

FREIHEIT DELUXE mit Jagoda Marinić

Arundhati Roy – Azadi. Freedom

Jagoda Marinić [00:00:01] Welcome to my podcast, Freedom Deluxe. My name is Jagoda Marinić. I'm a writer and op-ed columnist, and I'm leading you through the second series of 16 podcasts on questions of Freedom. In each season, I'm lucky to talk to one English speaking guest. In this season, my guest is Arundhati Roy. I have, like the rest of the world, admired her since her debut novel, „The God of Small Things“, for which she won the Booker Prize in 1997. Arundhati Roy is such a gifted novelist that it only took her two novels to show the vastness of the universe she inhabits through her language and imagination. Her second novel, „The Ministry of Utmost Happiness“, is again a work of great depth and complexity. And Roy also writes texts on politics and society, such as her latest book „Azadi. Freedom, Fascism and Fiction.“ She's a precise and incorruptible observer of our times of India, of activism, and mostly of those who do not make that much noise in these noisy times. She's the perfect guest to talk about freedom with an international focus, and I couldn't be happier to have her on my show. Welcome to Freedom Deluxe, Arundhati Roy.

Arundhati Roy [00:01:22] Thank you for inviting me to this, what you've promised to be a free ranging conversation. Yeah, I mean, it's interesting that the title of my new book of essays is somehow so related to the title of your podcast.

Jagoda Marinić [00:01:43] It's free ranging, yes, free floating thoughts exchange. But it's also the one thing that we do have is our guest brings a quote. And what have you brought us to the show to talk about freedom?

Arundhati Roy [00:01:57] Well, I guess, I mean, I should have brought a quote of someone else I like and admire. But, you know, oddly enough, this collection of mine called Azadi, which means „freedom“ in Urdu. So I thought I would just read the first paragraph of the introduction because it so resonates with the title of your podcast:

"While we were discussing the title of this book, my publisher in the United Kingdom, Simon Prosser, asked me what I thought when I thought of Azadi. I surprised myself by answering without a moment's hesitation: „A novel“. Because a novel gives a writer the freedom to be as complicated

as she wants, to move through world, languages and time, through societies, communities and politics. A novel can be endlessly complicated. Layered. A novel to me is freedom with responsibility. Real, unfettered Azadi - Freedom.

Jagoda Marinić [00:03:13] It's so good you brought that quote, because I would have brought it if you hadn't. Because it resonates so strongly and there's so many layers also to talk about you and the way you approach writing and the world and and maybe the freedom, but also the other conditions that might feel less free. So, why did you pick it? Why is this so important to you?

Arundhati Roy [00:03:41] Why did I pick this quote? Well, I think, you know, these days in some ways, in the last few years, the freest thing in the world seems to have been a virus, you know, travelling across borders and peoples and cultures without a passport. But for the rest of us, freedom has become something so complicated, something so contested, you know, something which I think we don't even realise or understand how quickly it's eroding everywhere. And the people who think of themselves as free so often are people whose minds have been completely caged by the avenues down, which now we are forced to, you know, are forced or persuaded in so many complicated ways to go and to believe that these limited worlds of ours are the whole world or the real world or the true world. And so for me, these questions were very important. And even while we are sort of isolating ourselves into little silos ideologically or in terms of our identities or language or nations, I see somehow the novel as a very, very subversive and very radical thing, because the novel cannot be about one person or one identity or one experience. Anyway, a great novel or a good novel can't be about one thing. You know, the essential nature of the novel is, that it requires the writer to travel into to be a pilgrim soul, you know, to travel into other people's lives and worlds and to examine the borders between them, the conflict, the love, the surprisingness of how people who are very different may not be that different after all. And people who feel that they are very similar may not be similar at all.

Jagoda Marinić [00:06:12] Even, you know, that you talk passionately about the novel and the freedom it provides or can provide or should provide — And I remember a lecture I saw on YouTube, the Sebald-lecture, where you said, he hated the novel, but you love it. And you said with the laughter in your voice „I may be even am the novel.“ So what does that say about you, your freedom? And why should you be the novel?

