



CHARLIE HEBDO: A BRIEF HISTORY

Dr. Claire Visier

ABSTRACT

Dear Friends, I am pleased to share with you a brief note written by Dr. Claire Visier, Marie Curie fellow at the European Institute of Istanbul Bilgi University, on the Charlie Hebdo Debate in France. Dr. Visier provides us with a very detailed account of this unfortunate massacre looking at the domestic and international debates revolving around the issue.

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Dr. Claire Visier
Istanbul Bilgi University
European Institute

Charlie Hebdo was founded in 1969 under the name of *Stupid and Nasty, Hara Kiri Hebdo*. It was banned in 1970 because of its first cover dedicated to General Charles De Gaulle's death "*Tragic ball at Colombey: 1 dead*",¹ and was founded again under the name of *Charlie Hebdo*. It disappeared in 1982 due to its lack of audience and resumed publishing in 1992. The recognition of the journal is not a matter of audience (120.000 at its peak in 1971, only 3.000 in 1981). It is more closely linked to its very specific inscription in the media landscape and the way it embodies some leftist

¹ Colombey is the village of De Gaulle; one week before his death a night club there took fire and more than 140 persons were killed.

trajectories after May '68. Moreover, the newspaper introduced some cartoonists who later became celebrities, and attracted very well-known columnists.

1969-1981: “Stupid and nasty”, an outsider but very emblematic newspaper

During its first period, the newspaper claimed to use a “*stupid and nasty*” black humor: uncompromising, provocative, sexually explicit, often violent and scatological with no moral boundaries. Its co-founder (with Professor Choron), F. Cavanna argued that

“nothing is sacred, nothing, not even your own mother, not even the Jewish Martyrs, not even those dying of hunger... Laughing ferociously and bitterly at absolutely everything, in order to exorcise the old monsters. It would pay them too much respect only to approach them with a straight face. It's exactly about the worst things that you should laugh the loudest, it's where it hurts the most that you should scratch until it bleeds”.²

The specificity was not only in tone but also in manner. Although there were many writers, the publication remains in the collective memory as the starting point of many famous cartoonists like Reiser, Cabu, G  b  , Wolinski and Willem. Influenced by American comics (especially *Mad* magazine) but also following the French tradition of an anti-establishment media, their emblematic drawings were not used as illustrations of articles but as autonomous writing.³ Thus the cover pages of *Charlie Hebdo* are the showcase of the journal; they symbolize the spirit of the journal. In the early days, the relationship between *Charlie Hebdo* staff and the traditional press was quite tense and reciprocally loathing: “*They have never accepted us. Our flat refusal of any labels, cronyism liaisons even within journalism, paves the way for the disdain of the entire profession*”, said Charlie’s journalists.⁴

The story of the newspaper is inseparable from the late sixties and seventies in France. It claims to have the cultural heritage of May '68. Its free tone crystallized and stimulated the debate about censorship, and paradoxically, the newspaper became famous thanks to its ban, but it has also covered a lot of social issues that were not especially linked to hot political issues. Due to its aversion to values like order, authority and advocacy to powerful groups, and to the political right wing, *Charlie Hebdo* can be politically qualified as leftist, but the members of the staff were not leftist political activists such as Trotskyites or Maoists, and adopted a very hard-line attitude towards the left political parties. The staff was made up of anarchists, libertarians, ecologists, feminists, anti-clericals and anti-militarists who did not share the same point of view. There was no specific editorial line, and this was accepted and proclaimed. The

² F. Cavanna, *B  te et m  chant*, Le Livre de Poche, 1983.

³ S. Mazurier, *B  te, m  chant et hebdomadaire. Une histoire de Charlie Hebdo (1969-1982)*. Paris, Buchet Chastel, 2009, p. 86.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

newspaper also remains famous for its orgiastic and alcoholic editorial meetings. In that sense the newspaper was anti-conformist without being specifically political. Outsider but very emblematic, “*It triggers a renewal, defines a new sensibility that addresses the needs of a new segment of the audience*” said F. Giroud in 1971.⁵ Its specificity inspired the first version of the newspaper *Liberation* (far-left daily newspaper founded by J.C. Sartre and S. July in 1973 in the wake of the 1968 protests).⁶

The 1973 economic crisis as well as the election in 1974 of V. Giscard d’Estaing definitively closed the era of de Gaulle and opened a new era. The newspaper seemed to be a mismatch with the spirit of this time, and meanwhile Cavanna faced hard times trying to ease the growing internal dissensions. The accession of the left wing to political power definitively drew readers away from the newspaper. The publication of the journal ceased at the end of 1981 due to its lack of readership.



Urba, unemployment, hemophilia, superphenix (affairs...)
F. Mitterrand: “And Charlie who returns!”

A process of normalization of the newspaper under the P. Val’s management

Charlie Hebdo began publication again in 1992, not as a new newspaper but as a rebirth of the former one. Except for the co-founder, Professor Choron, most of the old staff was part of the new one, completed by newcomers like the cartoonists Charb, Tignous, Riss, Luz, and the economist B. Maris. The new editorial chief, P. Val, was also a newcomer. The layout of the newspaper as well as its spirit remained the same: “*There is exactly the same reason to be angry, the law of the powerful one, the same few people that cling to power and decide for millions of others*”, said Cabu.⁷ But in a new social and political period, the newspaper underwent a process of normalization. At the same time it still gave a good overview of the left-wing trajectories.

The new *Charlie Hebdo*’s publication was very well received (its first issue sold 120.000 copies) and was successful in the 1990s, accompanying and supporting the rise of protest movements. Thanks to the large French domestic social protest movement in 1995 and to the emergence of alter-mondialism (the newspaper is one of the founding

⁵ F. Giroud, quoted in F. Barbant, « Charlie Hebdo, nous nous sommes tant aimés », *Vif.be-L’Express*, <http://www.levif.be/actualite/international/charlie-hebdo-nous-nous-sommes-tant-aimes/article-normal-360445.html>

⁶ During the 1980s and 1990s *Liberation* underwent a number of shifts to take a more conformist center-left position.

