

# That Monster Tariq Ramadan and His Degringolade

by Hugh Fitzgerald



“It’s not just about sexual violence. For some students it’s just another way for Europeans to gang up against a prominent Muslim intellectual. We must protect Muslim students who believe and trust in him, and protect that trust.”

The statement by Eugene Rogan, director of the Middle East Centre at Oxford, explaining a few weeks ago his initial decision to allow Tariq Ramadan to continue teaching at Oxford, after the first set of his female accusers came forward, charging Ramadan with extreme violence, sexual assault, and rape, was an extraordinary example of moral confusion.

To be clear about the timeline of the cascading charges made

against Tariq Ramadan: when Eugene Rogan made his fatuous remarks about Ramadan in early October, he did not know that in addition to the four women in Paris who have accused Ramadan of sexual violence and rape, three of whom have gone public (the fourth is still considering it), four other women would come forward in Geneva, where Ramadan taught at a high school in the 1980s and 1990s, to accuse him of seducing them when they were his trusting pupils, aged between 14 and 18.

But Rogan already had enough information to justify limiting Ramadan's one-on-one interactions with female students. The women in Paris who have publicly charged Ramadan with extreme violence and rape are all Muslims. Far from being "Europeans" who chose to "gang up against a prominent Muslim intellectual," a belief that Rogan ascribed to "some [Muslim] students," there was no "gang-up." The women came forward, obviously with palpable fear, and only dared to do so years after the sexual violence and rapes, for they had been frightened by the threats Ramadan made, that "if they dared say anything" about what he had done, harm could come to them. He threatened to blackmail one victim with compromising photos he possessed. For another victim, Henda Ayari, he made physical threats not just to her but, even more terrifying, threatened to harm her children. The wanton violence he inflicted on them gave them every reason to believe that he would carry out such threats. Henda Ayari was the first to break through her own carapace of fear, and then the other women followed. Indeed, her revelation about Ramadan came in two stages. First, she described in detail Tariq Ramadan's behavior, a man whom she had so admired, once she was alone with him in his hotel room, in her book *I Chose To Be Free*. But in the book, she called him by the alias "Zoubeyr":

*"This man, Zoubeyr, transformed before my very eyes into a vile, vulgar, aggressive being – physically and verbally," she wrote. "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."*

These statements, and others from Henda Ayari, 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 tell anyone.

His other victims also described Ramadan as violent and threatening.

*Mr Ramadan is also accused of raping another woman in a hotel room in 2009. The unnamed 42-year-old, who is reported to have disability in her legs, said on Friday that the professor had subjected her to a terrifying and violent sexual assault.*

*A third complainant, identified as Yasmina, told Le Parisien in an interview on Saturday that Mr Ramadan sexually harassed her in 2014 and blackmailed her for sexual favors.*

*There is still a fourth woman, a Belgian known as Sarah, who is apparently thinking of filing a complaint, according to the RTBF radio network. In a testimony about her relationship with Mr Ramadan, she said she was scared for her life. "He can be very, very violent, grabbing you very violently, expecting from you any sexual practice and demanding it aggressively enough, and then it comes down again, but these*

*moments are very difficult to live.”*

The same extreme physical violence, including grabbing and choking, the same threats, the same aggressive and humiliating sexual demands, including rape – his modus operandi appears to have always been the same.

But as we have seen, these were all Muslim women, not “Europeans” with a score to settle against Islam, nor did they “gang up” on Ramadan, but only with difficulty managed to summon up the courage to denounce this powerful monster, who with his connections and ability to tap the limitless wealth of his Muslim admirers to pay for the best lawyers, will certainly do all he can to blacken their names to brazenly deny everything, and even to sue for libel.

What finally pushed his first accuser, Henda Ayari, to go public was what happened after the revelations about Harvey Weinstein, with women everywhere complaining about sexual aggressors, and naming names in Europe (with #balancetonporc) as in America (with #metoo). The three other women were no doubt inspired by Ayari’s bravery to reveal what Ramadan had done to them, but there was no “gang up.” Nor was there, as Ramadan’s supporters have been ludicrously claiming, a “Zionist plot” to go after him.

