

Freedom of expression : those who deserve it... and those who don't - From Salman Rushdie to Julian Assange

Sunday 14 August 2022, by [HELIE LUCAS Marieme](#) (Date first published: 12 August 2022).

Not everyone is equally eligible to enjoying freedom of expression. This is, at least, what one could deduce from the unequal support met by victims of censorship - death penalty being the ultimate step of censorship.

It is with great relief that we witnessed the general support for Salman Rushdie yesterday, after his attempted assassination and while we still don't know whether he will survive (and, if he does, in which condition he will be).

However, this will not erase my memories of many of our friends refusing to support him at the time of the first fatwa calling for his murder - 14.02.89 - after his novel (*The Satanic Verses*) was published. The reasons these friends invoked then are exactly similar to those we became, alas, accustomed to: from: he deserved it, he looked for it (as with *Charlie Hebdo's* cartoonists), to: he is not even a good writer (as if the bad ones should be left to rot - a justification which left me speechless, when invoked at the time by progressive intellectuals and feminist Pakistani friends to justify their refusal to speak up for Rushdie).

I also deeply appreciate the fact that beyond the protests directly concerning Rushdie himself and yesterday's event, were commemorated the translators, editors and publishers who participated in giving Rushdie's book an international audience and who for this reason were slaughtered by Nazis-fundamentalist-book burners. [[1](#)]

No, Rushdie did not always enjoy the favor of progressives nor of international human rights organizations. I am happy he finally got it some years ago.

However, there are other Rushdies presently persecuted for similar reasons, they do not enjoy any more than Rushdie did in his early years as a persecuted writer the unconditional support and protection human rights people - individuals and organizations alike- claim to hold dear to their hearts: neither the brave *Charlie Hebdo's* cartoonists, not the secularist teacher Samuel Paty (to name only two internationally well known recent cases) benefitted from it; as hypocritical people still said, in the final analysis, they deserved it, they looked for it... Listen to Rushdie himself [[2](#)], explaining why, when one tells him : 'I believe in freedom of speech but...', he just stops listening...

Today, publisher Julian Assange is vilified, submitted to psychological torture in prison isolation, threatened with life imprisonment in the USA for having made public some of the war crimes committed by the very same United States which since yesterday howls about the attempted assassination on Rushdie. Would you believe it? Some do-gooders even pretend that Assange deserved it, that he looked for it.

Could it be that the international context makes it more acceptable to criminalize Iran rather the

United States of America?

Defending free speech is never – never – free from politics (as international human rights organizations pretend to be), and we should be permanently prepared to denounce the political instrumentalization of human rights in general and of freedom of expression in particular.

Yes indeed, today, some writers, publishers, editors, translators, etc.. are still seen as more 'deserving' than others regarding their access to freedom of expression. Rushdie victoriously passed the line some years ago. It was a long wait. With his support and in his name, during this momentum when there is a consensus about Rushdie's full right to freedom of expression, let's make sure others do not languish for too long into a human rights' purgatory.

12.08.22

Marieme Helie Lucas

P.S.

- Siawi. Sunday 14 August 2022
<https://www.siawi.org/spip.php?article29212>
 - Translated from French by Marieme Helie Lucas
-

Footnotes

- [1] See: <https://shuddhashar.com/shuddhashar-condemns-attack-on-salman-rushdie/>
- [2] <https://www.siawi.org/spip.php?article29210>