Arundhati Roy [00:06:44] Well, because, you know, I think, one of the difficulties, you know, in my life, even personally and even as a very young child, was this problem, which I now consider to be the novelist's problem. You know, and I remember even when I was very young, when I was punished, and sometimes it was very severe. And today, you know, those things would count as abuse. I don't mean sexual abuse, but abuse of all kinds. And I was always trying to understand it from the point of view of the person who was doing that to me, very unchildlike, but very novelist thing, you know, to try and understand what's going on all of the time. And, you know, the „Ministry of Utmost Happiness“ is a novel, a great part of it is set in a graveyard, you know, one of the main characters, she builds a guest house in the graveyard called „Janat guest house“. „Janat“ means „paradise“ in Urdu and sometimes I feel that right now, all that's going on in the world like what was going on in „The Ministry of Utmost Happiness“ is about graveyard etiquette. You know, somehow that sense of „us“ turning this world in this planet into a sort of graveyard and then living in it and wondering what the right way is to live in a graveyard, maybe turn it into a place where life begins. Maybe turn it into a place where revolution begins. And so when I say "I'm the novel“, sometimes, you know, I feel like because of the strange, undefined sort of writer that I am, I write novels, I write non-fiction essays. I have somehow travelled through so many resistance movements. And for me, writing is somehow a way of putting power into the hands of some of those movements. And therefore, you know, you become a sort of space where people, you know, and ideologies and conversations and people who don't get on with each other — But somehow, you know, I get on with them and it's a bit like being the "Janat guest house“, a bit like being a novel that somehow connects things without being judgemental, without being too judgemental. But some amount of judgement is important. Some of the amount of editorialising is important, but so I feel the idea of a novel is so beautiful, for all these reasons.

Jagoda Marinić [00:10:11] Hmm. And now that you speak so deeply about the novel and I can hear the city in our conversation, which reminds me of your novels, where you always feel the city somehow, and you sometimes say the book is also a city, and also the city is a character in a book. So thinking of you, creating atmosphere, creating this universe, you once so beautifully said that you try to write like you would explain somebody you love, the universe you look at. And I remember when I was reading your novel first, when I was, I guess I was 19, it was just doing baccalaureate. And everybody was like „I wish I could create this kind of atmosphere, this kind of density.“ And so when you speak of your childhood and the density of emotion and the non-judgemental thing that you have, where in the other hand you have very strong capacity to make a critical judgement. It's all in you, the contradictory and the city. Where do you get access to this

density, to this atmosphere that even as a child, you said I was just trying to understand the world around me?

Arundhati Roy [00:11:45] Well, I mean, I don't know. I think the correct and most honest answer to that question would be „I don't know“. But we can always have our theories whether they're right or wrong. And so sometimes I think, it was exactly that. You know, the attempt to create for somebody you love, to create and communicate, somebody you love, the world that was yours before they knew you, you know. So I grew up in Aymanam, where „The God of small things“ is set, in South India, which is, you know, very small, very parochial, very closed place where, you know, I mean, my mother was divorced and she had married someone outside the community and therefore, she was to be judged. She was to be cast out in some ways. And we, me and my brother, were were just, you know, constantly being told, even by our own family, that you don't belong here. You know, we would be...we were not poor. We were..I mean, we were very poor, but we were not from an oppressed caste. We were not, you know, the Syrian Christian community to which my mother belongs was a very elite and oppressive community, actually. But then when somebody disobeys the laws, they become, uh, you know, like we used to be literally called "the children without an address" because, you know, everyone has that ancestral home, that patriarchal home, and you're like „the children without an address". So, um, and so even though it was, you know, in terms of the landscape and the river that I grew up on and the fish that I spoke to all the time and a soul that was sort of welded to that landscape. But I spend all my time plotting my escape, you know, from there. And to escape the fate that was already written for me, you know, and of course, there was also constantly the thing about, you know, no one's going to marry you and you don't have that kind of pedigree sort of thing. So I just wanted to leave. And when I left and I came here north to Delhi, it could as well as been strangers coming to Germany, you know, I mean, it was so different: language is different, food is different, everything is different. And then as you build a life, you want to tell people, „yeah, but you know, the place I grew up in, this is how it was, or this is what it was. These were the stories there.“ And I think that's how „the God of small things" came. And it came from the I think the humility of being from a small place, which nobody knew about. And it gave you a kind of liberation, because then you can write it, you can describe it, you can communicate it without the arrogance of, you know, everybody should know about this place and what it's like and so on. So, you know, oddly enough, that gave me a freedom as a writer, a freedom to kind of try and invent a language which was peculiar to that place and peculiar to the people there. And by that, I don't mean English or Hindi or Malayalam, but I mean, we grew

up in this kind of confectionery store of language in India all the time. You're speaking all kinds of languages, you know.

Jagoda Marinić [00:15:49] Hmm. And then you came there and you studied architecture. You were starting to make movies, and yet you understood that, like the language, the novels, the stories, the characters in itself is like where you feel to express yourself the most. Or How did you know that in the end of all the gifts you had, that this is the one that is going to shape your life and where you found the biggest audience?

