramadan was the golden boy of Islamic apologists, offering his suave taqiyya to audiences throughout Western Europe. He held a prestigious post as a professor at St. Antony's College, Oxford, with a chair funded especially for him by the Emir of Qatar. And at the same time, he held a second important position (and received, no doubt, an even larger salary than he was already getting at Oxford) as the head of the Islamic Law and Ethics Research Center, his own academic fiefdom, in Qatar.

But now he is on "leave" from Oxford, a "leave" that is undoubtedly going to be permanent. And he can't very well head his Islamic Law and Ethics Research Center sinecure in Qatar when he has been told not to set foot in Qatar ever again. Still, he has his many unswervingly loyal followers – two million Facebook friends and 200,000 followers on Twitter, and 135,778 who have [signed a petition](#) demanding that Tariq Ramadan be released from prison.

The Internet is full of “*temoignages*” (testimonials) to the greatness of Tariq Ramadan. Here’s the first one I came across: “I still remember. I was a child when I first listened to Tariq Ramadan. His words have had an effect on me, like a father who learns to walk to his child, to awaken my curiosity which was, until then, in the early stages. His thought, but also his way of expressing it, with sweetness and nuance, has been a principle for me in any approach to learning and teaching. I had the chance to meet him at various seminars where I was able to discover a simple and accessible man to his entourage, full of kindness and kindness. He is for me a thinker that enriches my thoughts, a brother who feeds my spirituality, a passeur of light that awakens my conscience and especially a man who constantly recalls hope.”

The latest news on Tariq Ramadan does not come from France, where he is in prison awaiting trial, after several women (Muslim) accused him of rape and extreme sexual violence. You surely remember his very first accuser, one Henda Ayari, who had earlier written about Ramadan in her book *J’ai choisi d’être libre* (“I Chose To Be Free”), giving him the alias “Zoubeyr” because, at that point, she was still terrified of what he might do to her, given how violently he had already treated her in their encounters. Ramadan is both very powerful and, as she knew, very sinister. In fact, her fears were justified, for once she bravely accused him publicly, she received more than 3,000 death threats within just a few days. She now is forced to live under round-the-clock guard.

Here is how she had described Tariq Ramadan, giving him the name “Zoubeyr”:

“This man, Zoubeyr, transformed before my very eyes into a vile, vulgar, aggressive being – physically and verbally,” she wrote. And then she explained that she was now giving him, in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandal, his real name: Tariq Ramadan. **“For modesty, I will not give the precise details here of the acts he made me submit to.** But it is enough that

he took great advantage of my weakness and the admiration I felt for him. ”

“He allowed himself gestures, attitudes and words that I could never have imagined.”

“And when I resisted,” she writes, “when I cried to him to stop, he insulted and humiliated me. He slapped me and attacked me. I saw in his crazy eyes that he was no longer master of himself. I was afraid he would kill me. I was completely lost. I started crying uncontrollably. He mocked me.” And she described his violence: **“He choked me so hard that I thought I was going to die.”** She also described him as threatening that her children might be harmed if she were to tell anyone.

A second Muslim woman in Paris also accused Ramadan of raping her in a hotel room in 2009. The unnamed 42-year-old, who is reported to have disability in her legs, said that the professor had subjected her to a terrifying and violent sexual assault. The French edition of *Vanity Fair* magazine, whose staff met the 45-year-old woman, said her lawsuit against Ramadan described **“blows to the face and body, forced sodomy, rape with an object and various humiliations, including being dragged by the hair to the bathtub and urinated on.”**

But that’s not the latest news about Ramadan.

The latest news does not come from Switzerland, where four women previously accused him of sexually assaulting them when they were his pupils in high school. We are still waiting to see if the Swiss Statute of Limitations will protect Ramadan either from criminal prosecution or from civil suits by the women.

Nor does the latest news about him come from the United States, where a Muslim woman is pressing charges of rape.

No, this time the news comes from Brussels, Belgium.

It's all about hush money:

Prominent Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan, detained in France over rape allegations, paid a woman to stay silent about their relationship in 2015, the Belgian judiciary said.

