

In Memoriam: Daphne Caruana Galizia

Hope has always been a hard thing to hold, and it's getting ever harder. It's especially difficult in societies that only pretend to be democratic but are widely understood to be oligarchies in which governments can only expect to be elected if they demonstrate their willingness to serve commercial interests – and if they please the media moguls whose outlets propagandise for the rich. For those of us who care about freedom of speech and understand why the thinkers of the Enlightenment placed such a premium on it, it has recently been depressing to see the bad faith use of the concept, by employees of those media moguls, to dismiss criticism from those who suggest that they do not speak truth *to* power but tell lies *for* power.

In a climate in which politics and media collude to manufacture consent for the unjust system under which we live, whilst obscuring or eliding its actual workings, we need journalists like Daphne Caruana Galizia more than ever. Daphne understood that journalism should not spring from advocating a set of interests, or even a political party, but from a determination to expose corruption and stand against cruelty, no matter what the cost. That corruption and cruelty was endemic, as Daphne knew all too well: the policeman who arrested her at a protest against the Maltese government in 1982, when she was just 18, ended up becoming Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta for the “business-friendly” Labour Party, whose close relationships with domestic and international corporations she explored on her *Running Commentary* blog. This secured a bigger readership than the expensively financed mainstream press, and threats were posted in its comment section daily. That was the cheapest end of a coordinated campaign of intimidation, in which the public were encouraged to harass her, she was accused of making things up, her dog was killed, and her front door and then her house were set on fire.

None of this deterred Daphne – nor did the 47 libel suits she was facing at the end of her life. This came after she alleged that Egrant, a company based in a tax haven in Panama, was owned by the wife of Malta's Prime Minister, Joseph Muscat. She had been fearlessly investigating the links between the Maltese government and companies set up to manage assets abroad, as revealed in the Panama Papers. For that, she was killed. The method was a car bomb, set to go off as she went to the bank to get her account unfrozen after ministers filed vexatious lawsuits, five years ago this month. Daphne's life and death should remind us of the most fundamental principle regarding freedom of speech – that nobody should be killed, ever, for what they write – but also that the biggest threats to freedom of speech come from the top, made by people with wealth in positions of power, and even more so, of impunity.

Daphne's final written words were stark: “There are crooks everywhere you look. The situation is desperate.” There are, and it is. It's very fashionable for journalists to talk about polarisation now, between left and right – but Daphne's work reminds us the real divide is between rich and poor, and that you do not have to be aligned to a particular ideology or movement to point out how it is widening. It is incumbent on us, then, as writers and as citizens of a globalised society, to take up her principles and her stories, as 45 journalists in 15 countries have done. The trials against the corporate interests accused of ordering her assassination are ongoing, and it is easy to despair about how little consequence those exposed in the Panama Papers seem to have faced, and about how contemporary

governments tend to deal with scandals by insolently brazening them out, often abetted by a compliant media who minimise or ignore the issues. But protests against Daphne's murder, and the lack of official response, eventually deposed Joseph Muscat, and the best journalism can still provide impetus for mass movements against systemic corruption. That relies on us not to take the easiest or most lucrative paths through an industry, but to remember the ideals for which writers and artists of all sorts have fought for centuries: to ask who really holds power and *how*, and to tell the truth about it, no matter what it costs.

Juliet Jacques