On hearing of the charges of rape against Ramadan, Bernard Godard, an Islamic expert, known as the “Monsieur Islam” at the French Ministry of the Interior, where he served from 1997 to 2014, told the French magazine L’Obs that while “he [Ramadan] had many mistresses, that he consulted sites, that girls were brought to the hotel at the end of his lectures, that he invited them to undress, that some resisted and that he could become violent and aggressive yes, but I have never heard of rapes, I am stunned.”

Surely it is we who should be stunned at the apparent willingness of the French government to protect Tariq

Ramadan's public image from being sullied, even though everyone advised by "Monsieur Islam" knew for years that Ramadan was a sexual predator, with multiple mistresses, a penchant for prostitutes (ordered up from those "sites" he consulted), and girls [groupies] "brought to the hotel" after his lectures, as a kind of extra honorarium, and if those girls resisted, "he could become violent and aggressive." Why did the French government allow this to go on? Why did it not investigate to find out more about Ramadan's behavior? Why did Monsieur Godard claim to be "stunned" by the charges of rape when everything he admits he did know about Ramadan surely points ineluctably in that direction?

When Eugene Rogan made his first bizarre remarks about "protecting Muslim students who believe and trust" in Ramadan – by not disciplining or limiting him in any way – Ramadan had already been accused of monstrous behavior, including extreme violence and rape, by three Muslim women (and a fourth was considering whether to go public). Each of his attackers independently described being the victim of similar behavior – the same kind of demands, the same kind of extreme violence, the same threats to ensure that they keep quiet. He has not yet been tried, but everything we, and Eugene Rogan, had learned about him, including the revelations of Monsieur Godard, make those charges most plausible.

Let's repeat Rogan's words;

*"It's not just about sexual violence. For some students it's just another way for Europeans to gang up against a prominent Muslim intellectual. We must protect Muslim students who believe and trust in him, and protect that trust."*

Actually, it is just about sexual violence, which four women charged was inflicted by Ramadan on them, and the way those charges of sexual violence against Ramadan were initially handled at Oxford's Middle East Centre. Eugene Rogan, the

director of that Centre, deflected attention away from the charges made, and focused on the harmful effect of these charges on his Muslim students because of their extreme sensitivity to any possible unfair treatment of Tariq Ramadan: “for some students it’s just another way for Europeans to gang up against a prominent Muslim intellectual.”

Since those who in Paris initially charged Ramadan are all Muslim women who came forward with great hesitation, and since there is no evidence of a “gang-up” by “Europeans,” Rogan had a duty not to endorse such a claim by Muslim students – if indeed such a claim was ever made (which now seems doubtful) – but to refute it. What he should have said is this: “Some students, supporters of Tariq Ramadan, claim that the very serious charges made against him are part of a campaign by ‘Europeans’ to ‘gang up against a prominent Muslim intellectual.’ I can assure them that not a scintilla of evidence exists of such a campaign, that these are serious charges, made by Muslim women, against Professor Ramadan, with no hint of collusion among them. We have a duty to ensure the safety of all of our students, and not to ask them to endure conditions where they might be afraid. As head of the Middle East Centre, I, of course, will treat Professor Ramadan exactly as I would treat a non-Muslim faculty member facing the same charges. That is, I have relieved Professor Ramadan of his tutorial and supervisory duties of female students and all other teaching duties.”

Rogan went on to say that we [in Oxford] need to “protect Muslim students” who “believe and trust in him [Ramadan], we need to “protect that trust.” So apparently Oxford has a duty to reassure Muslim students who believe in him, to “protect [their] trust” in Tariq Ramadan. Why? Why should Oxford want to “protect the trust” of students in a man whom, if we are to believe the growing number of his accusers (now up to four in Paris, and four in Geneva), betrayed the trust of many? He betrayed the trust of the Muslim women in Paris who so admired

him, and whom he had invited back to his hotel room, ostensibly to talk more about the morality of Islam, his abiding theme, and once they were there he subjected them, they all claim in similar accounts, to extreme sexual violence and rape. He apparently betrayed too, the trust of pupils in their teacher, for a day after Rogan spoke, other charges against Ramadan surfaced, as those four women in Geneva told the Journal de Geneve that when Ramadan was their teacher at a high school in the 1980s and 1990s, he seduced them.