Arundhati Roy [00:16:20] Well, I didn't know at all, you know, but when I was a child growing up in that village in Aymanam, where there was no there were no bookshops, there was no library. There was no cinema hall. There was no restaurant, nothing, you know. But because my mother had started a little school and every three months as the head of a little school, which had about, you know, seven kids in it, but still, we used to get a parcel of books from the British Council library in Madras. And you could keep, you know, about a hundred books and you could keep those books for three months and then send it back. And, you know, that was your lifeline to other worlds and so on. And I studied in my mother's school where I was encouraged to write what I was thinking, what I was feeling. And even before that, you know, when my mother left my father, who used to be in the north east, in Assam, in a state called Assam, and she left him I must have been two or three years old. And we came down to to a place called Ooty, which is not in Kerala, but into a tiny little place we used to live in. And for a while I was taught by a Australian missionary who was for some reason she really disliked me as a child. I don't know why and she would keep telling me that she could see Satan in my eyes. And so, I still have it in fact, this little notebook where I think the first sentence that I wrote or of creative writing was „I hate Miss Mitton. And I think her knickers are torn.“ And so, you know, there was a sort of understanding from a very young age, that if you could write what you were thinking, uh, something would ease in you, you know.

Jagoda Marinić [00:18:42] And then you were Arundhati Roy, as we know you now — Yeah, I think personally, one of the most gifted writers of our time. And you're writing in many layers, I would say: Writing —There's this novelist inside you, and then there's this political observer inside you. And each of these selves produces texts and yeah, lets us glimpse into your way of understanding this world. And you had a long time where you did not publish the second novel, but you published many other things and you were very involved in the world around you. How was it for you? You had this huge success with this novel and you as a novelist, which is of totally different quality than

writing a political essay is, everybody can read. What did pull you into this reality, into this political reality, into I mean, one could say, it would be easy to plot yourself out of this political world that we live today, like your little girl wanted to plot herself out of the little village. But there you went in the midst of the pain and in the midst of what's hard to bear. And what was it, that made you not plot the escape, which you could have after you had such a success, but you did the opposite. You went to where the world hurts, I would say, where the wounds are.

Arundhati Roy [00:20:13] So even today, I ask myself why I do this, because it's really something which I don't understand. But I think when like I told you about growing up and trying to understand why even the things that were done to you, you're trying to understand from the point of view of the person who was doing it, why, you know, and it creates a strange schism in your mind. When I wrote „The God of Small Things“, and I think it was 97 when the Booker prize happened and I was I've said this, you know, so many times, I was on the cover of every magazine in India, and India was at that moment just emerging onto the world's stage as this, you know, big economy — the markets had opened. You know, Indian women were Miss Universe and Miss World and so on. And then suddenly the the right wing Hindu nationalists won the elections. And within months, you know, they did these series of nuclear tests. And with those tests came a kind of nationalism, Hindu nationalism, a kind of ugly bullying, majoritarian language. And I was, you know, being put out as one of the examples of this confident, new conquering India. And my silence would mean acquiescing to that. And I didn't agree with it. You know, so I wrote this essay called "The End of Imagination" about the nuclear test and about this new language and about the ugliness of this kind of nationalism and what it was going to lead to for such a complex and, you know, delicately poised in its own history country like India. So it pushed me into another world where there was, of course, the world of dissent, the world of so many things that were going on, the world of walking through this country into the most brutalised parts, you know, whether it was Central India, whether it was the indigenous people being pushed off their lands, whether it was Kashmir. It just set me off on a journey which I'm obviously still on.

Jagoda Marinić [00:23:04] And it made you a witness of many people who are fighting fights that I guess in the media in your country, they would prefer not to have these people covered. They would prefer to have the official agenda reproduced. And you took your spotlight and brought it to spaces where I think people like to put a veil on, you know, just like, you know, let's not talk about this. It disturbs the narrative.

Arundhati Roy [00:23:33] Its not just that I was a witness, but a participant. You know, and through that worldview emerges. A concrete set of disagreements emerges, a danger emerges, you know, and the dangerous of what language can do, what writing can do. You know, I was just having a conversation yesterday with a person who told me, you know, you should leave India because, you know, now there are things that that cannot be said which need to be said from somewhere outside. And you need to make films. And, you know, we need to have our own sort of propaganda videos and all that kind of thing. You know, I'm not that person. I am somebody who will always believe in the power of the written word. You know, you can make as many videos as you like and as many films as you like. But ultimately, the danger that a writer poses is a different type of danger, you know? And that is my danger. That is the danger that I am.

