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# THE PERFORMANCE OF TERROR IN FRANCE

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## I. Introduction: French Muslims and social justice

Major news anchors reported the action second by second. They replayed video footage of two hooded gunmen executing a French police officer followed by reports of other connected attacks and images of deployed French counter-terrorism units. The unfolding drama quickly created an atmosphere of panic, even in places far away from where the incident of Charlie Hebdo took place. The sequence of events also gave birth to a global support movement. Among the vast crowds coming out in French cities, international state high officials marched alongside President François Hollande ostensibly to defend freedom of speech, express their unity in the fight against Islamic radicalism and demonstrate readiness to crack down on global jihad. This fast-paced sequence of events left little room for reason or reflective thinking in France and other locations in Europe. Emotions, understandably, were riding high. After all, the hideous attacks sought more than just reaping the lives of the cartoonists for lampooning Islam, mocking its symbols, and ridiculing its followers. The attacks on Charlie Hebdo meant to execute a memorable “performance of terror,” to send a strong message to the French Republic and the Judeo-Christian Western world. Convinced that they, righteous and pious, are ordained by God to rid the world of the blasphemous West, the attackers understood their own struggle in global and religious terms, a clash of civilizations and a war between good and evil.

The attackers, who chose martyrdom for their grand finale, had no interest in drawing attention to the chronic national crisis of French Muslims, struggling to be seen and heard. France has yet to integrate them as citizens with equal rights and equal responsibilities. The grandiose performance of terror obscured the minoritized French Muslims and, for years to come, will undermine their struggle against countless manifestations of social injustice. This performance of radical terror, I however contend, was just one show among many. Like the jihadists, Charlie Hebdo, the French political establishment, and several heads of state have created the illusion of an existential clash between *liberal* free speech and barbarism, secularism and radical religion, good and evil, the West and Islam. Veiled under marketable names—freedom of speech, liberal secularism, counter-terrorism, and global security—their performances have contributed to the systematic marginalization of the arguably most vulnerable ethno-religious group in French society today, yet they are rarely acknowledged formally as such. Indeed, although their performances took place on the French national stage, the involved parties seem determined to frame what was happening in the context of the global war on terror as if the agreed upon directive is to manipulate the tragic incidents for particular purposes: increase authoritarian state powers, perpetuate social injustice, strip French Muslims of their right to exist even as a minoritized community, and relieve the establishment of accountability. The chances of granting equal rights soon to French Muslims are weak at best because at the heart of their problem lies French liberalism. Not only that, but also they are caught between national, transnational, and global competing performances of terror. The Charlie Hebdo attack has further denied them equality, respect, and recognition. Under these trying circumstances, they cannot successfully fight alone, nor could they start a revolution. But a revolution is needed to restore justice to them as well as to other marginalized minorities. Particularly, I would argue, responsible intellectuals can spark the revolution. They can challenge the unjust status quo by producing historicized and contextualized counter narratives in order to draw attention to the normative absence of social justice in the French Republic.

To smoothly discuss these points, the article proceeds in the following order: It (1) explores the crisis of French liberalism, (2) examines the French political establishment's troubling approach to home-made terrorism, (3) draws attention to the problematic nature of internationalizing the attacks on Charlie Hebdo, (4) identifies acts of liberal racism in Charlie Hebdo's philosophy and points to the need for a revolution spearheaded by responsible intellectuals before it, (5) finally brings the discussion to a point of closure.

