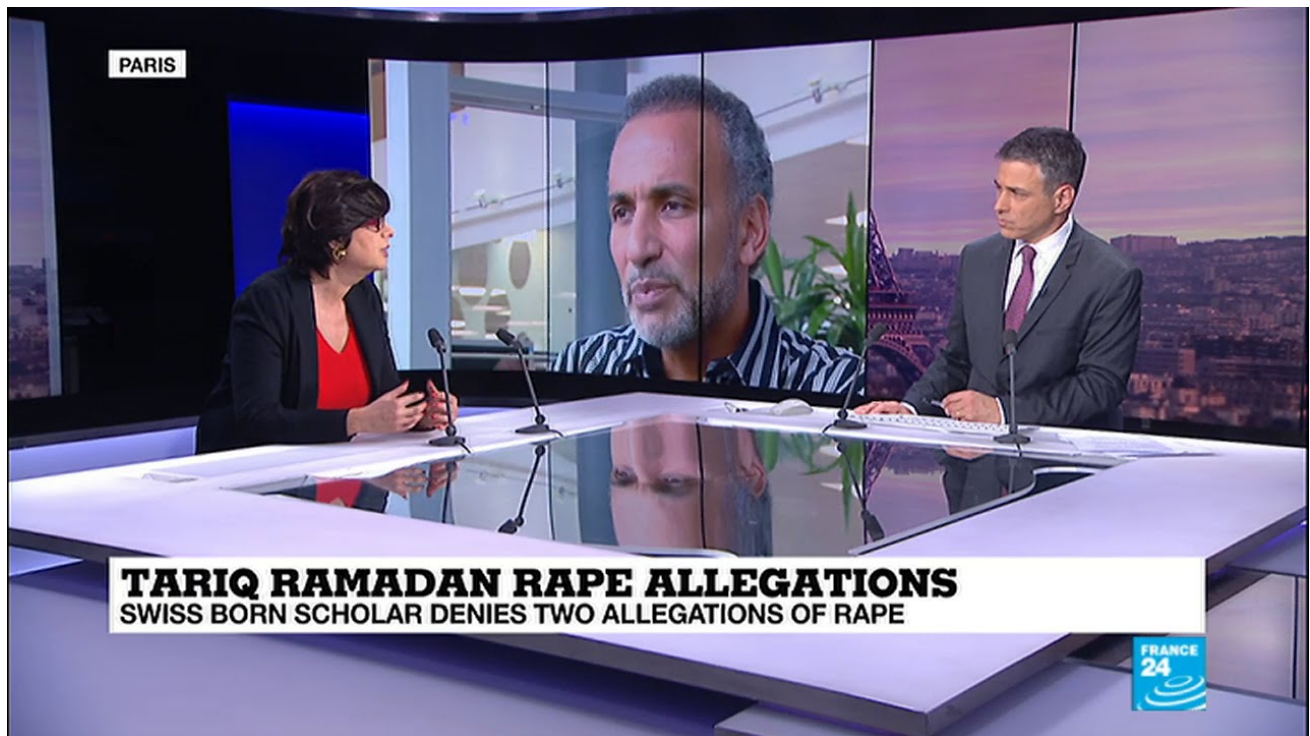


The Persecution of Tariq Ramadan

by Hugh Fitzgerald



An open letter is now circulating, in English, French, and Arabic, in support of Tariq Ramadan, who has been under investigation for nearly five months, and has just been charged in Paris with raping two Muslim women. It is a remarkable letter, obtuse and indecent, and deserves to be better known. So far, 27,000 of his admirers have signed it.

Tariq Ramadan: Full Support

This open letter expresses our full support for Professor Tariq Ramadan. It also explains the reasons that underlie it.

Over and above the presumption of innocence to which Tariq Ramadan, like everyone else, is entitled, we support him because such a stance is dictated by our religious and/or ethical principles.

It is unthinkable that we withdraw our esteem and our confidence following accusations that are highly questionable at best.