Jagoda Marinić [00:24:52] You have so, yeah, with the I would even call it with this very soft strength that you have when you speak often said how dangerous you feel writing can be and that this is the place from where you want to do your work. And I would want to talk to you about another writer, about Salman Rushdie, who has just last week been stabbed on a reading by an extremist who is still, I think, in the mindset of the fatwa, which shows how powerful still people who work with words are in the public debate and how parts of our world and societies feel threatened by this kind of work. And we now know that he has fortunately survived. And still, there's a lot of questions and debates going around about the fact that somebody tried to murder Salman Rushdie. How did you perceive this.. this terror act, this aggressive act? How did you look at this?

Arundhati Roy [00:26:03] My first reaction was, that I hope Salman Rushdie is going to survive to be able to write and speak and continue to do his work. I don't think that there are any ifs or buts or caveats in a completely clear condemnation of that attack. On my part, at least, that cannot be any caveat. The old controversies that have resurfaced because of this attack — and interestingly, you know, just last month, two people in India were killed by a similar act of terrorism, if you like to call it, because they supported this Hindu nationalist BJP spokesperson on TV who was being very, very insulting about the prophet. And they supported her and so they were killed. So, you know, it's very fresh here. And I think my second reaction to what happened with Salman after being so, so shocked by it was a sort of terror of how is that going to play out now geopolitically? And especially here in India, where we just live in a constant ocean of of death threats and of all kinds of fatwas, if you like. And most of them come from the Hindu Right. I mean, in 2017, a friend of mine was assassinated, Gauri Lankesh, a friend of many of us for speaking out against Hindu nationalism by

an extremist Hindu cell. We live in a time of lynching, of mass murder, of people being, you know, Muslims being forced by police to sing the national anthem as they are literally dying on the streets. And so, you know, this whole debate about free speech has come up, as it should, after this attack on Salman Rushdie. And I, I just kind of think, it's very important not to simplify that debate now, you know, not to make it sound as if it's now a question of the liberal, democratic, democracy loving west that believes in free speech versus the forces of darkness. Because I think every every culture, actually, including those who pretend they support free speech, do not. You know, we all know we need to remember what happened to the Beatles when they just made a joke about being as famous as Jesus Christ, you know? So every country, every culture, every people have their taboos. And then some have a megaphone with which to appear sophisticated when in terms of how they can afford to be, you know, what are the real issues of what we call free speech? Now, one of the problems all over the world is fact-free speech. You know, we are dealing with fact-free speech, fact-free history in a country like India that is leading to a form of fascism, where you have people, religious people dressed in saffron robes, coming out openly calling for the genocide of Muslims, openly calling for the mass rape of Muslim women. We have a wonderful Indian activist called Teesta Setalvad, who for 20 years has pursued the legal channels to really open legal as well as political responsibility on the government of Narendra Modi, who was chief minister of Gujarat when a horrible genocidal massacre against Muslims happened when women were burned, raped, gang raped and burned alive in the streets of cities like Ahmedabad when people were slaughtered. And now the activist who is pursuing the legal route to justice has been jailed because of a judgement from the Supreme Court, saying that she was just trying to defame the government. Similarly, another friend of mine faces incarceration because he has been pursuing the matter of, you know, 19 Indigenous people who were killed and who, eyewitnesses say, were killed by the police inside the forest of Bastar. So the same companies that are involved in the mining of these indigenous areas which therefore have resulted in 600 villages being burned, hundreds of people being killed, women being raped, those same companies fund and sponsor literary festivals where great writers come and speak about free speech. While those people whose homes are being destroyed are not allowed any form of speech and even their lives are being snuffed out, you know. So how do we equate this? You know, how do we look at this without being polemical about what is really happening in our world? You know, what are the dishonesty and hypocrisies that are so much a part of political discourse? And you and I know today it's not just these brutal attacks, whether it was on Rushdie or whether it was on my friend Gauri Lankesh. But there is a kind of taut police that is springing up in every niche and alley now, there are so many forms of tyranny, micro tyranny, macro tyranny, all kinds of brands of tyranny

which are sitting huge wires on the parts of every form of thought. And you cannot have creative language, beautiful language, poetic language. If your stride is being restricted, you can only then have army language or NGO language or brochure language, you know. So free speech is now a very, very complex issue. And we can't allow politicians especially to reduce it to languages that suit their political positions and their various hypocrisies. You know, because in the country that I come from, yes, Muslims have murdered people recently for speaking ill of the prophet or for supporting someone who spoke ill of the prophet. But equally, Muslims are under such danger. I mean, just ordinary life is becoming impossible. There are detention centres being built for people being pushed off the citizens list. There are daylight lynchings, there are like murders, there are mass murders taking place. And we have to take on board all these complexities when we talk about speech, because speech is threatened, thought itself is threatened in this world today like it has never been before, in ways also that it has never been threatened before.

Jagoda Marinić [00:34:09] Why do you say never? Because of social media or what? What do you feel the never about?