### 1. The Crisis of French Liberalism

In favor of a strictly literal interpretation of liberalism, the French political establishment objects to the visibility of cultural and religious markers of ethnic French citizens. If this difference does not recede, the popular argument goes, French liberal democracy will lose its foundational values and secular character. The problematic nature of French liberalism, however, has to do initially with two inherent blind spots in liberalism as a theory and political system: the principles of impartiality and recognition. Liberalism dictates that all citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious, racial, sexual, economic, or educational orientations, are entitled to the same expectations, rights, and obligations. Some governing bodies, including the French political establishment, interpret impartiality to strictly mean no accommodations ought to be given to religious, ethnic, or cultural minorities because privileging one group over other citizens, by accommodating its difference, violates the code of impartiality. Occupied with impartiality, many European liberalisms have yet to take seriously the need for recognition, especially of ethno-religious and cultural difference. "Many members of minority cultures," writes Jonathan Seglow, "do not receive the public recognition they deserve. And one reason for that is a lacuna in liberal theory itself: it does not recognise the importance of recognition in forming individual and social identities."<sup>1</sup> Although minoritized groups request, and deserve, recognition because they advance "claims for justice," Seglow states, their requests or needs are "claims for special treatment, for something extra in the way of rights or resources which other people do not have. This goes against the central liberal idea that the state should be impartial among different citizens whatever their particular identities and allegiances."<sup>2</sup> Accommodating difference, or rather accepting cultural and ethno-religious diversity, indeed, poses a serious challenge to liberalism in many European countries.

The case of France, however, is especially troubling. The contemporary French Republic presents itself as a liberal, secular state for all its citizens, yet it segregates against French Muslims. Arguably, Islam as a marker of alien religious difference in the Republic forcefully came to the fore after the 9/11 attacks and the declared War on Terror. Before 9/11, however, Arabness, not Islam, was widely seen as the unwanted difference. "It is in the relatively recent, expanded meaning of a secularized public space, [Jack] Chriac's sense," John R. Bowen writes, "that *laïcité* was deemed to be under threat from Islam. As late as 1999, however, the threat had not yet been identified quite so clearly."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in *Looking for Palestine*, memoirist Najla Said, who travelled in France in 1991, recounts an encounter with French fieldworkers, an encounter that confirms Bowen's point. For Said, one of the men stood out because of his throat-cutting racism towards French Arabs of Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan descent.<sup>4</sup> The man, Said reports, "began a conversation with his friend. He spoke rapidly and with great passion . . . He was complaining about a group of people who were 'ruining' France." Said hears the man repeating the phrase "'*Les Arabes*' with disdain approximately ten times" before he asks her "'*Et toi, tu aimes les Arabes?*' . . . with a giggle, obviously aware that as an American" Said "would have no idea what havoc '*les Arabes*'

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Seglow, "Liberalism and the Politics of Recognition," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Liberalism*, edited by Mark Evans, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U. Press, 2001), 89.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Seglow, "Liberalism and the Politics of Recognition," 90.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space*, (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>4</sup> According to Bowen, "[a]bout 60-70 percent of Muslim immigrants to France have come from three countries of North Africa. Algerians and Moroccans have contributed the largest numbers, followed by Tunisians. Turks and West Africans form the next largest groups" (50).

were wreaking on France.”<sup>5</sup> Les Arabs, according to the fieldworker, are “*Les Algériens, les Tunisiens, les Marocains*.”<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary hostility towards French North Africans is rooted in French colonialist history. The French subjugated Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. In Algeria, French colonialists distinguished themselves from indigenous Algerians. Separation was the norm. Indeed, according to Bowen, French settlers in Algeria “were fully French citizens, with French political and social institutions at their disposal. The Muslim colonized would remain as a separate ‘indigenous’ population with a distinct personal status” throughout the colonization period (36).<sup>7</sup> For the duration of French colonization of Algeria (1830-1962), the French colonialists committed atrocities, exploiting the subjugated people and their land, until indigenous resistance forced them out. This past violent divorce, however, continues to inform how French Arabs and French Muslims are treated in France. At best, they are second-class citizens, denied equal rights, economically deprived, and are subjected to popular and formal discrimination. Basic social justice principles do not apply to them. A 2007 secret cable addressed to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice demonstrates the crippling status of French Arabs and Muslims. The sensitive document accuses the French of exercising acts of “discrimination against minorities.” The dispatch further criticizes the French official “approach to religion and minorities”: the French political establishment “promote[s] assimilation under the banner of equality” and places “a strong emphasis on laïcité.” Accordingly, the adopted policy “demands official blindness to all racial and ethnic differences.” The French denial of difference manifests itself in French law, which “formally prohibits the collection of statistics on the basis of race, religion, or ethnic background.”<sup>8</sup> In this official French context, the principle of impartiality, meaning treating all citizens as equal by refusing to accommodate minority difference, further loses its claims to equality when minoritized groups face systematic discriminatory policies and practices. In fact, impartiality becomes a myth.<sup>9</sup> Not of their own choice, the undesired French Muslim difference has seriously disadvantaged French Muslims and more so after the Charlie Hebdo attack as evident in the French political establishment’s response.

