

Unfashionable Objections to Islamophobic Cartoons

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L’Affaire Charlie Hebdo

By

Dustin J. Byrd

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For Jamie, my foundation stone

Fluctuat nec Mergitur

~ Motto of Paris

Allah will not be merciful to those who are not merciful to people.

~ Prophet Muhammad

It's normal – you cannot provoke; you cannot insult the faith of others.

~ Pope Francis

*I believe in the brotherhood of all men, but I don't believe in wasting
brotherhood on anyone who doesn't want to practice it with me.
Brotherhood is a two-way street.*

~ Malcolm X

*What is dangerous about the creeping villainy is that it takes considerable
imagination and considerable dialectical abilities to be able to detect it at
the moment and see what it is. Well, neither of these features are
prominent in most people – and so the villainy creeps forward just a little
bit each day, unnoticed.*

~ Søren Kierkegaard

*Our responsibility is much greater than we might have supposed,
because it involves all mankind.*

~ Jean-Paul Sartre

*“Come let us mock at the great
That had such burdens on the mind
And toiled so hard and late
To leave some monument behind,
Nor thought of the levelling wind.*

*“Come let us mock at the wise;
With all those calendars whereon
They fixed old aching eyes,
They never saw how seasons run,
And now but gape at the sun.*

*“Come let us mock at the good
That fancied goodness might be gay,
And sick of solitude
Might proclaim a holiday:
Wind shrieked—and where are they?*

*“Mock mockers after that
That would not lift a hand maybe
To help good, wise or great
To bar that foul storm out,
for we Traffic in mockery.”*

~ William Butler Yeats

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PREFACE

The Norwegian terrorist, Anders Behring Breivik, believed that Muslims in Europe were responsible for the destruction of European culture, the Christian heritage and the white race. Inspired by the rhetoric of prominent Islamophobic personalities, both in Europe and the United States of America, this self-identified neo-fascist and ethno-nationalist accused Muslim immigrants and their children of colonizing Europe in the name of Islam, which he believed was a foreign religion ill-suited for modern Europe. However, such Muslims did not act alone according to Breivik; the “Cultural Marxists,” most importantly the Frankfurt School, which was composed primarily of left-wing Jews at its beginning in the early 20th century, were the night-watchmen that intentionally opened the gate, knowing that the Trojan Horse they welcomed in was full of enemy soldiers. Thus, according to Breivik, the political Left, through multiculturalism, political correctness, and their self-hating resentment towards western global dominance, sought to destroy the West from within by welcoming Europe’s perpetual “other”: The Muslims.

In order to retaliate against this supposed cabal of Islamo-Marxists and their “demographic warfare,” Breivik set his sights on the Norwegian center-left government in Oslo. On July 22, 2011, he parked a car-bomb outside government offices in Norway’s capital, which when exploded, resulted in the death of eight civilians. After setting the bomb, Breivik moved north to the small island of Utøya, where the Worker’s Youth League ran a summer camp. Posing as a police officer to gain access to the island, Breivik methodically shot as many children of the Labor Party as he could find, many of whom were attempting to hide or swim away from the island for safety. In total, he killed sixty-nine youngsters on the island before he nonchalantly surrendered to the police.¹

For Norway, this was the worst attack since World War II. For Europe and the rest of the West, it demonstrated the need to not only struggle

¹ For more on Anders Behring Breivik and his attacks, see Aage Borchgrevink, *A Norwegian Tragedy: Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utøya*. Trans. Guy Puzey. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013.

against religious fanaticism emanating from the Islamic world and Muslim immigrants, but also right-wing secular (and religious) nativism that was homegrown among the ethnically “Euro” population. Although extremist nativism has been around since the end of the 19th century, it has grown exponentially in Europe and America since the September 11th attacks of 2001, and the subsequent “war on terror” unleashed by the neo-conservative U.S. President George W. Bush. Additionally, xenophobic nativism increased dramatically in the United States after the election of the first Black American President, Barack Obama. The so-called “Tea Party Patriots” accused Obama of being both a communist and a fascist, as well as a Muslim, despite of the fact that he self-identified as a liberal “born-again” Christian and a member of Chicago’s Trinity United Church of Christ, pastored by Rev. Jeremiah Wright. Nevertheless, Obama’s Kenyan roots and “socialist” sympathies remained a source of deep suspicion among right-wing conservatives and businessmen in both Europe and America, as he was perceived as another Trojan Horse whom the multicultural, politically correct, political-left smuggled in. “Birtherism,” spearheaded by the nationalist-populist and now President Donald J. Trump – who lost the 2016 election’s popular vote but won the electoral college over the neo-liberal Hillary Clinton – not only maintained that Obama was secretly a Muslim, but also forwarded the idea that Obama was not born in America and therefore was not even eligible to be president, since, according to the United States Constitution, Article II, section I, all presidents must be “natural-born citizens.” Trump’s self-aggrandizing exploitation of America’s growing Islamophobia against the first African-American president was thinly veiled behind what he advanced was his *patriotic* concern for the country. In fact, it was an opportunistic exploitation of Islamophobia through which he heightened his political profile in preparation for his 2015-2016 bid for the White House.