Ramadan, 55, paid the Belgian-Moroccan woman \$33,000 to stop posting details about their affair online, Luc Henry, president of the Court of First Instance in Brussels, confirmed to AFP Wednesday.

Hennart said a public judgment was made in Brussels in May 2015 between the professor and the woman, Majda Bernoussi, after she posted online about his "psychological grip" on her. She did not accuse him of rape or sexual assault.

The agreement "provides that Majda Bernoussi deletes her online posts and stops publishing new ones, for a sum of money given by Tariq Ramadan," Hennart said.

Bernoussi also agreed to no longer send "offensive or threatening messages" to the professor and his family, according to French news website Mediapart."

Ramadan had some kind of "affair" with this woman but its extent is unclear. The fact that she did not accuse him of rape or sexual assault in her online posts does not mean that such assaults did not take place. It may simply mean that Majda Bernoussi was too scared to make such an explosive charge, knowing Ramadan's power and what his most loyal followers might do, but still wanted to damage Ramadan, to get her revenge on him for what he had done to her. When she charged him with having a "psychological grip" on her, what did that in practice mean? When she was in his grip, what things did she do "willingly" that could not, therefore, be described as rape or sexual assault in the strict, i.e., juridical, sense?

And if he was innocent of all such charges, from whomever they came, as he has always maintained, why didn't Ramadan threaten to sue Bernoussi for harassment? If he had done nothing at all with or to her – and he keeps claiming he is in every case “completely innocent” – he could have easily exposed her as a semi-demented camp follower, whose advances he had rebuffed, faithful husband that he has always claimed to be. Instead, in May 2015 he paid her \$33,000 to remove all postings about him, and to refrain from any further postings about him. If his behavior was completely aboveboard, shouldn't he be telling us just why he paid her so much? What was that hush money intended to hush up?

But let's end on a different, more forgiving note. Perhaps we haven't done Tariq Ramadan justice. Let's look at all these accusations from his point of view. For he may have his little faults; he's never claimed to be a saint. Tariq Ramadan, remember, is no ordinary man. He has been called “Europe's greatest Muslim scholar,” “Europe's foremost Muslim intellectual,” “the great Muslim thinker,” “this prominent theologian,” “this eminent Oxford professor,” “one of the world's leading Islamic thinkers,” this “profound scholar,” this “great reformer of Islam,” this “towering intellect.” Let him be given the respect he deserves, as a Great Man, capable of Deep Thoughts. [Consider only these:](#)

We must learn that our encounters like our separations are acts of initiation: we can love what is and, in the end, know only hurt and suffering.

Near to you or without you. Why do we love? Why do we break apart? Why, indeed?

To judge is to love. Suspending one's judgement is a better way of loving ...and to love, in spite of judgement, is truly to love.

Listen without passing judgement, or rather judge there is

nothing on which to pass judgement. To judge is human, & to judge is to love.

A character trait, a smile, an expression, a feeling, a wound, a silence or an absence: everything speaks to those who know how to listen.

It is up to every one of us to discover the extraordinary that lies hidden in the heart of the all too ordinary presences in our daily lives.

Absence. Meaning. Life is flying, people are leaving. The heart is crying, the heart is smiling. Oh God, to learn to thank. Simply to thank !

Life is beautiful, life is sad. This life is not Life. To live is to love.

To tell the people we love we love them, and to truly love them. With courage in the heart, tears in the eyes.

It is thoughts like these that have earned Tariq Ramadan respect and admiration throughout the world. A few private peccadillos, of which he is accused by a handful of resentful and malicious women, each of whom clearly wanted him for herself alone, and all of whom have undoubtedly been manipulated by CIA and Mossad operatives, cannot be allowed to sully the reputation of Tariq Ramadan, a "towering intellect" who is "one of the Islamic world's leading thinkers." His message has always been one of peace and tolerance – as he has repeatedly said – and were he to be brought down, that would only let the terrorists on both sides win. And that is something we must not let happen.

First published in