Arundhati Roy [00:34:13] Yes, I'd say I mean, I would say that, you know, earlier you could make or easy binary between some sort of repressive regime, some sort of state censorship or some Stalinist silencing of people and quote unquote „the people“, you know. But now censorship is coming from every direction, from the direction of Islamist fundamentalism, from the direction of Hindu fundamentalism, from the direction of Supreme Court judgements, from the direction of people who call themselves progressive on the social media. There's a policing and a desire to police that is not just limited to authority, but as I said, all forms of tyrannies are springing up now. It's almost like gang war. What can and can not be said.

Jagoda Marinić [00:35:12] You and I understand your image. I mean, it's like, what do you think is going on in all these..I mean, it's like this autocratic thinking, the DNA of this kind of thinking, of tyrant thinking, like it was contagious, like it's spreading to more and more people, more and more groups and everybody's radicalising. So I would like to hear maybe two thoughts from you. One is, what would you want the „the West“ in brackets when you say there's a lot of hypocrisy also in the reactions to Salman Rushdie. What would you wish to hear from politicians in the West and what kind of reaction would you like to see and hear? Also, taking into perspective the diversity of, for example, India, as you just showed. And also what's very interesting, if you can keep that in mind for me, is but we can, yeah, deepen that later is: How has this brutal aggression in your country

unfolded? I mean, whether you speak verbal aggression, physical aggression. There's so much aggression that you describe. It's so open. So how did you come to that point of what went wrong to have so much open aggression in a society? So we start with the Western reaction maybe, and then go on to the aggression.

Arundhati Roy [00:36:35] Well, you know, I mean, I don't think there's anything new about, you know, the hypocrisy of Western nations, you know, and America, because you have, you know, based on a very concocted piece of fake news, for example, that Iraq had nuclear weapons. You know, the destruction, the killing of hundreds of thousands of people. I was reading recently about how, you know, Robert McNamara and Curtis LeMay when they decided to bomb Tokyo, 100,000 people in one night. I mean, how many writers and poets and painters were silenced then? You know? And even today, the discussion is that „oh, the bomb was dropped in order to save lives" or even if you just take it in a more contemporary, current affairs way. After the massacre that took place in Gujarat, Modi was banned from travelling to the US. But now that he's Prime Minister with that same ideology and with all the violence that that entails — embraced, embraced, you know, a regime that is now shutting down every form of speech. He's embraced by the same people who are talking about standing up for free speech. So what are we supposed to think about that? Physically embraced. I'm saying, you know, all the time. He loves embracing people and being embraced back. He doesn't embrace Indians but everyone else. How did we come to this violence? Well, look, the fact is that the most powerful organisation in India today is an organisation called the RSS, which stands for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, to which Modi belongs and almost all his ministers belong. Modi has been a member of it since he was a young man or boy even — that organisation will be celebrating its hundredth year in 2025. So it was founded in 1925. Its ideologues have openly admired German fascism, have openly admired Mussolini, have openly talked about how the Muslims of India should be viewed like the Jews of Germany. They have openly said and even now, you know, just today, the particular group of people who are talking about the genocide of Muslims have put out a constitution that says, you know, Muslims and Christians in India should not be allowed to vote. So this organisation is now the backbone of power in India, the BJP, which is the political parties, just its front desk. There is a good chance that somehow India will be maybe declared to be a Hindu nation. You know, so the violence, the polarisation, the BJP has proved to the voting public that by demonising and isolating Muslims, it can win a majority without a Muslim vote. So Muslims are more or less disenfranchised, which is a very dangerous place to be in. When people rose in protest against the anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens. I mean, in Delhi, there was a

massacre. And who are the people in jail? Mostly the Muslims themselves. Now, the new regime is that if a muslim comes out to protest without any proper judicial process, their houses, their shops their business places are demolished. Recently the Hindu right had in America had a bulldozer procession because the bulldozer is the new symbol of Hindu nationalism. It's like some new kind of God with this iron claw that can just demolish and crush, you know, its satanic opponents. So we are talking about a very violent form of religious fundamentalism, you know, and nobody pays very much attention because India is a big market. India has a big economy. India is buying a lot of weapons from a lot of people. And when the world realises it'll be very, very late.

Jagoda Marinić [00:41:39] When you say when the world realises it will be very, very late, this is like like a good title for almost everything that seems to be going on, from climate crisis to Russia to China to the US. And you have in one interview said that observing the storm at the capital on January 6th, that is now being like worked through and the connexions with Trump, that in India these people have long ago stormed the capital like they are in power.

Arundhati Roy [00:42:15] Yes.