Why should Muslims not “withdraw” their “esteem” for, and “confidence” in, Ramadan, given the many charges, by eight women (not all of them as yet made public), against him? Are we never to have or express an opinion about someone accused of a crime until a court finally decides? And is even that the end of the matter? How many people think, despite the verdict of the court, that O.J. Simpson was indeed guilty of killing two people?

Ramadan may be “innocent until proven guilty” in a court of law, but in the court of public opinion, there is no need for such a presumption. We are entitled to voice our opinions, as long as they are sufficiently grounded in the evidence available so far. It is up to us to present the evidence in our possession to support those opinions.

What justifies the signers of this petition calling the accusations “highly questionable at best”? The accusers were, and remain, Muslims. They were not out to “get Islam.” Far from it, they were self-described admirers of Ramadan as a “Muslim intellectual” who was especially interested in Islamic “ethics and morality.” Indeed, it is only because they were such admirers that they accepted his invitation to “continue their discussion” in his hotel room, which is where, they testified, he suddenly turned before their eyes into a sexual predator, capable of great violence, blackmail, even physical threats to their children. They identified a small scar on Ramadan’s groin that they could only have known about had he lowered or removed his pants. There is not the slightest suggestion that these accusers knew each other, and the similarity of the details in their stories tends to confirm their truth.

In the light of the principle of universal justice, such an attitude would be profoundly unjust and by its very nature, must be rejected.

We express our support for Professor Ramadan because we, like most people, have seen that the accusations leveled against him are now being treated by a section of the French political and media establishment as guilty verdicts.

So the “support” for Ramadan – Professor Ramadan – is based not on exculpatory evidence, but on a desire to defend him, Islam’s champion, at all costs. It’s not the contents, or the plausibility, or the evidence in support, of the accusations made against Ramadan that matter to the open letter’s signatories. They see themselves, instead, as offering “balance.” If some “section of the French political and media establishment” treat the “accusations” as “guilty verdicts” (not a single example is adduced in support of this charge), then it is up to his supporters to do the opposite, to dismiss those accusations altogether, simply because of how they are being used in a supposed campaign to blacken the name of Tariq Ramadan. And thus the signatories even characterize those who have the moral decency to take the accusations seriously as merely forming part of a plot, decades old, to “demonize” Tariq Ramadan. At least in this open letter they refrained from mentioning, as some of Ramadan’s supporters have been doing online, a “Zionist plot.”

The same accusations are part of an ongoing campaign that has attempted to demonize him ever since the beginning of his involvement as an intellectual and an activist in the early 1990s.

We are here being asked to believe that these accusations – in Paris, all the accusations came from Muslim women – are part of a “campaign to demonize him.” While not named, “Zionist plotters” have previously been mentioned online by Ramadan’s

supporters. Perhaps they deemed the charge too blatantly antisemitic to include in their “open letter.”

Professor Ramadan and his ideas have never left people indifferent. But instead of confronting him in open debate, his ideological and political opponents have unfailingly used the most underhanded methods to discredit him as a Muslim intellectual and to discredit his thought. This is why we—who see Tariq Ramadan’s struggle as our own—here reiterate our outright rejection of attempts to vilify him. These attempts will in no way lessen our respect for him nor the pertinence of his ideas in our eyes.

How have his “ideological and political opponents...unfailingly used the most underhanded methods to discredit him as a Muslim intellectual”? What “underhanded methods” are those? Many of his opponents, in and out of debate, have included examples of the taqiyya he practices. One well-known example came up in his debate with Nicholas Sarkozy, when Ramadan was repeatedly asked to denounce the stoning to death of adulterers. He repeatedly slithered away from doing so, suggesting only that there be a temporary moratorium on the practice, while the matter continued to be debated. Thus did Ramadan manage to suggest his own opposition to stoning to death for adulterers, when in fact he was insistent in not ending the practice of stoning for adultery. He did not say, during that debate, as he might so easily have, that “it is my personal hope that the debate among Muslims will lead to the practice being done away with.”