⁷ F. Roussel, I. Hanne, « "Charlie", satire dans tous les sens », *Libération*, 7/01/2015,

members of the very popular French association ATTAC), its readership increased to 90,000. Its strong stand against the far right was also very timely and relevant at this moment. The content of the newspaper evolved, with a larger focus on political news, the recruitment of journalists coming from traditional newspapers and well-known signatures. "*Drawings have become more illustrative. Before, the cartoonists let their imagination run free. When they wanted to publish a caricature without any link to the hot news, they did. Now, caricatures are dedicated to the hot news, they have become illustrations*".⁸ The internal atmosphere also changed, far from the anarchic joyful mess of the 1970s: editorial conferences, for example, became much more serious. During that period, *Charlie* achieved some scoops and definitively turned its back to marginality. "*Charlie Hebdo is not Hara-Kiri. It is a political newspaper, left-wing and responsible*", said Cabu.⁹ Comparing the front pages of the 1970s (for example, the treatment of the anti-Semitic wave at the end of the decade) and 1990s, the newspaper quieted down. But it still fought without taboo in turn: militarism, religious fundamentalism, far right, (Corsican or Basque) nationalism, religion, the Pope, the hunters, the toreros, the politicians, and so forth.

At the end of the 1990s, the chief editor P. Val's political stand and management led to harsh internal fights with a very large impact on the public sphere and on the readership. In 1999, P. Val took a very clear position in the journal's editorials in favor of the NATO intervention in Kosovo. It then started to be considered by a part of the far-left readership as pro-Atlanticist and an aggressor; meanwhile his position was also criticized within the newspaper. Concerning the left wing coalition in power, a fault-line emerged among the staff separating them between a moderate, soft stand (P. Val's position) and a more radical one (held by Charb and Siné, for example). The 1999 European elections aggravated the tensions, since P. Val called for a vote to the Green list of Cohn Bendit, a prominent figure of May '68, and opened *Charlie's* columns to D. Voynet, the Green minister of the environment, and A. Liepitz, another key figure of the French Green Party. While disapproving it, a part of the team decided to publish, without P. Val's approval, the result of an internal poll that put the far-left list in first position of intended vote. This triggered a harsh internal crisis, and meanwhile the readership decreased from 70,000 to less than 60,000 copies in one year. In 2000, a new formula was launched by the journal in order to attract new readers. Some of P. Val's opponents left the newspaper. Bernard Maris and Gérard Biard were appointed as new assistant chief editors, embodying a new *Charlie Hebdo* style: impertinent but not thoughtless, more political than satirical. Wolinsky explained this process with the following words:¹⁰

"The provocation of the former Charlie was necessary to advocate reforms for abortion or the contraceptive pill. Today, we are fighting for

⁸B. Touverey, « Charlie Hebdo, canal historique, Entretien avec Stéphane Mazurier », *Biblio obs*, Nouvel obs.com 09/01/2015

⁹ R. Valentin, « Interview avec Cabu », *L'Est Républicain*, 15/09/1996

¹⁰ B. D'Algerre, « 10 ans de Charlie Hebdo », *Ring, New, culture et société*, 20/06/2002.

preserving what we gained at this time. Provocation just for provocation makes no sense. Charlie's vocation is not to be pornographic."

P. Val's political position after the September 11, 2001 attacks also generated large internal and external debates. He criticized far-leftist movements for not having condemned the attacks because of their anti-Americanism. Still fighting against neo-liberal globalization and commoditization, he then started to distance himself from alter-mondialism, which he considered to be more and more anti-American and anti-Semitic. At the European Social Forum held in Paris in 2003, he opposed the coming of Tarik Ramadan, whom he considers an "*anti-Semitic propagandist*". He denounced "*a rhetoric which is the same that was spread all around Europe before the Second World War*" and that "*must be considered as a cause for concern*".¹¹ In 2008, P. Val dismissed Siné, one of the newspaper's famous cartoonists, considering one of his articles to be anti-Semitic. Siné perceived it as a pretext for his firing. The crisis led to extensive media coverage, with many personalities arguing in favor of one or the other. Again, the consequence was a decrease of the audience, which had risen again up to 80.000 and then declined to 55.000.

In March 2006, in relation to the Mohammad cartoon controversy in Denmark, P. Val organized and co-signed with 11 people, among them Taslima Nasreen and Salman Rushdie, a manifest "***Together facing the new totalitarianism, Islamism***", first published in *Charlie Hebdo*.¹² The manifest goes as follows:

"After having overcome Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, the world now faces a new totalitarian global threat: Islamism. We, writers, journalists, intellectuals, call for resistance to religious totalitarianism and for the promotion of freedom, equal opportunity and secular values for all. The recent events, which occurred after the publication of drawings of Muhammad in European newspapers, have revealed the necessity of the struggle for these universal values. This struggle will not be won by arms, but in the ideological field. It is not a clash of civilizations nor an antagonism of West and East that we are witnessing, but a global struggle that confronts democrats and theocrats. Like all totalitarianisms, Islamism is nurtured by fears and frustrations... Islamism is a reactionary ideology which kills equality, freedom and secularism wherever it is present. Its success can only lead to a world of domination: man's domination over woman, the Islamists' domination over all the others. To counter this, we must assure universal rights to oppressed or discriminated people. We reject 'cultural relativism', which consists in accepting that men and women of Muslim culture should be deprived of the right to equality, freedom and secular values in the name of respect

¹¹ P. Val, « L'antisémitisme n'est pas une marchandise », *Charlie Hebdo*, 5/11/2003.

¹² « Ensemble contre le nouveau totalitarisme, l'islamisme », *Charlie Hebdo*, 1/03/2006.

for cultures and traditions. We refuse to renounce our critical spirit out of fear of being accused of "Islamophobia", an unfortunate concept which confuses criticism of Islam as a religion with stigmatization of its believers. We plead for the universality of freedom of expression, so that a critical spirit may be exercised on all continents, against all abuses and all dogmas. We appeal to democrats and free spirits of all countries that our century should be one of Enlightenment, not of obscurantism."