Jagoda Marinić [00:42:15] And once India used to be the rising democracy and people thought it's going to be like, you know, economy and democracy going hand in hand. How much has that narrative actually proven wrong to you and what does this do to your belief in democracy? And I know that it won't do much about in your belief in like the natural functioning of capitalism. But how has this changed your belief in huge concepts like democracy and its institutions?

Arundhati Roy [00:42:54] Well, you know, the thing is that we don't have anything better than Democracy now, but even way before this rightwing government came to power, I remember writing an essay called „Democracy's Failing Light". You know where I spoke about how when the Indian market opened to international finance, you know, we used to joke about how creating a good business environment meant going and crushing all kinds of protests by people who are being displaced by dams and other kinds of infrastructure. There was an side by side with the opening of the markets began the rise of Hindu nationalism, and they both was together, you know, like a pair of lovers. And today, you cannot have the kind of violence that is taking place against minorities, against Christians. I mean, there's been something like 300 or 400 attacks against Christians just this last year. You know, churches smashed, statues of Jesus smashed all of that. But none of that and none of this can happen if it wasn't underwritten by India's huge

corporate capital. You know, the main sort of sore arm of Hindu nationalism is the hundreds of 24 hour news channels in India. And most of them function where the anchors work like the captains of lynch mobs. Literally, they are calling for people to be arrested. Literally, they are calling and creating an atmosphere of so much violence. You know, I was just thinking about how the person that attacked Salman Rushdie, we don't know who he is or why he did it. But the fatwa called by the Iranian government, the bounty put on his head, all of it created an ecosystem where any crazy person could go and do what that man did to Salman Rushdie. Similarly here, an ecosystem has been created of such hyped up, hopped up hatred against Muslims and Christians and left wing people and liberals that it only needs one little spark, you know, one little attack or false flag attack for things to just go up in flames. So the everything has been set, the stage has been set, and now any crazy person can change the fate of this country.

Jagoda Marinić [00:45:45] And any crazy person is something I would like to make a little bigger as an image, because any crazy person is normally in our times portrayed as somebody who's been raised and I don't know what in extremist surroundings and so whatever. But as we see, I think we are living in times where more and more people feel very, very insecure. In the beginning, you talked about insecurities and how it affects us. And when you say „the corporate capitalism“, I would like you to tell us a little more about the effects that you see it had on people that you were close to, participating in movements maybe as you said. Or how did these corporations, Yeah, by making themselves richer, exploited the country, exploited the people. And is there anything that these people believe in? I mean, I don't say that everybody was frustrated, was going to be and do something horrible. But you have, as you said, a stage where the aggression is on a very high agenda, political, media. And on the other hand, more and more people who get angry in a system where they don't feel safe. So to put the extremists aside and go to the real people that their needs, what are the ones that you have seen suffer in the last ten years that are reported and where you think we should go to and look at and and shed a light on?

Arundhati Roy [00:47:17] Let me try and tell you something simple. First of all, you know, today in Jail, there is Teesta Setalvad, an activist, a really, you know, profoundly, um, moral in a way, a person who has stuck with these people who were brutalised during the Gujarat massacre, stuck with them for 20 years, you know, fighting their case in court today. She's in jail. You have Professor Saibaba, a person who is paralysed from his waist down, was a professor of literature serving a life sentence in jail. You have Varavara Rao, the poet, you have got, you have, I mean, you have poets, writers, student, their lawyers, all in jail today. All of them are people who have sat

at my table in this house from where I'm speaking to you from. They are all friends of mine. When I try to take a broader look at how things happened, you know, since today's Independence Day, 75 years of Indian independence and you see, obviously, you know, it's not that India's the worst place in the world. It's just sad to see what could have been something extraordinary being dismantled at the speed at which it is being dismantled. So, you know, after independence in the sixties, you had radical movements demanding things like „land to the Tiller“, demanding the redistribution of land from these, you know, huge upper caste landlords who would own hundreds of acres of land. From the sixties, Seventies to the Nineties, the call for justice became anti displacement, where you have millions of people being displaced from what little land they had by huge dams, roads, infrastructure projects and so on. Then by 2000, the demand just became what was called the Rural Employment Guarantee Act, where people were asking for and got salary at a daily minimum wage for three months, which would be altogether less than what you would spend on a decent meal in Germany. And this is for one year for a person. And even that was considered radical, you know, and now you have a situation where people are just being given rations, you know, like five kilos of wheat and some amount of sugar and rice. And then they are being told, now you've been given this and bought for this government and you have people fighting for their citizenship. You have 2 million people in that system who've been removed from the rules of citizenship and huge detention centres being built. When you ask about the corporates, apart from, you know, the fact that when a few years ago the government announced this thing called Operation Green Hunt, where basically it flooded the forests of central India with paramilitary to chase away millions of indigenous people whose lands had been signed over to these corporations for mining and infrastructure and so on. Now these corporations either own, you know, 25, 30 media channels or the controlling interest in these channels or they control them with the advertising. And so the situation I mean, when someday the history of this period in India is written, the media, I can't even begin to tell you. I mean, people here just referred to them as Radio Rwanda, you know, for the viciousness that day in and day out, 24 hours a day. And then you have the social media, which is handled incredibly by the ruling party and the Hindu nationalists to a semi literate population. So these completely fake videos, this completely fake history, this completely story, which you in Germany may be familiar with, you know, the idea of this huge population having been victimised by Muslims who ruled us for so many years. And the irony is that the the vast population of Muslims in India are people who converted to Islam because they were at the bottom rung of the caste system and they couldn't to escape the tyranny of caste. And now they're being portrayed as these tyrants who need to be wiped out or killed or raped or put into detention centres. You know, so the combination of all these forces is what is so frightening at this