In the meantime, America’s wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq, along with its subsequent drone wars in numerous other Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries, continued to produce deep-seated resentments towards America’s interventions in their countries. With each Muslim killed by a bomb, bullet, or drone strike, America and its allies created more resentment, more hatred, and more desire to retaliate. Many Muslims, who would have otherwise admired the West for its formal freedoms, prosperity, and its general openness towards others, foreclosed on their affections, seeing only the bloody red in the “red, white and blue.” Having lost all forms of secular resistance to the neo-liberal imperialism emanating from America’s geo-political and corporate interests, as Pan-

Arabism, socialism and Marxism failed in the Muslim and Arab world, Muslims turned to a radicalized political form of religion as their predominant vehicle for resistance. Islam, a once-progressive and emancipatory force within human history, was bent towards tyranny, oppression, violence and terrorism. In the name of defending Islam and Muslims, Islam appeared reactionary as opposed to revolutionary. In the name of Muhammad, Muhammad's supposed followers committed crimes categorically condemned by the very words and deeds of Muhammad, the Qur'ān, and the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the scholarly tradition.

With only minor exceptions, the world has moved towards a greater conflagration since the change of millennia. The western right-wing, both neo-liberal and neo-fascist variations, have made great gains in both the United States and Europe, and much of the Muslim world seems captive to similar right-wing tendencies. Those Muslims wish to impose their fundamentalist and authoritarian form of Islam (or secularism) upon their fellow believers. The secular right in the West (along with their religious-right "Evangelical" allies), and the religious-right in the Muslim world seem bent on exacerbating what Pope Francis has described as World War III, which he believes is a piecemeal global conflict between those who would impose neo-liberal imperialistic capitalism and its idolatry of greed upon the entire globe, and those who would impose a perverted form of Islam on the rest.

Into this global struggle between various forms of right-wing politics and culture, comes the intolerance of the "Enlightenment Fundamentalists," who embody a strain of secular leftist thought growing in Europe. This trend sees itself as the inheritors of the Enlightenment, which is responsible for much of the material, democratic and liberal success associated with modernity. Historically, the decoupling of religion from state power gave a birth to freedoms unknown to Europeans prior to the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the subsequent Bourgeois revolutions and reforms that took place throughout the peninsula. In order to protect these formal freedoms, these so-called enlightened individuals, who have fallen into the same *dialectic of the Enlightenment* first identified by the Critical Theorists Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, call for measures that would limit the influence of Islam in Europe, viewing it as a religiously conservative forces that would unjustly foreclose on Europe's "open society." While rejecting the crude racism of the Euro-hard-right, remembering the tragedy of the Holocaust (*Shoah*) and the hierarchy of human value inherent in European imperialism, they claim themselves to be the defenders of the West and its liberal values. For