In 2009, P. Val left the newspaper to become the president of the French national radio "France-Inter"; Charb took over his position and refocused the newspaper on a more satirical approach.

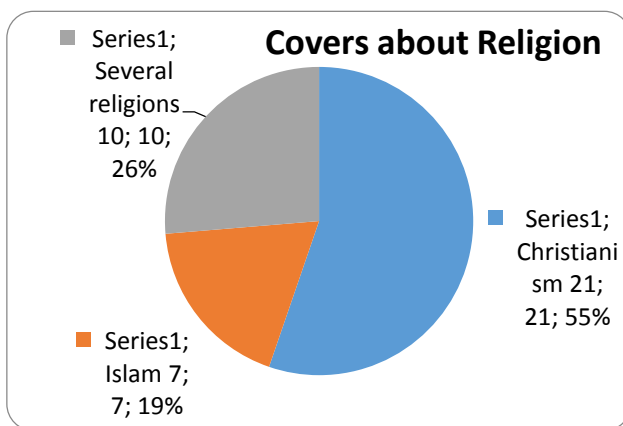
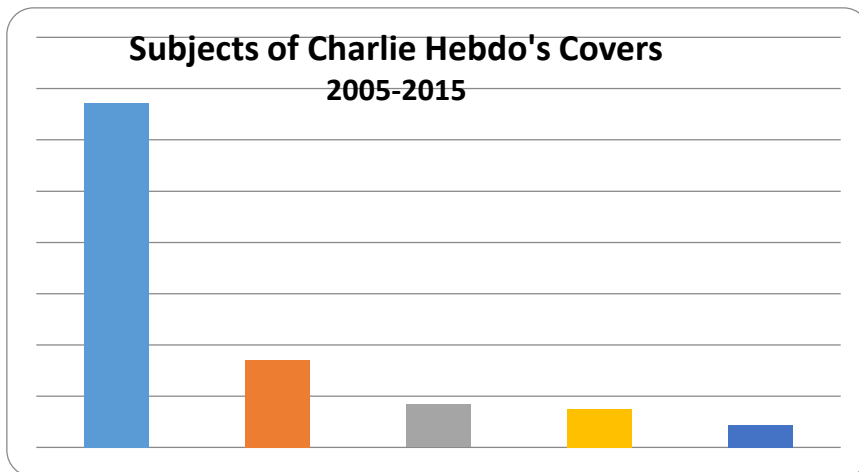
P. Val or Charlie Hebdo approach towards Islam and Muslims

P. Val's period is remembered as a controversial one, with consequences that are still felt today. The 2015 January attacks generated a debate about *Charlie Hebdo's* approach toward Islam and Muslims¹³. The political stands of P. Val and also of C. Fourest, who worked for the newspaper between 2005 and 2009, specifically on Islamism, triggered a large debate. Some people accused the newspaper of being racist and Islamophobic. Others considered that the positions of some of the members of the staff cannot sum up the position of a newspaper which is made up of plenty of political identities (far-left, left, anarchy, ecology) and that the magazine did not have a very clear editorial line: "*Charlie must be a tool against bullshit. Apart from that, we disagree on everything*", said Luz¹⁴, referring to the internal fights which sometimes were very harsh. On the 24th of February, two sociologists published a short study of *Charlie Hebdo's* front covers between 2005 and 2015¹⁵, showing that only 7% of the front covers were dedicated to religion. Among the 38 front covers mocking religion, 21 are about Catholicism and 7 about Islam. Jews were always laughed at with believers of other religions; 3 covers mocked all the religions.

¹³ It is interesting to notice that the debate spread even to the professional academic mailing list of French Political (ANCSMP list) with more than 20 mails exchanged during three days in the first week of March.

¹⁴ F. Roussel, I. Hanne, « "Charlie", satire dans tous les sens », *Liberation*, 7/01/2015.

¹⁵ J.F. Mignot, C. Goffrette, « Non, "Charlie Hebdo" n'est pas obsédé par l'islam », *Le Monde*, 24/2/2015.



This debate raises a point that must be highlighted: the question of the context and the contextualization of *Charlie Hebdo's* cartoons. As I have shown, *Charlie Hebdo* is a very specific medium in the French public space. Thanks to its history and to the celebrities who work in the newspaper, it is very famous; meanwhile its regular readership has remained very confidential, and regularly decreased. At the end of 2014, the print run was about 45.000 and only 30.000 were sold every week. Very few French people read *Charlie Hebdo*, or even have read it at least once. Everyone shapes his own opinion about *Charlie* through a process that encompasses a more or less important knowledge of the trajectory of the newspaper, the events that have brought the newspaper into the highlights of other media, and the comics or cover pages that have circulated in the web sphere. In that sense, the process of construction of opinion about the newspaper is quite remote from what the newspaper really is. The gap is even worse outside France, because the specificity of the newspaper is taken into account much less. The process of decontextualization is very important to keep in mind looking at the Muhammad cartoons' controversy. A second paradox needs to be clarified for a better approach to the controversy. On the one hand, due to its history

and to its satirical approach, the newspaper still considers itself marginal¹⁶; on the other hand, the popularity of many of its cartoonists and columnists, their insertion in the politico-mediatic scene¹⁷ nuance this marginality and underlined the process of normalization of the newspaper.