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<sup>5</sup> Najla Said, *Looking For Palestine: Growing Up Confused in an Arab American Family*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2013), 146-47.

<sup>6</sup> Najla Said, *Looking For Palestine*, 148.

<sup>7</sup> John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don’t Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space*, (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Embassy in France, “Engagement with Muslim Communities—France,” January 25, 2007, < [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07PARIS306\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07PARIS306_a.html) >. Similarly, Bowen argues that “[a]lthough France keeps no statistics on the religious beliefs or practices of its inhabitants, estimates of the number of Muslims resident in France today range from four to five million people” (50).

<sup>9</sup> Impartiality as the French political establishment understands it neither fosters equality nor leads to justice. Models of successful plural democracies nurture and embrace the ethnic, religious, and cultural differences of their minorities; only by so doing, they achieve equality and justice among their citizens. In such democratic models, impartiality means official direct interventions so as to recognize and protect minority differences. In situations where minorities face discrimination and struggle for inclusion, the liberal regime should respond not by ignoring or attacking their difference, but it should publicly celebrate their difference. In this regard, Anna Elisabetta Galeotti rightly argues:

The struggle over the public acceptance of differences can . . . be understood not simply as an issue of compatibility with the ideal and the practice of liberal neutrality, but rather as a contested attempt to overcome marginality and exclusion, and to achieve fair access. Since individuals are marginalized and excluded as a result of their membership in minority groups, the positive assertion of differences in the public space is seen as the first symbolic step towards full inclusion. If this is what is at stake in contemporary controversies about toleration, then the normative response cannot be toleration as non-interference, but toleration as the symbolic recognition of differences as legitimate options of pluralist democracy. (67)

Anna Elisabetta Galeotti expresses this insightful point in *Toleration as Recognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2002).

## 2.1. The French Establishment: A Home-made Terror

The French political establishment conveniently took the attacks to be acts of global jihadi terror directed at the French freedom of speech. Not only did the political establishment willfully ignore the French nationality of the attackers or quietly push under the rug the colonial history and the hopeless present they are trapped in, but it further went to reassert the sacred French tradition of free speech by embracing the “Je Suis Charlie” slogan. Instead of the pre-attack standard circulation of about 60,000 copies, the government aided in the printing of five million copies of the first issue of Charlie Hebdo after the attacks. In fact, the “magazine’s distributors said its print run had been lifted to 7 million copies.”<sup>10</sup> President Hollande, a strong believer in the French concept of freedom of speech, thinks it is “the [French] culture [of secularism] that the terrorists want to put an end to because it is insolent, because it is disrespectful, because it is free, it’s human.”<sup>11</sup> This liberal ill-conceived logic imagines a cultural clash: a civilized secular, liberal “us” versus barbaric religious “them” dichotomy. Hollande believes, more secular satire will combat jihadist Islam. Accordingly, the first post-attack issue of the magazine stayed faithful to the tradition of satirizing Islam. The published issue featured the Prophet on its cover. In a sense, the French establishment has decided to combat terror with terror, violence with violence, and hatred with hatred. Its disguised liberal freedom of speech engenders forms of liberal racism.