them, it is not the *race* of the individual that is incongruent with Europe, but rather it is their religion and culture. Therefore, *Islam* is the problem, not the Muslim per se. While they agree with the “cultural Marxists” (as self-described neo-fascists like Breivik describe Critical Theorists), that the universal values of the Enlightenment exclude no race, gender, or nationality, they patently refuse the idea that Islam – as a religion or a semantically closed “comprehensive worldview” – can be integrated within the already existing liberal society of Europe. Successful multiculturalism is impossible in their view. Therefore, following the Bourgeois tradition, they think either Islam has to be forcibly privatized or it must share the same fate as Christianity – virtual disappearance or *neutralization* within the lifeworld of the citizen. In this way, the politics of the left-wing Enlightenment fundamentalists have entered into the pervasive cultural wars (*kulturkampf*), as well as the asymmetrical World War III. Most perversely, it has allied itself with a cause that is its natural opposite: the neo-fascist right-wing, with their xenophobic and thoroughly Islamophobic hatred of the “other.” Instead of identifying, preserving and fulfilling the liberational, emancipatory and revolutionary aspects of Islam, which it has in common with the *negative* and *apophatic* forms of prophetic Christianity and Judaism, which the Enlightenment inherited, Enlightenment fundamentalism’s blindness to the Enlightenment’s historical *determinate negation* (*aufheben*) of revealed religion has helped deliver Islam to right-wing pseudo-Islamic terrorists. The Enlightenment fundamentalist has become the handmaiden of the growing neo-fascist and neo-liberal trends, both in the United States and Europe – the very destructive movements it often says it is committed to resisting. Thus, the Enlightenment itself becomes a new form of domination over those who do not conform, and in defense of the Enlightenment, anti-Enlightenment measures are taken against Muslims.

The reality of the political-left’s effective alliance with neo-fascism and neo-liberalism thoroughly evaded the national discussions leading up to the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* and its workers on January 7, 2015. In the midst of France’s national identity crisis, which was a part of the broader post-modern and post-nationalist identity crisis of a politically and economically integrated Europe, France became the epicenter of this struggle between the secular European right-wing and reactionary forms of Islamic identity politics. As the tensions increased between the neo-fascist right, including Marine Le Pen’s *Front National*, and the Muslim community, both immigrant and citizen, *Charlie Hebdo’s* cartoons – which often criticized the right-wing for their racism and xenophobia – contributed to the normalization of mockery of a segment of the

population that was the most vulnerable, most demonized, most stigmatized and therefore most oppressed within a “free” society, thus augmenting the alienation and resentment already felt by those who were told to assimilate but were not socially allowed to integrate. Such communities were excluded and secluded in the poverty-stricken *banlieues* outside of Paris. This situation, wherein one is *in* a society but not *of* that society, wherein the society preaches the universal values of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, but practices them selectively, leads many to look for alternatives to this demeaning and degrading condition. The only alternative for many European Muslims to being *not-French, not-European, not-wanted*, has been to retreat into the reactionary and fundamentalist ideology that pseudo-Islamic terrorists have made out of Islam – the faith of 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide. I claim, it is precisely the rejection of the universal values of the Enlightenment that created the conditions in which pervasive misunderstanding, xenophobia, neophobia, and terroristic violence have flourished. Unfortunately, the cartoons of *Charlie Hebdo* contributed to this diminishment of the Enlightenment, and as a result, broadened the expanse of distrust, hatred and violence.

The political-left need not fuel the global right-wing and the Third World War they’ve imposed on humanity; they rather *must be the alternative*. In order to do that, they must be able to bridge the gap between the religious and secular, understanding the motives, concerns and grievances of the other, be prepared to be self-critical and have the courage to embrace an ethic of *being-with-and-for the “other.”* This is especially true when the other holds opposing views or positions seemingly incongruent with the dominant culture.

The painful practice of always being on the side of the innocent victim

Every author knows that there are two kinds of books: those that the author planned on writing and those that they have been impelled to write due to specific circumstances. This book is of the latter category – somehow wedged between my work on the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory of Religion and my work on contemporary Islamic thought. I’ve known about the controversial anti-Muslim (or anti-terrorist/fundamentalist) cartoons of *Charlie Hebdo* since they were first brought to my attention during the Danish cartoon crisis (*Muhammedkrisen*) of 2005. While critical of the cartoons’ juvenile form and content, I did not expect there to be too much of a backlash considering the relatively small readership of

the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (in which they were originally published) and the obvious absurdity of the cartoons. I was wrong. The cartoon crisis exploded in parts of the Muslim world due to the efforts of a few Imams looking to stoke outrage in the Muslim population, who would be otherwise uninterested in the daily publications of a small Scandinavian country. However, the dissemination of the cartoons sparked “spontaneous” riots, resulting in multiple deaths and contentious relations between the Danish government and some Muslim-majority countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Indonesia, Morocco and Bosnia-Herzegovina, all of whom demanded answers from Denmark for what they perceived to be its fostering of hate against Islam and Muslims. The subsequent attacks on Danish individuals and Denmark’s embassies were reminiscent of the Salman Rushdie affair, which centered on his 1988 book *Satanic Verses*, which mocked Prophet Muhammad. This book sparked protests in many cities, especially among British Muslims, who called for Rushdie’s death or imprisonment. In 1989, the controversial work garnished Rushdie a *fatwā* (religious ruling) from Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The ruling essentially made it legally permissible – under Islamic law – to assassinate the author. Although they didn’t defend Rushdie’s work, Khomeini’s decision was rejected by many other Muslim scholars, who offered alternative and more peaceful ways to respond to Rushdie’s insults.