CHARLIE HEBDO AND MUHAMMAD CONTROVERSY

In 2004 the Dutch film director Theo van Gogh was murdered in Amsterdam because of a movie he created that dealt with violence against women in some Islamic societies. The following year, the Danish writer Kåre Bluitgen complained about being unable to find an illustrator prepared to work on his children's book *The Qur'an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad*, because of their fear of reprisals. The Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* then asked the members of the newspaper illustrators union if they would be willing to draw Muhammad, and published 12 cartoons about Muhammad on 30 September 2005. Some of the cartoons were poetic (Muhammad with a walking stick seemingly on a desert trek, with the sun on the left, low on the horizon), some were stylized (the Islamic star and crescent merged with the face of Muhammad). One showed a worried cartoonist hiding the Muhammad portrayal he is doing. Another presented a young boy named Mohamed in front of a blackboard, pointing at a written sentence (in Persian): "*The editorial team of Jyllands-Posten is a bunch of reactionary provocateurs*". Another showed Muhammad in the sky welcoming Muslims who had committed suicide attacks and saying that there were no more virgins. One figured Muhammad with a bomb in his turban.

Muslim groups in Denmark promptly reacted to the publication, complaining and holding protests in Denmark. A *Committee for Prophet Honoring* called for a meeting with the prime minister. Two cartoonists received death threats. A controversy emerged: while the newspaper announced that this was an attempt to contribute to the debate about criticism of Islam and self-censorship, others considered that the newspaper's intention was only to be provocative. In December, the controversy took on an international dimension. After failing to meet with the Danish government, the *Committee* decided to gain support and leverage outside by meeting directly with religious and political leaders in the Middle East. Contestation gained a diplomatic international dimension as the 12 cartoons started to be published in different parts of the world, first in Egypt, then in Europe and in the USA. In late January and February 2006, protests against the cartoons were held around the world; some of them turned violent, with at least 200 deaths according to the *New York Times*.¹⁸ Danish Prime

¹⁶ This remains true to a certain extent. For example, the newspaper doesn't want any advertising, which normally accounts for a large part of the media financing.

¹⁷ Two examples of its insertion among many others: we have noticed that P. Val left *Charlie Hebdo* to become the director of the first national public radio. President Hollande was directly informed of the 11/01/2015 terrorist attacks by one of the Charlie Hebdo's columnist, P. Pelloux, whom he knew very well.

¹⁸ P. Cohen, « Yale Press Bans Images of Muhammad in New Book », *The New York Times*, 12/08/2009.

Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen described the controversy as Denmark's worst international relations incident since the Second World War.

In France, the issue was covered by all the media and triggered a large debate. The managing director of the daily *France Soir* (J. Lefranc) was the first to decide, in February, to reprint the cartoons; he was dismissed the following day by the owner of the journal. The mainstream daily newspapers *Liberation* and *Le Monde* decided to reprint only some of the cartoons.¹⁹ In the international context of the crisis, the French President (and also Bill Clinton and Kofi Annan, general secretary of the UN) said that the newspapers that disseminated the caricatures made exaggerated use of freedom of expression and demanded more responsibility. The famous French NGO against racism, MRAP, considered the cartoons Islamophobic. One week after the publication in *France Soir* and because of the dismissal of the managing director, *Charlie Hebdo* reprinted all the 12 Danish cartoons, and dedicated its cover to a Cabu cartoon depicting a sobbing Mohammed with his head in his hands, saying, “*It’s hard to be loved by idiots*” with the caption “*Mohammed overwhelmed by fundamentalists*”. 160,000 copies (instead of the 60-70,000 regulars) were printed for this issue that quickly ran out of stock; 480,000 new copies were reprinted.

Following the publication, the Paris Great Mosque and the Union of Islamic Organizations of France sued its editor P. Val, arguing that Cabu’s cartoon and two of the Danish ones created an offensive link between Islam and terrorism and accusing Val of “*publicly abusing a group of people because of their religion*”²⁰. *Charlie Hebdo* is used to being sued. Between 1992 and 2014, it was taken to court 48 times²¹, mainly by the far right and the Catholic associations, politicians or journalists. 2007 saw the first trial under a charge of Muslim organizations (another one took place in 2013). Whereas the newspaper was almost always condemned between 1969 and 1982, it has been acquitted of charges in 75% of the cases since 1992. This is due to a very protective law concerning media freedom in France, a larger societal and judiciary tolerance, but also a softening of *Charlie*’s caricatures. Since 2000, the number of trials has decreased. Still, the 2007 one received very important media coverage.

Charlie Hebdo wanted this trial to be a symbol of the freedom of expression. It called on many important politicians, like F. Hollande, first secretary of the Socialist Party F. Bayrou, presidential candidate who claimed its Christianity as witness. Even N. Sarkozy, at this time Minister of the Interior and for religious communities, also presidential candidate, sent a message of strong support that was read during the trial: “*I prefer too much caricature to no caricature*”. Finally, *Charlie* was acquitted, considering that “*In a laique and pluralistic society, the respect of all the believers goes*

¹⁹ *Le Monde* also published an original drawing by its famous cartoonist Plantu: a cartoonist under the control of an Imam writes 100 times “I mustn’t draw Mahomet”, like a school child. The sentences figure a bearded face.

²⁰ It is interesting to notice that they only complained about 3 out of the 12 cartoons, meaning that the depiction of the Prophet was not a problem in itself.

²¹ « *Charlie Hebdo, 22 ans de procès en tous genres* », *Le Monde*, 8/01/2015.

together with the freedom of criticism of religions, whatever they are". The judges also insisted on the fact that blasphemy is not a criminal offence anymore in France. They also took the specificity of *Charlie Hebdo* into account: "a satirical newspaper that contains a lot of caricatures that no one is obliged to buy or to read, unlike advertising posters or billboards, for example". They considered two cartoons to be offensive, but only towards fundamentalism and suicide attacks. The statement for the third cartoon (showing the prophet with a bomb in his turban) was a little bit different: the judges considered that it could be seen as an offensive expression towards all the Muslim believers because it equates them to terrorist supporters. But, even though shocking, they considered that it needed to be interpreted in the light of the context: *Charlie Hebdo* publication did not mean to offend all Muslims but only made a contribution to the current debate about supporters of fundamentalism and violent Islam. This judicial answer was very interesting, placing greater emphasis on the contextualization of the cartoons. The Paris Great Mosque's rector was not unhappy with the verdict.²² He underlined that "We have made the same interpretation but the court did not conclude in the same way (...) in another context, it could have decided against the cartoon". On the contrary, the Union of Islamic Organizations of France denounced a political verdict and appealed against the judgment, unlike the Great Mosque. But the debate went far beyond the French context. P. Val considered the judgment to be a "European victory", revenge for the murder of Theo Van Gogh and on the absence of reaction after the attacks against Denmark and its embassies which was "a Munich attitude", he said. In that sense, we can say that P. Val sees *Charlie Hebdo* as a minority who resists, a kind of "war resister". After the publication of the caricatures, *Charlie Hebdo's* staff received death threats and the newspaper was placed under the protection of the police.