As expected, the new issue of the magazine drew violent protesters out on the streets in some Muslim countries. In response to the demonstrations outside France, President Hollande expressed his dismay at the protesters for failing to understand the importance of freedom of speech for the French Republic: “There are tensions abroad where people don’t understand our attachment to the freedom of speech. . . . We’ve seen the protests, and I would say that in France all beliefs are respected.” To tell the truth, Hollande should have said, “all beliefs are” *respected as long as they confine themselves to the private domain until the so-called believers eventually disappear or seek radicalism because the Republic, overtaken by an ultranationalist dogma, does not want them*. President Hollande zealously sanctifies secular French liberalism, especially the value of freedom of speech—or the right of the state and its apparatuses to terrorize marginalized segments of the French society—, yet he does not recognize religious beliefs and immigrant cultural identities as worthy of mutual respect. It seems like there are superior secular and inferior religious values. President Hollande unfortunately forgets a fundamental truth: “[d]ue recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need,”<sup>12</sup> says Charles Taylor, and “the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression.”<sup>13</sup>

This oppression travels beyond French national borders. In a statement about the angry protests in Niger, Algeria, and Pakistan, Hollande asserts that France “supported these countries in the fight against terrorism” and “I still want to express my solidarity” towards these countries, “but at the same time France has principles and values, in particular freedom of expression.”<sup>14</sup> Although one must denounce the protesters’ violence, while President Hollande demands respect for mainstream French difference, he dismisses the principle of universal dignity when he insists on sanctifying the French freedom of speech that silences minoritized ethno-religious and cultural difference. Because politics of difference is born out of the politics of universal dignity, equality, and recognition, in demanding the former (i.e. difference) without committing to the latter (i.e. universal dignity, equality, and recognition), President Hollande participates in what I would call “liberal racism” discourse. Liberal racism manifests itself in a set of commonplace racist policies and practices seen in the eyes of mainstream France as politically correct as long as they are directed at the minoritized French Muslims. This liberal racism racializes French

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<sup>10</sup> ABC News, “Charlie Hebdo: French President Francois Hollande Defends Freedom of Speech amid Worldwide Protests over Prophet Mohammed Cover,” January 17, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> AFP, “Charlie Hebdo Will Live On: Hollande,” January 14, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”: An Essay with Commentary*, edited by Amy Gutmann, (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1992), 26.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 36.

<sup>14</sup> ABC, “Charlie Hebdo: French President Francois Hollande Defends Freedom of Speech Amid Worldwide Protests over Prophet Mohammed Cover,” January 17, 2015.

Muslims. While it imposes an oppressive imaginary homogeneity on a diverse population, it defines them as the ultimate opposite of *liberal* Republican values and French secularism. In the context of President Hollande's response to the demonstrations, liberal racism further seems grounded in French colonialist heritage: French secularism and its liberal freedom of speech are rational, modern, and thus superior while the values of the protesters, and by extension those of French Muslims, are irrational, premodern, and therefore inferior. On the basis of this logic, the violence the former commits is permissible, while the latter's violence is deemed barbaric. President Hollande's statement masquerades French particularism as universal, but it does not extend reciprocity towards the values of Muslims and Muslim French.

Instead of taking some responsibility for the attacks on Charlie Hebdo, the French political establishment continues to pin what happened on global terrorism. In so doing, it erases the Frenchness of the jihadis and denies the failure of the state in integrating French Muslims. It willfully ignores the horrors Western, including French, colonialisms have brought upon countries like Niger, Congo, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. In fact, colonialist burden is not a mere matter of historical heritage. Since 2003, France has aligned itself with the U.S.-led war on terror coalition. France has been militarily involved in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria. Because French Muslims do not exist in a vacuum, some French Muslims might define their identity against these harsh realities. The radicalized French Algerian attackers, says Tariq Ali, "were a pure product of French society. Unemployed, long-haired, into drugs, alienated till they saw footage of US torture and killings in Iraq."<sup>15</sup> Their attack points to a homemade French problem whose roots reach back to French colonialism in North Africa. In addition to colonial heritage, which ails France now, contemporary economic, societal, cultural, and political harsh realities increase the rift between French Muslims and the French establishment. According to Vaiju Naravane, French suburbs are scarred by "desolation, deprivation, violence, and poverty." In these centers of collective misery, "[y]outh unemployment is over 40 percent, four times the national average; the school dropout rate as high as 36 percent. A majority of France's six million Muslims live in the suburbs, the rich, inner-city neighborhoods of large towns being beyond their reach." These impoverished "North African Arab or Blacks from France's former colonies . . . live jammed together, isolated and cut off from the rest of the country," Naravane writes.<sup>16</sup> Living under such abject circumstances, denied the basics of social justice, particular French Muslim youth could easily be pushed towards terrorism.