time and and how democracy and the process of elections, each of the institutions that is supposed to be a check and balance for democracy have been hollowed out, have no meaning now, have you know, the fact is that the institutions of the state, the institutions of the government and the political party, they've all fused into one thing, and they all serve the purpose of Hindu nationalism.

Jagoda Marinić [00:52:56] When you say that's so scaring nowadays, but still it does not seem scaring enough to silence you. Or do you feel insecurities about I mean, do you feel there is you one said in an interview beautifully that one has to — or it's in your book in Azadi — that we have to stop partitioning in little groups of people and hating each other, and that there has to be a flood, like liberate ourselves from obedience that we have come to. Do you see a hope or what is the reason that this fear doesn't silence you?

Arundhati Roy [00:53:39] Well, you know, let me not pretend that I am not fearful. You know, I'm just aware that in a regime that functions with the instincts of kind of a fascist bullying, they are always weighing the, you know, consequences of what happens when they do what to whom. So all the people that I am telling you are in jail. Now we can't pretend that the overwhelming emotion amongst journalists, writers and poets and so on is a kind of caution. You know, the road is trip wired. Anything can happen to any of us at any time. When it comes to somebody like me, I know that the only thing that so far has protected me is the fact that I am a writer that is read all over the world, you know? And so that protects me. And one doesn't know for how long. And I cannot I cannot say to you that, oh, I feel free to write whatever I want to write and to say whatever I want to say. I am, you know, so cautious, even when I'm speaking to you. And I don't know whether one can unlearn that form of caution, you know. But it's a sad thing. But at the same time, I keep telling myself, look at the conditions in which writers wrote under Stalinism. Look at the conditions in which people still did what they had to do. One has to just continue to do what one does, because there isn't anything else to do. You know, what else can you do?

Jagoda Marinić [00:55:39] But let me come back to, I mean, I really sense the depth of your political involvement. And it's also in your books, as you often stress. I mean, „the God of Small Things“ is a story about casts as well. And I see the question, are you why don't you escape into novels would be the wrongest question, because wherever you go, you would feel that — that's how I perceive you — that the human condition and the capacity of our life is so limited or broadened by the political surroundings of our life and these tremendous forces that can end our

lives by bombs or, as you say, detentions and massacres and, um, all these inhumane burying things that we do as human societies. But yet the novel to me at least gives some — I can't explain, it's just my.. — is maybe just the hope of imagination. Like you said, you had this essay, *The End of Imagination*, and that's like a death. You know, if you're in this world that we're living in, lose imagination, I mean, how can you imagine to get out of this dark and go back to some kind of light. How do you quarrel with this as a writer, with your political observations and also with this tremendous gift you have of creating fiction? You know, also as an escapist form of getting away from reality.

Arundhati Roy [00:57:24] Well, I don't think it's escapist. And I don't think being political or understanding how things work or having a penetrating view of life around you is also necessarily dark. You know, I was thinking about one of the things that, you know, people keep making posters of and, you know, quoting over and over and over again is from the end of a talk I did after 9/11. And you know that sentence when I said „another world is possible. And on a quiet day, when I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing.“ So someone asked me recently, like, "can you still hear her breathing?" And I said, You know, when you read the „*Ministry of Utmost Happiness*“, you will realise that that other world is here. It's a question of seeing. It's a question of looking at how people can be with each other. You know, it's a question of realising that despite all this, there are so many ways in which people love each other and protect each other and do things for each other. And that is what ultimately the „*Ministry of Utmost Happiness*“ is about. You know, as I keep saying, if "the God of small things" was about a family with a broken heart at its center, the „*Ministry of utmost Happiness*“ starts out with the shattered heart, with families that don't exist. And then people bring shards of that shattered heart and make a mended heart in a graveyard, you know. So I am not for however clearly I see what is going on. I also see so much beauty. You know, I also see so much laughter and irreverence and the refusal to lie down and die or give up, you know, because as we keep saying, we have to do what we do. And even if we go down, we won't be on their side, you know? So we might as well do what we do beautifully.