The second step of the controversy took place in 2011. At that time, Val and other polemical journalists (like C. Fourest) had already left the newspaper. On November 2, *Charlie Hebdo* was fired, just before its 3 November issue was due. The issue was entitled ***Sharia Hebdo*** and featured Muhammad as the guest-editor. It took place just after the Ennahda party's electoral victory in Tunisia, and Libyan leaders' statements in favor of *Sharia* and polygamy. The attacks generated a strong solidarity movement with the newspaper. The *Charia Hebdo* issue ran out of stock. Even if death threats had never stopped since 2006, *Charlie Hebdo's* team was really shocked by the attack. "I can't really understand how a drawing can generate such reaction. It doesn't deserve death or fire!" said Charb.²³ Because of the attack, the newspaper had to move, and three persons (Charb, and two other cartoonists, Luz and Riss) were placed under police protection. In 2013, Charb's name was included in a wanted dead or alive for crimes against Islam article published by *Inspire*, the terrorist propaganda magazine published by al Qaida. The *Charia Hebdo* issue has rekindled the debate about *Charlie Hebdo's* position towards Islam and Muslims, underpinned by columnists who had left

²² Observers consider that the Great Mosque had been pressured into going to court.

²³ « Un dessin, ça ne mérite ni la mort, ni un incendie : entretien avec CHarb », *La Chaîne Parlementaire*, 2013 <http://www.lcp.fr/videos/reportages/167056-charb-un-dessin-ca-ne-merite-ni-la-mort-ni-un-incendie>.

the newspaper. This debate lasted for a long period. In 2013, Charb published a long article in the newspaper *Le Monde*, entitled “No, Charlie is not racist!” arguing that “*the reading of our newspaper is the proof of what we claim [we are not racist] (...), those who dare to say the opposite don’t read us and just rely on disgusting rumors*”.²⁴ This claim puts the spotlight on the paradox I have already pointed out: the independence of some of the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons which are diffused all over the world without any reference (except the name) to what the newspaper is.

Charlie Hebdo has embodied the trajectories of the leftist movements in France since the late sixties with a very specific freedom of speech; in that sense it can be considered a French symbol. Rather controversial, the newspaper has been in the center of a broad debate about the way a religion (Islam), a political phenomenon (Islamism) and one of its components (radical Islamism), believers or just members by origin of this religion (Muslims), a French minority and a world community can be depicted and mocked. “*40 years ago, shouting at (...) religions was an obligatory path. The ones who wanted to criticize how the world is run needed to call the main clergies into question. But according to more and more people, we should now remain silent*”²⁵ Charb summed up the issue but also reduced it, speaking only of “clergies”.

JANUARY 2015, FRANCE: CHARLIE’S EVENTS

On 7 January 2015, two Islamist terrorists armed with assault rifles and other weapons forced their way into the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris. They fired up to 50 shots, initially killing 11 people (including Charb, Wolinsky, Cabu, Riss, B. Maris) injuring 11 others, and shouted “*Allahu Akbar*” during their attack. A French National Police officer was the last to die as he encountered the gunman shortly after they had left the building. One day after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, another Islamist terrorist shot and killed a municipal police officer. The day after, he entered a Casher supermarket at Porte de Vincennes in east Paris. He killed four people and took several hostages, while the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorists were also holding hostages. The police assailed the three terrorists on the 9th of January and killed them. After the *Charlie* attack, 8 January was declared an official day of mourning by President François Hollande, with a minute’s silence required in all the public services. On the 9th of January, demonstrations were held in many French cities. *Je suis Charlie* (French for “I am Charlie”) has come to be a common worldwide sign of solidarity against the attacks. Many demonstrators used the slogan to express solidarity with the newspaper. The hashtag #jesuischarlie quickly trended at the top of Twitter hashtags worldwide following the attack. The United States Embassy in Paris changed its Twitter profile picture to the “*Je suis Charlie*” placard. Demonstrations spread to other cities outside of France, including Amsterdam, Brussels, Barcelona, Ljubljana, Berlin, Copenhagen,

²⁴ Charb, « Non, “Charlie Hebdo” n’est pas raciste ! », *Le Monde*, 20/11/2013.

²⁵ *Ibidem*

London and Washington. Around 700,000 people walked in protests in France on 10 January. On 11 January, up to two million people and more than 40 world leaders led a rally of national unity in the heart of Paris to honor the 17 victims. 3.7 million people joined demonstrations nationwide.

Three famous French historians, Jean-Noel Jeanneney, Pascal Ory and Michel Winock²⁶, agreed on the exceptionality of this 11th January gathering, not only in terms of number of participants (the end of World war II gathered one million people, Victor Hugo's funeral, two million), but also in terms of spatial distribution, international dimension, and Unitarian dimension of the mobilization (the memorable French days are generally more about conflict than they are about Unitarian days²⁷ and France is not really used to such unanimity). This day appears all the more important in the French context of economical, political and social doom and gloom. The demonstrations vigorously contradict the vulgate of the "*declinists*" that has recently flourished again in France.

But the 11th of January was not even ended before questions arose about the political meaning of this mobilization. "*What about tomorrow? What are we going to do*" asked an editorialist²⁸.

