

# What freedom of publishing for independent publishers?



Study initiated and coordinated by the International Alliance of independent publishers (2018-2019)

## Background

In 2014, 400 independent publishers from 45 countries declared, at the collective development of the [International declaration of independent publishers](#): “We must redouble our vigilance and creativity to overcome all forms of oppression of speech. The struggle against all forms of censorship (state, administrative, religious, economic and self-censorship) remains a priority issue”.

Since the creation of the Alliance, publishers – custodians of freedom of speech alongside journalists, authors, bloggers, booksellers, artists... – have been the whistleblowers on instances of censorship occurring in some countries. Over the past few years, we have noticed some new forms of attack on freedom of speech. In several contexts, pressures and limitations exercised on public speech are increasing. After the wave of freedom expected during the revolutions in the Arab world, the series of attacks in Africa, Europe, and in the Arab world, destabilised freedom of speech: a loss of sense, of bearings that brings us to question spaces of freedom, the reach of words and the power of the medium.

The freedom of publishing is a “category” of freedom of speech that can take different forms through various supports. The freedom of publishing pertains to the liberty to choose an author, to select or commission manuscripts, publish them, disseminate and distribute them, and put them on the market – all these activities are at the heart of publishers’ work. The threats to the freedom of publishing are precisely what the Alliance seeks to examine in this study.

In different geopolitical contexts, threatened by different censorship forms, the Alliance’s independent publishers are committed to circulate texts and ideas, to amplify voices, even if sometimes they are in minority, to participate in building critical thinking and emancipation. It is their responsibility, both professional and civic.

However, some are victims of direct censorship by their country’s public or religious authorities, or by some sections of public opinion (in Bangladesh, Turkey, Cameroun, Algeria, Iran, for example...), and are the target of violent attacks because of the ideas they defend.

Attacks against freedom of publishing also exist in the North, often in a more insidious manner (economic, media, legal...). In Quebec, the team of Écosociété publishing says: “The [case of \*Noir Canada\*](#) revealed an attempt to hijack publishing issues [*Noir Canada* is a book denouncing the Canadian mining companies’ activities in Africa, that was the subject of a lawsuit and of which sales are now banned following the legal procedures that mining companies have won]”.

## Objectives and format of the study

The Alliance thus conducts a study that will amplify independent publishers' voices, focusing on the following issues:

- What are the various attacks on freedom of speech faced by independent publishers in their countries?
- How does it manifest concretely in their daily profession?
- How do publishers resist, protect and defend their freedom of publishing? How do they curb censorship?
- Can we speak of a greater vulnerability of the publishing activities in their respective countries? Are there significant changes over the past few years?
- From the publishers' perspective, is there a limit to the freedom of publishing (and of speech)?

### Target audience:

This study targets professionals and the general public to present the other side of the story of some books, the various challenges independent publishers must overcome to make it into readers' hands; to speak and present censorship from their viewpoints, to raise awareness on insidious and less visible forms of censorship. While the risks associated with journalism are known from the general public, it is not the case with the ones experienced by publishers. The study will also be an advocacy "tool" used by publishers towards international institutions such as UNESCO.

### Provisional plan of the study:

*Introduction:* delimitation of the study's framework, definition of freedom to publish, methodology...

#### *Part 1/ Historical approach, by Jean-Yves Mollier*

A historical context will be written by Jean-Yves Mollier (academic expert in the history of publishing field), providing an overview of key moments in the history of censorship in the field of publishing, and the categories of censorship that have existed until today.

#### *Part 2/ Sociological approach, by Anne-Marie Voisard*

*Interviews:*

- Interviews with independent publishers (and in some cases authors) based on several types of censorship – a daily life in the work of a publisher in Tunisia, Iran, Cameroun, Algeria, etc. but also in Latin America, India, in European and North American countries. These interviews will highlight different types of censorship and different attacks against freedom of publishing, on several continents. They will also shed light on the ways in which publishers curb censorship.

*Analysis and summary:*

- The analysis will lead to a "typology" of censorships: based on publishers' experiences (interviews), and will also identify censorship categories, from the more direct censorship to the more insidious.

### Format and language of the study:

The study will be relatively short, between 150/200 pages (excluding historical approach, that will be approximately 50 pages), to be more accessible and impactful as possible. It will be written in French, and contributions from non-francophone publishers will be translated into French. A translation of the entire study in other languages (including in English) is not planned for the moment, for budget reasons.

The study will be published in a digital format, available in open and free access on the Alliance's website (see studies already published [here](#) or [here](#)), and that of partners and publishers member of the Alliance (should they agree), enabling an international diffusion.

