

A FRIEND HAS LEFT US

Genovefa Etienne, Claude Moniquet, and the ESISC team

Last night journalist Marie-Rose Armesto, 46, passed away, succumbing to the cancer that she had tenaciously battled for several years. At such times, it is commonplace to say that words are powerless and cannot express how unfair and cruel life can be. Commonplace, but true. And unfortunately, these words are unable to take away any of the pain felt by her family, by her husband, journalist Jean-Pierre Martin, and by the many friends, including us, that she has left behind.

Marie-Rose Armesto was not “just” a journalist. She lent credibility to this profession by looking past appearances, by peering beyond reflected images, and by endeavouring to produce the most accurate descriptions of the populations whose paths she crossed, usually during periods of crisis or wartime, as she performed her duties as a leading reporter for the Belgian network RTL-TVI. She always appeared youthful as her journeys took her from Bosnia to Chechnya, not to mention Algeria, Rwanda, Somalia, and Afghanistan.

Although she looked fragile, Marie-Rose possessed extraordinary strength of character and deeply-rooted convictions. She was a committed woman, and she shared that commitment with Jean-Pierre Martin; the two of them were an intensely close couple. For Marie-Rose, human rights, democracy, and women’s rights were not hollow, empty concepts: she infused life into them. Throughout her career and in her life. These are the values that, for instance, led her to dare to challenge Fidel Castro in an interview and to mobilise her energy on behalf of disappeared Chilean citizens and victims of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and of genocide in Rwanda. These same values also drove her to fight not only terrorism, but also Islamism, and to adopt a position regarding the war in Iraq that contrasted sharply with the ridiculous vision displayed by too many of her colleagues.

Marie-Rose saw Islamism as a new type of Fascism – albeit one that is tolerated by our politicians and by too many well-meaning souls in the name of the “right to be different.” A type of Fascism that threatens to ruin “pro-integration” efforts, assault women’s rights at the very core of our societies, and encourage hatred of others. Her commitment never prevented her from being available to listen to others, to all others. Thus, nearly five years ago, she produced an impassioned testimonial on the radicalisation of a segment of Muslim youth in the form of a lengthy interview with Malika, the wife of one of the men who killed Commander Massoud. Although militant, she did not limit herself to purely journalistic work. Indeed, she also tried to help the young woman to escape the grip of the sphere of influence that had led her husband to commit murder. But in this she failed, which left her with a secret wound that she only revealed to those who were near and dear to her.

The foolishness and cowardice of those who show consideration for this hideous beast or pretend not to see it often enraged her. But it was a cold rage that did not detract one iota from her lucidity and that, on the contrary, gave her a new sense of courage in her struggle. Unfortunately, on the night of 22nd/23rd January 2007,

Marie-Rose lost the battle that she had valiantly waged against another hideous beast.

Last night was the first truly cold night of this grey winter. We see this as a symbol because when Marie-Rose departed this world, a little of its warmth, humanity, and solidarity also left us.

Today, we are mourning her loss. Tomorrow, her memory, left with Jean-Pierre and with all her friends, will serve as an additional motivation to continue her fight. The fight waged by all democratically-minded people.

ESISC offers its most heartfelt condolences to Marie-Rose's family.