"What is the meaning of this huge demonstration (...)? What kind of France are they announcing? No doubt that it was a very strong time. But, the day after is crucial, when life resumes. Why did we mobilize ourselves this Sunday? What was the meaning of the protest? The question is much more complex than we think it is. Why did people protest: - to send a message to the terrorists. But terrorists don't care (...), one can even say that such a mobilization is the sign of their victory (...); - to defend the freedom of expression. Ok, but is it for this reason that V. Orban came (...)? – To show that France is united. But is France really united? Three million people in the street; that means that lots of French were not in the street (...), those who don't care, those who disagree, those who don't want to be close to the others. – To show solidarity to the victims and their families: is the more obvious reason, empathy? It is a nice feeling, but just a feeling. Can we turn it into politics? »²⁹

Can we make politics from that point on? S. Vanish (historian of the Revolution) interprets the mobilization³⁰ as a demonstration of mourning, referring to Mauss's definition of a ritual of symbolic foundation of social groups: in order to create a community, social groups express compulsory feelings to themselves and to the

²⁶ « Un jour qui fait la France », *Le Monde* 11/01/2015, p. 19.

²⁷ Like the three glorious days of July 1830, the 1948's February revolution, May 1968 or the 1984 demonstration against the private school reforms.

²⁸ X. de la Porte, editorial « Attentats en France : et demain, on fait quoi ? », *Rue 89*, 11/01/2015.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ S. Vahnish, A. Badiou, « Contre courant », *Mediapart*, 24/01/2015.

others. In that sense the mobilization touches upon the sacredness of Politics, through the figure of the Republic. It is a refoundation, but it does not have a political meaning by itself, because politics is more about elaboration and development of a line of conflict.

While France is, like other European countries, facing a revival of identities debate, an increase of the Front National and many public denunciations of the so called Islamization process of the society, the political effect of the event is an important issue. Just before *Charlie's* attacks, the latest media controversy was about the forthcoming novel of the very controversial writer M. Houellebecq. Named *Submission*, the novel is about the coming into power in France in 2022 of an Islamic Republic, thanks to an alliance between a Muslim party and a centrist party. Even before its launching, the novel generated a huge debate among journalists who got the book, many of them expressing their indignation: *"I come from a Muslim culture by chance. I am completely laic, I was sickened by this book (...) I felt offended"* said a famous journalist³¹, *"Let's invite Celine"* argued another one. It is, of course, impossible to picture what the long term effects of the attacks and this historical mobilization will be. We would like here just to describe the first political responses and the first debates that emerged in the month following the attacks.

The political answer to the Charlie events

The attacks and the very large mobilization first generated a national unity that made it difficult for any political party to try to take advantage of the event. The management of the three-day crisis by President F. Hollande, Prime Minister M. Valls and the Minister of the Interior B. Cazeneuve and their capacity to organize the hosting of more than 40 world leaders on January 11 has been largely praised. On January 14, for the first time since 1918, all the members of the National Assembly sang the French Anthem. *"At this time, you become aware of being a Representative of the people"* said an UMP member. The Prime Minister also received an ovation after he honored the victims of the attacks. *"For 10 years, I haven't heard such a powerful speech"*, declared the President Deputy of the center right party UDI. Members of far left and ecologist parties also took part in the standing ovation that must have been unthinkable one week earlier. On January 19, a poll (IFOP-Paris-Match) gave a percentage of 40% satisfaction with President Hollande, which meant an increase of 21 points!³²

In this atmosphere, the Front National faced some difficulties. Marine Le Pen accused the "UMPS", which is a contraction of UMP and PS, meaning the parties of the establishment, of exploiting the event and attempting to exclude the FN from the national unity. This stand appeared to be out of step with the huge mobilization. Finally,

³¹A. Baddou, « La Nouvelle Edition », *Canal Plus*, 04/01/2015

³² « Hollande +21 points, Valls +17 », *Le Figaro*, 19/01/2015

considering the FN's strategy of normalization, M. Le Pen decided to join the march on January 11, but not in Paris (that would have meant to be a part of the establishment). She went to Beaucaire, a small town in the South held by a stronghold of the FN, where the demonstration turned into a pro-Marine meeting, a few hundred people shouting "*Here, it is our home*" (*On est chez nous*). Compared to the huge unitarian protest, it appeared once again to be out of step. M. Le Pen's message was also ambiguous: on the first evening of the attacks, she claimed the necessity to not confuse fundamentalists with Muslims, but then, she kept advocating that mass immigration paves the way to Communitarianism and fundamentalism. As usual, her father played a non-consensual and more provocative role, questioning the official version of the attacks or saying "*I am not Charlie, this anarchist newspaper was the direct enemy of our party*". However, these short-term difficulties did not impact the increase of FN's national audience. On the 1st of February, the candidate of the FN arrived ahead in the first round of legislative by-election in the Doux with 32.6 % of the votes. FN also got 25.29% of the vote in the first local elections held on the 23th of March, 2015.

Even if the president of UMP, N. Sarkozy, has tried to coordinate the multiple and various propositions from the right, the opposition has faced difficulties in challenging the government. President Hollande, the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior have monopolized the media and have concentrated the governmental action on the security issue (which is normally a master issue for the right wing). The government has also focused on the education issue, trying to tackle the question of "living together".