After all, these French suburbs, according to second-generation French Algerian author and filmmaker Mehdi Lalloui, are populated by the wretched of the earth. They "have been marked by racism and condescension born out of colonial superiority." Speaking to Naravane, Lalloui shares his own experience in one of France's deprived suburbs:

When I was growing up, my [French] teachers said: you are not apt to go to university. You will train as an electrician. And that's what I did. But later, on my own, I went to university, became an author and filmmaker. The ambitions of several kids in the banlieus are crushed this way. Many fail because the French system tries to fit them into a mould—culturally, intellectually and even politically. They fail, become dropouts and are then tempted by organised crime and the ideology of radical Islam that appears to give them a purpose in life. Those who succeed academically get away from these ghettos as soon as possible. So these areas go from bad to worse where the state is completely absent.<sup>17</sup>

Dynamics of the exclusion and othering of French Muslims are self-evident in the statement. Sadly, these serious issues have been constantly pushed under the rug and they will be further "pushed . . . so long as life in the rest of the country can continue unaffected," says sociologist Annie Faure.<sup>18</sup> There is neither the economic capability nor the political will to treat the festering problem of the French suburbs.

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<sup>15</sup> Tariq Ali, "France Tries to Mask Its Islamophobia Behind Secular Values," *Outlook India*, Interview with Pranay Sharma, January 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Vaiju Naravane, "Charlie's Angels," *Outlook India*, January 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Vaiju Naravane, "Charlie's Angels."

<sup>18</sup> Naravane, "Charlie's Angels."

Even the tragedy of Charlie Hebdo which should have been an opportunity for the political establishment to unite the nation and re-imagine a France inclusive of all its citizens was sadly instead turned into international publicity fare—a cheap political farce.

## **2.2. International Heads of State: State-sponsored Terror**

Another performance of terror materialized on January 11, 2015. Gathered in Paris, numerous world leaders marched with President Hollande in solidarity. Their message was to express support for freedom of speech, denounce terrorism, and stand in unity with France against global terror. Among these state officials were the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, British Prime Minister David Cameron, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, Gabon President Ali Bongo Ondimba, King Abdullah of Jordan, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, and the U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder. These alleged supporters of freedom of speech have in fact suppressed free speech, persecuted journalists, and shut down media outlets in stark violation of the freedom of the press. Outraged by the hypocrisy “of leaders from countries where journalists and bloggers are systematically persecuted,” Reporters Without Borders issued a formal statement to denounce the “presence of [these] ‘predators’ in [the] Paris march.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to hypocrisy, violence and opportunism are common characteristics the present leaders and state representatives share. For example, the Israeli-organized acts of terror in the Gaza Strip last year took the lives of seven Palestinian journalists.<sup>20</sup> In Israel, liberal journalists like Gideon Livy found it difficult to freely express their opinions, especially during Operation Protective Edge. In fact, Livy had to hire bodyguards after death threats were made on his life from Israeli ultranationalists. Hoping to attract the votes of more Israelis, including ultranationalists, Prime Minister Netanyahu joined the Paris Charlie Hebdo March although the French government advised against it.<sup>21</sup> His presence was opportunistic and his case was by no means exceptional. Jeremy Scahill is, indeed, right to call the display of world leaders a “circus of hypocrisy” because “[e]very single one of those heads of state or representatives of governments there have waged their own wars against journalists.”<sup>22</sup> Although the display of these actors of state-sponsored terror was an insult to the pure concept of freedom of speech, their presence in Paris posed a more serious problem. Their presence internationalized a homemade French problem. Therefore, it absolved the French political establishment of any responsibility for the Charlie Hebdo tragic event, aided in its effort to silence French Muslims, and created the illusion of a clash of civilizations. To better understand the gravity of this political theatre, I must turn to the case of Charlie Hebdo.