Was it “underhanded” of Paul Berman to discuss Ramadan’s invocation of “Islamic biology” – meaning his defense of Islam’s rejection of evolution? Isn’t that a legitimate topic? When Brian Lehrer tried to get Ramadan to discuss “Islamic biology” on a talk show, Ramadan instantly changed the subject, a tactic he frequently uses. For examples of this changing-the-subject technique, simply search for “Tariq

Ramadan debate” at YouTube, and view any number of examples of Ramadan quickly “changing the subject” so as not to have to discuss aspects of Islam that he knows non-Muslims find disturbing.

“Instead of confronting him in open debate”? Actually a great many people have been eager to “confront him in open debate.” Among those who have engaged in very public – televised – debates with Tariq Ramadan are Nicholas Sarkozy, Ibn Warraq, Christopher Hitchens, Douglas Murray, Maryam Namazie, Alain Finkelkraut, Alain Minc, Richard Dawkins, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. And while I know of no one who has tried to avoid debating Tariq Ramadan, it is Ramadan himself who has sometimes avoided debating an opponent he deemed too formidable. He backed out of a scheduled debate with Hitchens in 2007 (Hitchens did manage, finally, to arrange a debate with Ramadan in 2011). Most significantly, Ramadan has repeatedly ignored Robert Spencer’s challenge to join him in an “open debate,” a challenge that was first made to Ramadan [compiled by Robert Spencer](#)), which qualify him not as an “intellectual” at all but rather, as Spencer suggests, a writer of Hallmark-card sentiments.

Judge for yourself: (errors of punctuation, spacing, etc. are all in Ramadan’s original)

We must learn that our encounters like our separations are acts of initiation:we can love wht 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.

Reading these, you'd have to have a heart of stone not to weep tears of laughter. Can anyone put out this fluff and expect to be taken seriously? Yes, Tariq Ramadan can. Because he is taken seriously. He has two million Facebook friends. He has 200,000 people who follow him on Twitter. He's "Europe's leading Muslim intellectual" and don't you forget it.

Finally, we feel it imperative to publicly express our support for Professor Ramadan, in the name of a cause that transcends his person.

Having attacked others for not withholding judgment, the authors of this open letter go right ahead and do the same, except they have concluded, without the slightest evidence, the very opposite: that he must be innocent, "in the name of a cause that transcends his person."

And what "cause" is that? It must surely be the cause of

Islam, of which Ramadan has been a tireless and slippery defender. The signers of this letter of support refuse to believe that his accusers, many of them Muslim, could possibly be anything other than members of a plot to “demonize” Ramadan. To attack Ramadan is, in their view, to attack all Muslims, to attack Islam itself.

The Open Letter continues:

In full solidarity with the efforts of those women who denounce the culture of rape that has festered in the heart of our societies, we cannot close our eyes to the risks inherent in the extreme solutions that some representatives of the feminist movement would have us accept.

To insist that police forces accept the word of presumptive victims and to demand that the legal system treat these individuals justly and with an open mind is one thing.

To treat their accusations as truth with no regard for their merit is something else entirely.

But that’s the whole point of the last four months – that the French system of criminal justice did not “treat their [the women who accused Ramadan] accusations as truth,” but took its time to investigate their likely truth or falsehood, and even now have not completed their inquiries.

To transform such accusations into public condemnations that destroy reputations, careers and the right of citizens to participate in religious and civic life is more than we can accept.

We call upon all intellectuals and activists (women in particular) of all political and religious persuasions to join a sincere and urgent debate on this vital question.

Pursued with rigor and courage, any form of collective involvement must take into account both the grievances of the

presumed victims and the possibility of false or slanderous accusations.

The first accusation of sexual violence and rape by Tariq Ramadan was made in October 2017. It was made by a woman who is herself a Muslim, a former Salafist, who had been a great admirer of Ramadan herself, until – once she had entered his hotel room – he turned into a “monster” and, among other forced indecencies, raped her. Another woman, also a Muslim, with “a disability in her legs,” then came forward to accuse Ramadan of rape as well. Two other women in Paris, who have not yet decided to make their identities public, are known to have accused Ramadan of sexual assaults as well. And then there are the four women in Geneva, not part of the French investigation, who have accused Ramadan of sexually molesting them when he was their teacher in a high school, and they were all underage, that is between 14 and 18. That testimony ought at least to have given signatories of the Open Letter pause.