The security issue

Well known for his security concerns, Prime Minister, M. Valls announced on January 13 a capacity enhancement to fight terrorism and the development of fundamentalist Islam in France. In his speech at the National Assembly, he spoke about '*a country in war against jihadist and radical Islam*'. As the terrorists were known to the police, the question of a potential failure of the security services arose and the public debate focused on a potential *French Patriot Act*, demanded by a part of the opposition. Using in a classical way the argument of the EU, the Prime Minister argued that France does not have enough autonomy vis-à-vis Brussels and its western allies to duplicate a *Patriot Act*. On the contrary, others argued that this is thanks to the European Parliament's concerns about fundamental rights of citizens that those rights are taken into account. M. Valls made it clear that in spite of the opposition to a European "Passenger Name Record" (the PNR that allows access to airline records), France will set up its own PNR system. Right-wing parties also asked for more financial resources and investigation power for security services. They also demanded the prevention of the jihadists' return to France by the withdrawal of French citizenship from those with dual nationality, and by the adoption of measures of « national indignity » for the

French³³ (as it was used in 1944 in order to punish the French who collaborated with Germany. Viewing the prison emerge as a turning point for criminals becoming terrorists, the opposition also asked for individual cells or specific centers for Jihadists. On January 21, the government announced its plans concerning security, rejecting a French Patriot Act, but focusing on many technical measures in order to show its willingness. In the general context of reduction of public expenses, the government announced 2680 new jobs and 425 million Euros for deployment of the high risk plan *Vigipirat*, employment in the judiciary and in defense, reinforcement of the police and gendarme security, a law about intelligence service, individual follow-up, de-fundamentalization process and reinsertion of jihadists; and finally, a terrorist file, fight against internet propaganda, and the development of European cooperation. The Prime Minister also called for an inter-parties brainstorming about the national indignity measure. Except for M. Le Pen, who accused the Prime Minister of missing the point, the government hasn't faced much criticism on this issue. The debate has been much more vigorous concerning the question of "living together" and French *laïcité*.

Living together and French laïcité

France was shocked at the discovery that the terrorists were French³⁴ with a very banal trajectory of broken families, school failure, no economic insertion, petty and then more serious crime, jail experience and radicalization in contact with other criminals. While the process of destruction of social links continues to worsen in the poorest neighborhoods, the debate has focused on the suburbs and the failure of the French model of integration. Much more than security, this issue has triggered harsh debates, especially about the way to address the problem. Ideological divisions go far beyond the traditional political cleavages.

Beyond the scenes during the day of protest that were reproduced in all the media, (the accolade between a citizen and a policeman, or between a priest a rabbi and an imam), the question quickly arose about how representative ~~was~~ the demonstration was. Some commentators emphasized the under-representation of youth from the suburbs or of population with immigrant backgrounds.³⁵ After the demonstration, reactions started to emerge in social media about people that could not or refused to identify with "*Je suis Charlie*", many counter-expressions flourished, like "*I am Charlie but*", "*I cannot be totally Charlie*", "*I am not Charlie*". The media focused on the reactions of "Muslims", very often seen as a single and united community. Like politicians, they also largely insisted on the disturbances (about 2000) that were noticed in 70 high schools (mainly in the suburbs) during the one minute's silence for the victims of the attacks. People from the opposition accused the Minister of National Education of underestimating the disturbances, of falsifying their number.

³³ International conventions prohibit making someone stateless.

³⁴ Like the terrorist M. Merah who killed 7 people in 2009 (3 were servicemen and 3 other Jewish children) in Toulouse.

The political response to this denial of identification with *Charlie* was very strong. C. Taubira, the Minister of Justice, issued a circular³⁶ calling for utmost resolve to the offences committed after the attacks. Within 10 days, almost 157 legal actions were instituted, some for Islamophobia, others (about 70) for “*defense of terrorism*” or “*threat to commit terrorist attacks*”; 30 people were convicted and 12 people sentenced to several months in jail.³⁷ The comedian Dieudonné³⁸ faced charges of defense of terrorism for having written on Facebook, “*I feel like Charlie Coulibaly*” (the Hyper Casher terrorist) and was later given a two and a half-month suspended sentence to prison. Concerning the disturbances at schools, Minister of Education N. Vallaud-Belkacem said at the National Assembly on the 14th of January:

*“Even where there haven’t been disturbances, students have questioned too much. We all have heard ‘Yes, I support Charlie but’, ‘there is a double standard approach’, ‘Why do we defend the freedom of speech in this case (Charlie Hebdo) and not in other ones?’ Those questions are intolerable, especially when you hear them at school, which is in charge of transmission of our values”.*³⁹

This stand has been largely put to debate, some considering it as an authoritarian conception of the freedom of speech, as a summons to being “Charlie”. This focalization on school and students who contest it is linked to the very strong French feeling of the failure of one of the most important republican institutions: the school that is not able to give every child the same chance of success, which reinforces social and territorial inequalities. Beyond the school, it is the state’s incapacity to keep the republican values of freedom, equality and fraternity alive. In that spirit, on January 20, M. Valls made a very firm speech, denouncing an ethnic, social and territorial apartheid in the French suburbs. Using for the first time the concept of “apartheid”, the Prime Minister meant that the process of segregation is produced by the policies. The opposition reacted strongly, accusing M. Valls of insulting the Republic. Despite this speech, the government did not focus on the processes of segregation or racialization, discrimination and production of inequality that occur in the suburbs and toward the migrants and descendants of migrants. All this comprehensive debate was condensed in the reaffirmation of French *laïcité*.

³⁶ Circular, 12/01/2015 - 2015/0213/ab – Ministry of Justice. *Objet : infractions commises à la suite des attentats terroristes commis les 7, 8 et 9 janvier 2015.*

³⁷ S. Faure, F. Durupt, « Cent cinquante procédures en deux semaines », *Libération*, 19/01/2015.

³⁸ Dieudonné is a very famous French comedian. He initially achieved success with a Jewish comedian, Élie Semoun, humorously exploiting racial stereotypes. He campaigned against racism and was a candidate in the 1997 and 2001 legislative elections in Dreux against the FN. Then, his sketch started to “cross the limits of anti-Semitism” and several organizations sued him for incitement to racial hatred. He approached Jean-Marie Le Pen, and the men became political allies. Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson appeared in one of his shows in 2008. Dieudonné was convicted in court many times on anti-Semitism charges. He subsequently found himself banned from mainstream media with increasing frequency, and many of his shows were cancelled by local authorities.

³⁹ <http://www.lcp.fr/videos/reportages/167368-najat-vallaud-belkacem-l-ecole-est-en-premiere-ligne-elle-sera-ferme>.