## **2.3. Charlie Hebdo: False Prophets**

Charlie Hebdo became the bastion of French liberty and *the* symbol of liberal freedom of speech immediately after the January 2015 attack. The history of the magazine, however, underscores the complexity of the French situation. It points to a sophisticated breed of state hypocrisy and it therefore raises legitimate questions about the limits of freedom of speech. Founded in 1969, the magazine was called Hara-Kiri Hebdo. In the following year, it faced a serious challenge from the French political establishment for ridiculing the deceased former French President Charles de Gaulle. “The country’s interior minister,” writes Oliver Duggan, “swiftly banned Hara-Kiri Hebdo, forcing the group to change their name.”<sup>23</sup> Failing to attract enough readers to cover its operational expenses, the magazine closed its doors from 1981 to 1991. Since 1991, the magazine gradually has focused its satire on the trouble with

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<sup>19</sup> Reporters Without Borders, “RWB Condemns Presence of ‘Predators’ in Paris March, Calls for Solidarity with All ‘Charlies,’” *Reporters Without Borders*, January 11, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Jessica Elgot, “11 Troubling World Leaders at the Paris Charlie Hebdo Rally,” *The Huffington Post*, January 12, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Barak David, “Why Benjamin Netanyahu Attended Paris Anti-Terror March over France’s Objection,” *The Jewish Daily Forward*, January 12, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Amy Goodman, “‘Circus of Hypocrisy’: Jeremy Scahill on How World Leaders at Paris March Oppose Press Freedom,” *Democracy Now*, January 12, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Oliver Duggan, “The History of Charlie Hebdo, Bastion of French Satire,” *The Telegraph* (UK), January 7, 2015.

Islam and the related objection to freedom of speech; consequently, it “tripled its usual sales and the politicians whose predecessors had once forced Hebdo to close came rushing to its defence.”<sup>24</sup>

This newly-found appeal among French politicians, including President Hollande, possibly has to do with the French hyper-anxiety over, and institutionalized prejudice towards, French Muslims and visible signs of religiosity among French Catholics and Jews. The magazine has been in harmony with the political establishment on issues of *laïcité*, or French secularism, and the discourse of “liberal racism.” However, to evade charges of racial and religious vilifications of French Muslims, the magazine has constantly argued for its professional and constitutional right to ridicule the worldwide phenomenon of Islamic extremism. Indeed, according to Alain Gresh,<sup>25</sup> deputy director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Philippe Val, the director of Charlie Hebdo, signed, in 2006, “The Twelve’s Manifesto: Together Against the New Totalitarianism.”<sup>26</sup> In this manifesto, Val and others wrote the following: “After having overcome Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism, the world now faces a new global threat of a totalitarian nature: Islamism. We—writers, journalists and intellectuals—call for resistance against religious totalitarianism . . . to promote freedom, equal opportunity and secular values for all.”<sup>27</sup> The call conceals a liberal racist attitude towards French Muslims. This dishonest call to target global Islamism is part of a revived transnational clash of civilizations discourse, a discourse opposed not only to the presence of Muslims as citizens of the West, but also to the visibility of all manifestations of ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious diversity.<sup>28</sup> It targets multiculturalism.