Once the news from Geneva had come out, Eugene Rogan ought to have himself acknowledged the new charges, and continued his remarks above with something like this: "The new claims made against Professor Ramadan, that he seduced four underage girls who were his pupils, has led me to reconsider the issue of trust. We now have eight women who have come forward; those who were older at the time of their encounters with Ramadan claim violent assault and rape, while those who were underage recall his serial seductions. All of the women vividly remember Ramadan's violent outbursts. Several of the women have mentioned not just the sexual violence, but have referred to the threats he made to them should they ever tell anyone. Given all that, I have decided to suspend Professor Ramadan from all of his duties, and I am recommending that he take a leave of absence until these charges are dealt with in a court of law." But of course he did not.

Instead, it was Oxford itself, the institution, that asked Professor Ramadan to take a "leave of absence." It was, to save Ramadan's face, described as "by mutual agreement." It was nothing of the sort: Oxford could not, after the revelations about his behavior with four underage girls, keep him on. Here is how Oxford officialese put it:

*"The University has consistently acknowledged the gravity of the allegations against Professor Ramadan, while emphasising the importance of fairness and the principles of justice and due process."*

Oxford did not “consistently” acknowledge the gravity of the allegations against Tariq Ramadan. The initial reaction, by the director of the Middle East Centre, was not even to mention the allegations, but to come to Ramadan’s defense. Rogan refused at first even to limit Ramadan’s teaching duties with female students, lest it be taken as a sign of “mistrust.”

If a non-Muslim professor at Oxford were accused by several women of rape and sexual violence, would that professor be allowed to continue to teach until a trial and a verdict? There is a presumption of innocence in the legal system, but outside that system, common sense should be used to determine when it is reasonable to limit the encounters of those who have been charged with sexual crimes. These were not trivial charges against Ramadan.

Given these charges, and the picture they paint of Ramadan, his students, especially his female students, deserved not to have to endure either the attentions or even the louche presence of Tariq Ramadan, especially in those one-on-one tutorials. We already know what he is like, even without these rape charges, from Monsieur Godard’s testimony, which confirms that the French officials have long been aware of his violent behavior with women, but chose to keep quiet. Indeed, far from going after Tariq Ramadan, the French government has seemed eager to protect him, and keep such information from the public. One reason might be that Ramadan is a friend of the ruler of Qatar, who paid for his chair as the H.H. Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies and Senior Research Fellow at St Antony’s College. Qatar has invested nearly \$25 billion in France, and the French government would not wish to damage its relations with Sheikh Hamad.

Another reason why the French government actually protected Ramadan by not revealing what it knew about his unsavory behavior with women was the continued dreamy belief of some in



the West that Ramadan really is what he keeps claiming to be, that is a voice for a reforming and “moderate” Islam, and that the government needed to keep quiet about his appalling sexual behavior.

When Eugene Rogan claimed that “We [Oxford University] must protect Muslim students who believe and trust in him, and protect that trust” he had things topsy-turvy. How were Muslim students, those who Rogan claims “believe and trust in him,” helped by having their belief and trust in Ramadan undeservedly reinforced by the refusal of Rogan and others at Oxford to relieve Ramadan of his teaching duties? Oxford has a duty, not to reinforce “trust” in someone who is clearly eminently untrustworthy, but to make a judgment as to the likelihood of his presence endangering students. In recognizing that, given the many victims, the similarity of the details in their charges of sexual violence and of rape, it would have been prudent, after the first revelations, to at least not have Ramadan continuing to meet, as he had been doing as a tutor and supervisor, with female students one-on-one. The students need to “trust” not Ramadan, but those who should be protecting them from Ramadan. Not to bar him was, at that point, a dereliction of duty on Oxford’s part.