Jagoda Marinić [00:59:53] Mhm. Beautifully, aesthetically and also on an everyday basis.

Arundhati Roy [00:59:59] Always remembering there's no excuse for bad art.

Jagoda Marinić [01:00:05] And bad art. But your art to me, you have quoted James Baldwin in your book with a quote you really have present when you said „and they would not believe me precisely because they knew that what I said was true“.

Arundhati Roy [01:00:24] Yes. And I think that is what as a writer — that is the responsibility I give myself that in a world where we have fact-free speech and fact-free history and fake news, I feel when you write, whether it's fiction or whether it's non-fiction, don't think about propaganda or outdoing someone with more noise. But think about music. Think about the fact that that note that you strike can be true in the way a musical note is true, you know, and that is understood then to be true.

Jagoda Marinić [01:01:18] And yet in a world where we have so much propaganda, truth has become one of the concepts most fought about.

Arundhati Roy [01:01:29] Yeah, that's what I'm saying. It's not about that kind of truth that is being fought about. That's exactly what I'm trying to say. You know, you cannot argue about, you know, a musical note. Is it correct or not? It is, isn't it? And that is not a fact. That is a feeling. That is a understanding, you know. And so one is not talking about I'm not talking about reportage or academia here, but I'm talking about when you create worlds and those worlds are understood in the way that music is understood, you know.

Jagoda Marinić [01:02:10] Mhm. I understand.

Arundhati Roy [01:02:11] And so then you, then, then you have, then you have that, that moment and I have had that moment several times where even people who are on the right or people who are, you know, in completely opposed to one's political views have come to me and said „but you're right, You know.“ You know, and that's beautiful. You know, for me.

Jagoda Marinić [01:02:41] I know. I understand. I can imagine your judgement is so clear. It really hurts. And it somehow hurts that we can see things clearer through your judgement and we still don't act. So I'm very grateful that you have this strength to be the novelist that you are. Aside from all the categories that we have created and that we sometimes use to make world easier. I'm very grateful that you shared your thoughts, your time, your words, your feelings, and whatever you brought into this conversation. Thank you for your time, Arundhati, thank you for sharing.

Arundhati Roy [01:03:23] Talking to us. It was a pleasure to talk to you.

Jagoda Marinić [01:03:28] It was a pleasure to hear you talking and to try to feel and think what you are imagining and picturing. Thank you for giving us your time, Arundhati.

Arundhati Roy [01:03:38] Thank you. Goodbye.

Jagoda Marinić [01:03:41] So this was our Arundhati Roy in the last episode of the second season of Freedom Deluxe. And yeah, I'm deeply grateful, deeply overwhelmed, in a way, by all the information she has given me about India and all the yeah, all the black spots and black boxes that I sometimes see I have in spite of thinking I'm interested in the world. She is, I think, one of the most interesting people we could have had for the last English speaking episode of Freedom Deluxe. I have learnt so many things, so many things, but not only on the situation in India, but also about how a human being must sustain in this kind of development when this human being like Arundhati is trying to speak her truth. And what a tremendous fight, I also think, it must be, to just be forced to be truthful to what you perceive and to know that in a way, this is the musical note that sounds true to you and that you hope that there will be enough audience that can feel this one musical note. So I hope that this will make you more interested in finding out about India and the current situation there. I hope that this will make you want to read more books of Arundhati Roy. She will have a new German book out this fall. And most important, I think, is to read these amazing two novels that are so rich and so deep with images and words and also descriptions of the political realm of her characters and the country that she just talked about. I'm grateful that you have been listening to Freedom Deluxe for six more episodes. I'm also very grateful to announce that there will be a third season of Freedom Deluxe and 16 more episodes where we will have interesting guests talking about freedom, inspiring us to do more research on freedom and to look at this strange word from many different points of view. So thank you for joining us. Thank you for following us. You can follow us on Twitter. We have a Twitter account. You can share the experiences you had while listening to this podcast. That's part of our little show that you can follow us on Twitter and watch my team share your thoughts and answer to your thoughts. And I might be joining in sometimes whenever I can. So thank you for this amazing journey we've had and I hope you have enjoyed our and yeah, exceptional last guest and I hope we will see you and hear you again this fall, when it's this third season of Freedom Deluxe.