A few days after the attacks, the French people discovered in the mainstream media programs that showed that other European countries did not share the same definition of freedom of speech. Invited to Sky News, which had banned “irreligious” and satirical images of Mohammed and the cover of the post-attack edition of the magazine, a cartoon depicting Muhammad weeping at the murders and saying, “All is forgiven”, C. Fourest, a former journalist of *Charlie Hebdo*, tried to explain how “crazy” it was that certain newspapers and media in the United Kingdom would not show the cover. At this point, she reached down and pulled up a copy of the *Charlie Hebdo* image. The camera cut away. “*Sky News has chosen not to show that image*” the presenter said before going on to apologies to “*any viewers who may have been offended*”.⁴⁰ This event shows two different approaches to freedom of speech: one which is based on an “ethic of conviction”, the other which is based on an “ethic of responsibility”⁴¹. Other radio programs in the days after the attacks explained how secularism was experienced in very different ways throughout European countries.

However, political responses to the attacks, especially concerning the schools, led to an overdose of *Laïcité*, without very much deep questioning of the notion and current definition of it by the French. For example, the “*11 measures for a large mobilization at school for Republican values*”⁴², presented by the Minister of Education on January 22nd, consisted of one day of *Laïcité* at school, the training of 1000 ambassadors of *Laïcité*; a charter of *Laïcité* signed by students and parents, and training of civic reservists, among others. In the name of *laïcité*, and just before local elections, a mayor decided to ban the replacement meals (when pork is served) at school. N. Sarkozy declared on television (five days before the elections) that he supported this decision and that he was in favour of the ban of the headscarf at the University. He also said that he had changed his mind in favour of the assimilation process rather than integration.

Some articles nevertheless put this reaffirmation of *laïcité* based only on an ethic of conviction in question. Some explain how *laïcité* can be humiliating for teenagers when they just perceive it as a requirement of negation of what they are, as something which is imposed and not built. Some teachers, working not only in the suburbs but also in more mixed high schools, describe in a very interesting way what happened in their class after the attacks:

“My school, which is not in a suburb, is not under the spotlight. But here, like elsewhere, teenagers are always questioning the framework when it is imposed. They are always suspicious towards mainstream speech and reluctant to accept some fallacious reasoning. This is in a way rather reassuring. Instead of being shocked that students are not all Charlie, we

⁴⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMbwcBYT0DI>.

⁴¹ D. Fassin, « “Charlie” : éthique de conviction contre éthique de responsabilité », *Libération*, 19/01/2015.

⁴² <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid85644/onze-mesures-pour-un-grande-mobilisation-de-l-ecole-pour-les-valeurs-de-la-republique.html>.

should thank their ability to think beyond collective emotion” (...). “I started explaining to them the sophism that consists of a connection between the denunciation of the attacks and an adherence to the editorial line of Charlie Hebdo” (...). As soon as, as a teacher representing the School institution, I explicitly authorized the expression of a critical discourse about the editorial line of Charlie Hebdo, the students who were sucked into the sophism (built by the injunction of being Charlie) stopped feeling uncomfortable. Then, they were able to get rid of the “barbarian” attitude they had when they entered the course (...) this attitude was the logical consequence of an absurd injunction (...) When we order people to be Charlie, without any discussion about the meaning of this slogan and the meaning of the identification with Charlie... who from the students or the School institution does not understand what is freedom of speech and critical judgment? It is the institution that produces (the disturbances) and builds them as a public issue, focusing on descendants of migrants as threats to the Republic.”⁴³

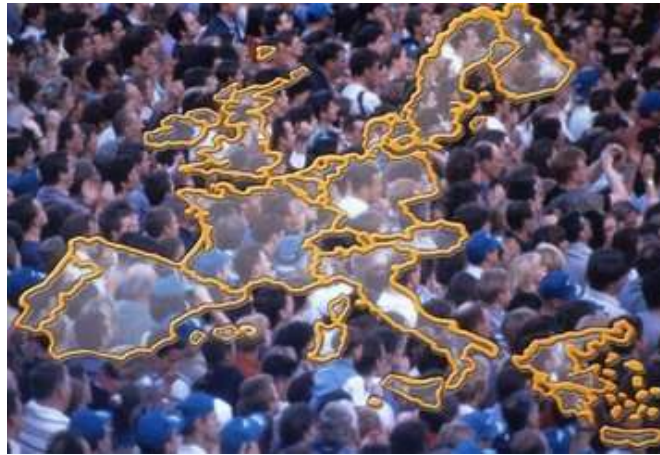
Although in an inappropriate manner, teachers also explain how disturbances could reveal very complex questions. Beyond the emotion of the first days, Charlie events have raised many complex questions that have been at the center of many private discussions (not only within the population of the suburbs, migrants and descendants of migrants, or teenagers) and public debates: How can we understand this huge mobilization while many massacres or many deaths occur everywhere and every day? Why is Dieudonne’s humor considered racist while *Charlie Hebdo’s* is not? Are terrorists monsters, or are they just normal human beings? If they are normal human beings, what are the reasons for their violence? Socio-economic? Political? Religious? What are the relationships between Islam, Islamism, and radical Islamism? How is the French context (in terms of freedom of expression, in terms of minorities) connected to the world context (in terms of the process of globalization and circulation of information, in terms of radical Islamism)? Some answers are more obvious than others, some are more controversial than others, but all the questions are worthwhile. The reaffirmation by imposition, and not by reconstruction, of one of the major values of the French Republic, *laïcité*, does not pave the way for these needed and valuable questions. *“Laïcité today is the fear of the other (...) The concept has become an impediment that prevents the students from seeing, reading the world, and from thinking about the future”⁴⁴.*

⁴³ M. Leray, « Je suis Charlie... ou pas, disent mes élèves de lycée. Ils ont raison de s’interroger », *L’Obs, Le plus*, 16/01/2015.

⁴⁴ B. Mabilon Beaufis, G. Zoïa, *La Laïcité au risque de l’autre*, ed. de l’Aube, 2014.



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