### *2.3.1. Pens for Social Justice: The Role of Intellectuals*

Read in the context of formal French politics towards French Muslims of North African descent, the magazine’s satirical representations of Islam not only infringe on their religious and cultural character, but they also veil the harsh realities under which French Muslims live. After all, satirical representations operate within the national domain. They are influenced by, and inform, the general public mood. Satirical art does not operate in a vacuum. On this ground, satirical art is a powerful tool of critique, *if* used ethically. An intellectual, the artist has a moral obligation and especially so in locales where

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<sup>24</sup> Duggan, “The History of Charlie Hebdo.”

<sup>25</sup> Alain Gresh, “It’s Going to Get Worse for French Muslims: The Problem with Drawings that Fuels Sectarian Tension,” *Aljazeera*, January 8, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> The manifesto document was published in the weekly magazine *L’Express*, by Bernard-Henri Levy, Caroline Fourest, and Antoine Sfeir.

<sup>27</sup> The manifesto is quoted in Alain Gresh.

<sup>28</sup> Regardless of the strong criticism Samuel P. Huntington’s thesis of the Clash of Civilizations has received, in the context of the Global War on Terror, the rising nativism in North America and Europe, and the general anxiety over economic recession and immigration, a plethora of American and European writers have found the thesis rather appealing. Geert Wilders, Thilo Sarrazin, Gisèle Littman also known as Bat Ye’or, Oriana Fallaci, Niall Ferguson, Pamela Gellar, Robert Spencer, Daniel Pipes, Patrick Buchanan, Christopher Caldwell, Mark Steyn, the late Christopher Hitchens, and Bruce Bawer claim that the West is facing a reverse Muslim crusade. Muslims will take over the West through demographics and conspiracies. Particularly, they all consider the presence of Muslims (Arabs included) in the West a tectonic threat.

These culturally conservative views strongly resonate in the writing of first-generation American cultural conservatives of Muslim or Arab descent. Brigitte Gabriel, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Nonie Darwish, and Wafa Sultan, among others warn the West of what they consider the inevitable threat Islam and Muslims constitute—both nationally and globally. In their narratives, Islam, multiculturalism, and all manifestations of non-Western cultural and ethno-religious difference are to be erased. In *Nomad: From Islam to America—A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilization*, Ali argues that the contemporary clash is not only between the West and Islam: “the West needs to criticize the cultures of men of color too. We need to drop the ethos of relativist respect for non-Western religions and cultures if respect is simply a euphemism for appeasement” (242). All non-white and non-Christian others are a threat. All must be assimilated: “When I speak of assimilation,” Ali clarifies, “I mean assimilation into civilization. Aborigines, Afghans, Somalis, Arabs, Native Americans—all these non-Western groups have to make that transition to modernity” (260).

prejudice and racism penetrate the institutional, societal, and moral fabrics of one's nation. This obligation, according to the late Edward Said, "is not to consolidate authority, but to understand, interpret, and question it." To Said, "the intellectual vocation essentially is somehow to alleviate human suffering and not to celebrate what in effect does not need celebrating, whether that's the state or the patria or any of these basically triumphalist agents in . . . society."<sup>29</sup> Artists who do not speak truth to power and do not help set the record straight, by pushing normative boundaries to a point of break, are fake intellectuals. Artists, satirists, academics, and other intellectuals, Said argues, are "individuals with a vocation for the art of representing;"<sup>30</sup> however, they are "of their time, herded along by the mass politics."<sup>31</sup> But they are "capable of resisting those [representations] only by disputing the . . . trends of thought that maintain the status quo." Intellectuals ought to speak *to*, but not *for*, power. In the French context, racist liberalism is now the normalized form of unchallenged power. It imposes essentialist notions of identity on individuals, communities, and the French collective. It does not recognize the plurality of identities, histories, and worldviews that compose contemporary France. It rather aims for a pure France, one without any ethno-religious difference, an imaginary France controlled by authoritarian regimes. In the face of such veiled tyranny, a true intellectual must destabilize normalized oppression and must disrupt dominant narratives. Intellectuals must advance "alternative versions in which, to the best of one's ability, the intellectual tries to tell the truth."<sup>32</sup> To fulfill these expectations, intellectuals ought to give voice to the voiceless, the oppressed, and the persecuted, those who are silenced by the might of the sword or the belligerence of the word.