Far from having their “accusations” treated as truth, his French accusers have had to undergo four months of waiting while the evidence was sifted, and only after all that, was he finally placed in custody on January 31, put under investigation on February 2, and then, on February 6, finally placed in jail, where he may be held in “provisional detention” for up to a year. Apparently the judge had taken into account the interests of his accusers, who might more easily have been subject to threats from Ramadan and his followers were he still free, and the concern as well that Ramadan might escape possible punishment, given his clique of loyal followers, by fleeing France.

The signers of the letter can hardly claim, after four months, there has been a rush to judgment. As for the merit of the accusations, if four women in Paris, none of whom knew each other, and all of whom were Muslims, came forward with similar stories of how they met Ramadan, then were lured to his hotel

room, where they were similarly subject to his violent sexual behavior, that does not amount to an unfair campaign to “destroy” his reputation – any more than happens with anyone accused of any crime. What should have happened? Did Tariq Ramadan deserve to be uniquely favored, without his name ever being made public, unlike every other person accused of a crime? On what possible theory?

And if these accusations have damaged his reputation, so what? Should the accusations never have been made? What is unjust about the treatment of Ramadan by the French authorities so far?

One has the feeling that his loyal followers believe that his Muslim accusers have somehow let Ramadan, and Islam itself, down, by accusing this “leading Muslim intellectual” of such acts. Couldn’t those women have let it all drop, they must surely be thinking, instead of harming this paladin of Islam who deserves to be protected by other Muslims?

The signers of this letter live in a fantasy world. You can imagine how they view the whole Ramadan business. They believe that the enemies of Islam were constantly bested in debate by Ramadan (go to YouTube and judge for yourself who came out ahead) and had to find another way to neutralize him, by having him face trumped-up charges of sexual violence and rape. Of course such charges, in their view, were absurd. Why would Tariq Ramadan, handsome, charming, and suave, ever need to sexually assault anyone, when after every public appearance he no doubt has to be fighting off the girls off? No doubt Ramadan’s lawyers will be making the same argument.

And they have an explanation for everything. The reason that these women’s stories were so similar, his defenders will claim, is that they had been supplied by those manipulating them with essentially the same script, though containing just enough variation to allay any suspicions. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Ibn Warraq, Alain Finkielkraut and a dozen other islamophobes

could not bring him down in argument – Ramadan's complete command of the subject of Islam, his impeccable logic, his masterful deployment of all the arts of rhetoric (remember, they live in a fantasy world) proved too formidable. But his enemies obviously managed to find a handful of women who were willing – who knows how much they were offered? – to make outrageous accusations that Ramadan has denounced, but nonetheless, the Western media has pounced on those charges, and made a melodrama of them, and made it hard for Ramadan's calm voice of reason to be heard over the islamophobic din. Henda Ayari's own sister-in-law posted an unflattering description of her – surely that should be sufficient to completely vitiate the value of Ayari's testimony against Ramadan, and those who want justice for Tariq Ramadan should demand that the other seven women who have made charges against him, charges suspiciously similar to those made by Ayari, should now be thoroughly investigated themselves. Who is really behind these accusations? And in the current cruel anti-Muslim climate, what justice can Ramadan at this point expect from the French judicial system?

The non-stop nonsense I've offered in the previous two paragraphs is an attempt to get inside the minds of those who, no matter what evidence is presented, are going to unswervingly support Tariq Ramadan, and who may even be among the 27,000 who so far have signed that Open Letter of unconditional support. If you are one of those who believes he is innocent even if "proven guilty" – well, I'm afraid you're beyond all help, and I'm sorry. But perhaps you can take consolation from Europe's – possibly the world's – "leading Muslim intellectual," Tariq Ramadan himself, and his words of wisdom:

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!

First published in