Eugene Rogan described the Muslim students “who believe and trust in him [Ramadan]” and claimed he needed to “protect that trust.” Is this even true? All the reports from the Middle East Centre describe students who are anxious and angry not about false charges being made against Ramadan but, rather, about the fact that Ramadan was being allowed to continue teaching, and they were further disturbed that he could be seen laughing with his colleagues. Not a single student was described as coming to Ramadan’s defense; many were critical of how the university, that is, Eugene Rogan, had handled this matter after the first charges were made public. The student newspaper, *The Cherwell*, reported that “students at the Middle East Centre have reacted in anger to the University’s response

to the mounting accusations of rape against Islamic professor Tariq Ramadan, accusing senior figures of acting 'as if nothing had happened.' In response to requests from students, senior figures in the faculty held a meeting on Tuesday to address implications for student welfare arising from the allegations. At the meeting, held at St Antony's College, several students expressed anger at the 'lack of communication' from the University, claiming they had heard of the allegations by 'word of mouth' without any acknowledgement from the department." In other words, Eugene Rogan was ascribing to students views that were the very opposite of those they held.

Could it be that Eugene Rogan was initially afraid to limit Ramadan's encounters with students in any way because he could already imagine Ramadan and his supporters turning on him and accusing him of "Islamophobia"? Or could Rogan, as director of the Centre, have been worried about offending that big donor to the Middle East Centre and friend of Ramadan, H.R.H. Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani? Both are possible. Neither is a reason to which Rogan could admit. Far better to pretend that in refusing to limit Ramadan's meetings with female students, Rogan simply wanted to support the Muslim students in their own mental distress at Ramadan's possible mistreatment. (Remember, students were reported to be angry, but only at the way the Centre's director was refusing to discipline Ramadan or to curtail his teaching duties). There was no need for Rogan to explain that he was fearful that Ramadan might turn on him, or that Sheikh Al-Thani, who has already given the Middle East Centre \$11 million and put Ramadan in the named chair he endowed, might stop funding the Centre if Ramadan complained of being mistreated.

But let's now turn again to the second wave of scandal involving Tariq Ramadan, which came from the Tribune de Geneve. That respected newspaper conducted its own investigation and found that Ramadan, who taught in a high

school in Geneva in the 1980s and 1990s, had seduced (in one case not succeeding) four of his underage pupils, who were willing to talk about it on the record (one can just imagine how many others, quite understandably, may still be unwilling to come forward). Here is what the paper reported:

*One, known as Sandra, was 15 when Mr Ramadan made advances towards her. She said he told her: "I feel close to you. You are mature. You are special. I am surrounded by many people but I feel lonely." She started spending time with him outside of school, and "two or three times we had intimate relationships. At the back of his car." She added: "He said it was our secret."*

*Another, Lea, said she was 14 years old when the teacher approached her during a trip. "He put my hand on my mouth telling me he knew I was thinking about him in the evening before falling asleep. Which was wrong. It was manipulation. He said he thought of me but he was married."*

*In her case, she says nothing physical happened. **She described him as a "crooked, intimidating man who used perverse relational ploys and abused the trust of his students. There was such an impression [pressure] on us."***

*A third woman, known as Agathe, was 18 and described being "captivated by the speech of this charismatic teacher." She said Mr Ramadan invited her for a coffee outside of school, "and then I had sex with him. He was married and a father. This happened three times, especially in his car. **It was consented but very violent. I had bruises all over my body.**"*

*Agathe says the scholar[!] threatened her and demanded she tell no one about the encounters. "It was an abuse of power, pure and simple."*

*The fourth woman, Claire, was 17 when the pair started a relationship and 18 when they first had intercourse. "I was fascinated, under his control. He took me, threw me [around],*

*established a relationship of dependence.”*

*None of these incidents was made public before now, with **one of the women expressing feelings of “disgust” and “shame” which made her stay quiet.***