These are not romantic ideals. Indeed, there are responsible intellectuals who question the status quo especially when voices for reason and justice are hushed. The accomplished graphic artist Joe Sacco engaged with the Charlie Hebdo incident in the form of satirical cartoon. In his response, Sacco exposes the limits of freedom of speech and draws attention to the responsibility of the artist—a responsibility to contextualize and historicize his or her narrative. Sacco interrogates the romanticized status official France bestowed upon Charlie Hebdo. "Though tweaking the noses of Muslims might be as permissible as it is now believed to be dangerous," Sacco writes, "it has never struck me as anything other than a vapid way to use the pen."<sup>33</sup> Sacco objects to Charlie Hebdo arguing for an absolute freedom of speech to vilify the marginalized while ironically dismissing "a cartoonist—Maurice Sinet . . . —for allegedly writing anti-Semitic column." Responding to this dismissal case, Journalist Alain Gresh writes, "[w]hile claiming to stand for press freedom, Charlie Hebdo dismissed one of its star cartoonists, Sine, due to false accusations of anti-Semitism."<sup>34</sup> Standing against this hypocritically oppressive artistic philosophy of liberal racism, Sacco reminds his fellow journalists and artists that absolute freedom of expression is a myth. This myth is as problematic as lampooning Muslims, on the ground of tectonic contemporary conditions shaped by Western imperialism and state-organized terror, is. Indeed, context and historical facts seem to have no currency for Charlie Hebdo. Satirical art communicates serious messages about real life people and their everyday challenges. It is by default political. Artists who cannot recognize that "lines on paper are a weapon" are false prophets. They produce *performances of terror*. Like sharp knives, their oppressive representations unremorsefully cut the throats of those who dwell in the margins. It is a given that "satire is meant to cut to the bone. But whose bone? What exactly is the target? And why?"<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U. Press, 2000), 502-03.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 13.

<sup>31</sup> Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Said, *Representations*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Joe Sacco, "On Satire: a Response to Charlie Hebdo Attacks," *The Guardian*, January 9, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Alain Gresh, "It's Going to Get Worse for French Muslims: The Problem with Drawings that Fuels Sectarian Tension," *Aljazeera*, January 8, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Joe Sacco, "On Satire."



### 3. Conclusion

So far, opportunistic ultranationalists, both religious and secular, have used the Charlie Hebdo tragedy to advance their agendas or pursue short-sighted objectives. To serve their interests, they have all performed acts of terror. According to their deformed worldviews, there is room on the national stage for *only* one actor, one tradition, and one hegemony. All manifestations of unsanctioned difference must be forced into unconditional submission. Yet, each player righteously claims moral superiority. These players forget a basic fact: the formation of identity is dialogical and relational. Charles Taylor is indeed correct to point out that

our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.<sup>36</sup>

Caught between state-sponsored and rogue performances of terror, French Muslims, among other minoritized sectors of the French society, will continue to suffer in silence. Subjected to state-sponsored demonization, abject exclusions, liberal racism, and most likely further draconian securitization measures on the ground of so-called war on terror, French Muslims have to endure until the rogue currents dissipate and the clash of civilizations discourse loses its purchasing power. Until the currents shift, French Muslims will continue to be the object of suspicion and discrimination. To liberate them through exposing liberal racism, intellectuals should condemn all performances of terror, including those executed by the state and its apparatuses against minoritized ethno-religious communities.

Indeed, violence in all its forms and shapes must be condemned, but condemnation alone is not enough. Deconstructing the essentialist representations of the self and its imagined other is a good place to start. Exposing liberal racism for what it is is next. In this endeavor, true intellectuals carry a heavy burden as they speak to, but not for, power. Their pens can, and should, spark a revolution.

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 25.

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