

CHAIR "HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE WRITER",

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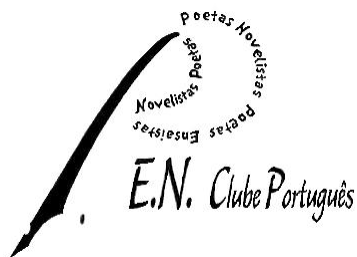
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Political power, freedom of expression and terrorism

Political power, freedom of expression and terrorism is a very complex triangle. Power, even democratic power (which is rare in our world), often tries to limit freedom of speech, and nowadays it has a new alibi: terrorism. It doesn't renounce to restrict (or even take over) power and freedom of expression, as it has been seen in our time in such various cases as the ones of Salman Rushdie with a book; Öhran Pamuk because of an interview; or even a propos of some cartoons about Muhammad, all reveal the same international phenomenon. And the freedom of speech of writers, journalists, artists, comedians, political and social activists and many other citizens is also threatened; sometimes by terrorism, sometimes by the State, and sometimes by both.

If a number of religious groups establish repression and terror in some places, there are also other religious groups that are not allowed to exercise or manifest their beliefs, repressed either by the political power, or by other belief systems (including religious ones). As La Palisse could have said, neither power, nor terrorism, nor freethinking renounce being what each one is and stands for. Is there a solution for this problem? Well, it's our job to find it. First, everyone needs to know clearly on which side he stands, and to defend the democratic liberties in his own country as well as internationally.

Freedom of expression, like any other freedom, is not unlimited, but it cannot be restricted at the expenses of human rights, globally acknowledged through a number of documents. Democracies cannot surrender to dictatorships in any of their essential values. And each should fight for the respect of all beliefs, but also for the rights of the ones that don't believe in anything. No religion, no atheism, no political force has the right of exclusivity. However, universal principles – like the right to life, education, free expression, no discrimination based on race or gender, the exercise of science and circulation of people and goods – must be secured by everyone who believes in them, against everyone who violates or thwarts them.



If a democratic state violates these rules for living in society, which have been conquered with so much difficulty and sacrifice in the course of several centuries, that infringement is even more serious than the violence employed by totalitarianism. The latter exercises its natural vocation, whereas the former works against itself and discredits its own official principles. As Benjamin Franklin has put it, “Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety.” (Or, if you prefer another impressive variant, “those who sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither and will lose both”).

Writers, journalists and members of other professional sectors and lines of thought (like jurists, politicians, philosophers and priests) have, in this part, a duty of information, enlightenment, vigilance and denunciation. In this context, the division between politics and ethics can be a fatal mistake for democracy.

Pragmatism and Realpolitik can be internal enemies, even when it appears that the war against terrorism entails renouncing to the values of liberty and truth. Torture is an extreme example of the perverse effects of practices that only illusorily have good intent. Of course, being exemplary (and most societies are far from that) isn't enough to keep the temptation of terrorism away from fanatics and criminals.

Security and its reinforcement through international cooperation must be a permanent concern. But only by keeping up the fight for free societies can we stop the expansion of violence and fanaticism.

Furthermore, the notion of terrorism should not be used arbitrarily to, with the pretext of fighting terrorists, suffocate legitimate socio-political identities and forces. Any coalition between democracies and dictatorships with the purpose of fighting an amalgam dubbed “terrorism” can actually reinforce the terror imposed by those same dictatorships to their own populations. Because it is clear that groups like al-Qaeda aren't the only form of terrorism. And in the fight against these, not all allies are the most suitable.

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