How many more non-Muslim women in Geneva remain too “disgusted” and “ashamed” for what they allowed themselves to endure as schoolgirls from their respected “‘prof” Tariq Ramadan to come forward even now? How many more Muslim women in Paris, who were admirers of the famous “scholar” Tariq Ramadan – Robert Spencer has described Ramadan’s Hallmark-card bromides masquerading as profundities [here](#) – were invited to discuss further the subject of Islam in his hotel room, but were choked, beaten, raped, and then threatened if they were ever to report him? Eight have come forward, submitting to various degrees of publicity, but how many, in both Paris and Geneva, will never come forward, out of shame, disgust, horror, a desire not to reveal such humiliating events to a husband or children? Yet there is always the possibility that more women, in Geneva, in Paris, possibly in Oxford itself (surely he would have taken advantage of students there, if he thought he could get away with it), will step forward. A permanent sword of Damocles hangs over the head of the once seemingly invulnerable Tariq Ramadan. No one deserves it more.

And what about Eugene Rogan? By now everyone, and not just at the Oxford Middle East Centre, knows about Ramadan and the latest chapter in the unfolding scandal of those underage girls in Geneva. The students at the Middle East Centre would not be able to control their fury at the pusillanimity of Rogan and his colleagues, were they at this point to have allowed Tariq Ramadan to remain at his post. The accusations about Ramadan’s sexual exploitation of underage girls crossed a line that even Rogan could not ignore. At this point, the whole Ramadan affair has received worldwide coverage, and is no longer a matter for the Middle East Centre alone. It was

the University of Oxford that demanded that Tariq Ramadan take a "leave of absence" until his problems with the law, both in Paris and Geneva, are cleared up. Face-savily for Ramadan, Oxford declared it was "by mutual agreement." But he "will not be present at the university or college."

It's hard to see how even Ramadan, who has been so adept at shedding his snake-skins, can recover from this. In the past, Ramadan always managed to overcome setbacks. Soft-spoken and sinister, he puts one in mind of the figure of Treachery in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale": "the smiler with the knyfe under the cloke." He was given an appointment at the University of Leiden, but after he was accused of being a "radical Islamist" and a "wolf in sheep's clothing," he did not take it up. Ramadan landed on his feet, by then being made a guest professor of Identity and Citizenship at Erasmus University and for the city of Rotterdam. He was again dismissed, this time by both the City of Rotterdam and Erasmus University, from his positions as "integration adviser" and professor, because both the university and the city's leaders felt that the program he hosted on Iran's Press TV, *Islam & Life*, was "irreconcilable" with his duties in Rotterdam. A book about his forked tongue, his defense of the Muslim Brotherhood, and his refusal to condemn outright such Islamic punishments as the stoning of women to death for adultery, and his ambiguous response when asked about the execution of apostates, Caroline Fourest's devastating *Frere Tariq*, did not prevent Ramadan from becoming a professor at Oxford's Middle East Centre, where he was given a chair named, and paid for, by the ruler of Qatar. But now his past, with these many accusations that he is a violent sexual predator, seducing girls, brutally attacking women, has caught up with him.

He's being deserted by his former friends, who have not merely left him, but put out scathing messages. There is, for example, Stephane Lathion, a Swiss specialist in Islam who spent years accompanying Mr Ramadan on his trips across

Europe, who told the Tribune de Geneve that he had heard various rumors and suspicions about his former close associate's behavior over the years.

Lathion told the paper: "I'm not surprised to see testimonies coming from everywhere. Not only are the reported facts shocking, but they also reveal the discrepancy between his attitude and his discourse on a moralising Islam, which advocates sexual relations in the exclusive context of marriage."

He continued: "Tariq Ramadan is a predator who has abused his power as a teacher, preacher and intellectual to seduce women and girls, who have suffered."

After all that has been revealed, Tariq Ramadan may have run out of academic places willing to employ him, though there's always Qatar University in Doha, which no doubt would be happy to hire him as a "leading Muslim intellectual." But he may not get that chance. Judges in Paris and Geneva, who will soon be deciding his fate, may finally give Tariq Ramadan his just deserts. And it will have had nothing to do with Islam.

First published in