### **Role of the Alliance:**

The Alliance is the publisher of the study, and will lead the coordination and monitoring processes; establish contacts between publishers and authors; ensure that the framework and calendar of the study be respected; and will be responsible, together with authors and its network of publishers and partners, of diffusing the study.

### **Methodology for the sociological part:**

- A questionnaire surveying the Alliance's independent publishers will be sent to publishers at the beginning of 2018;
- A series of in-depth interviews: corpus of 25 publishers minimum
- Focus groups to identify other issues that can be better raised through interaction, sharing and dialogue;
- A series of in-depth interviews with other professionals (including booksellers, librarians) and selected organisations, for complementary information.

### **Presentation of the authors of the study**

To select the author of this study (sociological section), the Alliance sent a call for proposals (see dissemination of the [call on the Alliance's website](#)), to objectively select the author of the sociological section of the study. Received proposals were examined based on selection criteria collectively developed by a selection committee, made of 10 people:

- A group of francophone publishers, members of the Alliance's working group on the Freedom of publishing: Isabelle Pivert (éditions du Sextant), Jutta Hepke (Vents d'ailleurs), Tinouche Nazmjou (Naakojaa)
- Serge D. Kouam, Cameroonian publisher, coordinator of the French-language network of the Alliance
- Jean-Yves Mollier, academic, co-author of the study
- Luc Pinhas, academic, and vice-president of the Alliance
- Hélène Kloeckner, president of the Alliance
- The three staff members of the Alliance

The proposal by Anne-Marie Voisard was unanimously selected, because of its proposed sociological approach, quality of the proposed analysis, its intercultural sensibility and her experience of censorship in the publishing house Ecosociété.

As for the historical section, it will be written by Jean-Yves Mollier, based on his previous books, his analysis and knowledge of the topic.

### **Jean-Yves Mollier**

Jean-Yves Mollier is lecturer at the [Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines](#) University. He is an expert of publishing history. His doctoral thesis in French literature focused on Noël Parfait (1978), and his State doctorate in History was dedicated to French political and cultural in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century (1986). He was director of the Centre for cultural history of contemporary societies from 1998 to 2005, and of the Doctoral school "Cultures, Organisations, Legislations" from 2005 and 2007, and of the Doctoral school "Cultures, Regulations, Institutions and Territories" from 2009 to 2015.[Extract from his presentation on Wikipedia]

[See the list of the books](#) he has authored, contributed to, edited or coordinated.

### **Anne-Marie Voisard**

Anne-Marie Voisard was responsible of legal affairs at Éditions Écosociété from 2008 to 2013, in the context of the 11 million of dollars libel suit instituted by Canadian gold corporations Barrick Gold and Banro Corporation, following the publication of the book *Noir Canada. Pillage, corruption et criminalité*

*en Afrique* (“*Black Canada. Pillaging, bribery, and criminality in Africa*”). She holds a MA on strategic lawsuits against public participation and legal repression of freedom of speech from the University of Montréal and has collaborated with several organisations and actors committed to defend civil and political freedoms. She also delivered several public talks on various issues linked to contemporary forms of censorship and the entanglements between law and freedom of speech. Lecturer at the Cégep de Saint-Laurent in Montreal, she is doing research in sociology at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales de Paris, since 2015. She has authored an essay on the legal mechanism as a means to exercise power, repression and censorship, to be published in 2018 on the occasion of the lawsuit against Écosociété, a censorship case that has undeniably marked the history of independent publishing in Canada.

### Framework of the study

The study will cover the following geographic zones: European, North America, Latin America, and Arab world, Africa, Asia. It will explore, through the interviews, different cases of censorship, leading to an analysis and typology of the various forms of censorship. The study will amplify publishers’ voices, and these interviews will constitute the primary sources of the study.

### Partnerships/ dissemination

The dissemination strategy of the study is being developed (dissemination partnerships with several organisations, associations, NGO working in the field of freedom to publish): this is a primary concern for the Alliance and authors.

### Preliminary calendar

- October 2017: first series of interviews in Paris and Frankfurt Book Fair
- January-June 2018: beginning of the study, Skype or face-to-face interviews, wherever possible
- February 2018: questionnaire sent to all members of the Alliance
- April-May 2018: publishers return completed questionnaires
- June 2018: first report based on survey and interviews
- July 2018 to May 2019: writing of study
- June-August 2019: editing work on study (proofreading, revisions, layout)
- September 2019: publication and diffusion of the study

For more information



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