Yet, similar to the Salman Rushdie Affair and the Danish Cartoon Crisis, it is apparent amidst *L’affaire Charlie Hebdo* that the antagonists on both sides are not interested in any form of productive inter-subjective discourse, dialogue and/or friendly debate. Rather, they are content to ignore the concerns and grievances of the other and retreat to their hermeneutically-sealed intellectual fox holes. Discourse, predicated on openness to the other, and the sole means we have available to come to some kind of peaceful mutual-understanding, is thoroughly discarded as an option – we are to live as entrenched antagonists, not as friends with disagreements.

My doctor-father, the Critical Theorist Dr. Rudolf J. Siebert, once told me to “always be on the side of the innocent victim.” That simple principle has always served me well when thinking about the controversial issues surrounding social justice and social mercy. However, the ethical results and ramifications of that simple principle are not always that simple. Such universal ideals, values, and moral positions often lead one into very uncomfortable and dark places, wherein one becomes uncompromisingly

critical of oneself – especially of one’s own unarticulated biases and preconceptions; it leads one to be painfully honest about one’s nation and fellow countrymen, whom one love’s dearly; it forces one to make claims, accusations and charges that cause pain to those that are near in affection. Because the critic stands up for the innocent victim against the victimizer, who maybe oneself, one’s nation, one’s tribe, one’s co-religionist, etc., they are often perceived as a traitor, a Judas, a Benedict Arnold. Yet, such simple but radical principles cut across national borders, religious affiliations, tribal and ethnic bonds, the gender divide, language barriers, inter-generational antagonisms, and racial divides, etc. Thus, those who remain committed to such artificial barriers learn not to trust the one holding fast to such universal ideals; the faithful are not team players in the political game of *divide et impera* (divide and conquer) – their divisions are for a different and more just cause: humanity as a whole, not only a part. This principle, which I believe can still be discovered deep within the great world religions, especially the prophetic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (although in some cases it seems to be hibernating), can also be found in secular critical philosophy. Philosophy, at least since Marx, has been given new life by those long-term freedom fighters that can no longer maintain any faith in revealed religion after the betrayal of its prophetic-emancipatory core, but still cannot simply abandon the utopian vision of a world no longer disfigured by pervasive injustice, stifling domination, and aggressive oppression. In the modern world, they are the inheritors of the great religious traditions that once inspired so many to sacrifice and even achieve martyrdom in the name of a more just and peaceful world. Thus, as the great religions once did, Critical Theory and other form of non-conforming critical philosophies of revolt, rebellion and revolution, have the capacity to shape, reform and transform each and every individual life within the human family – it is a radical call not only to justice, but also to mercy, directed against ourselves and those structures of domination that currently ensnare us in an unjust and unsustainable status quo. It is in this spirit that the Critical Theorists beseech both religious and secular voices to set in abeyance their theological differences and look to how they can work together to avoid Alternative Future No. 1, the Totally Administered Society, and/or Alternative Future No. 2, the Totally Militarized Society that is structured and dominated by atomic, biological and chemical (ABC) wars. Rather, they must work together towards Alternative Future No. 3, the Totally Reconciled Society – the society of freedom for all, justice for all, and solidarity for all.

This book is not meant to be an attack on France, and I hope none of my readers believe it to be. France is an amazing country, and in many aspects, it is the envy of the world. It is a country full of good-hearted and progressive people, willing to sacrifice a lot for those who have little. For much of its history, France has been hospitable to refugees, immigrants and the desperate multitudes looking for a better life. For this, recognition must be given. Unfortunately, the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* and its aftermath have cemented the mistrust, distrust, and resentment towards the other. With few exceptions, it has not revealed space for a real dialogue amongst Muslims and their non-Muslim fellow citizens. As someone with one foot in the world of Islam and the other in the West, fully belonging to both, I can visualize the bridge between the two parties, but see only a few bridge builders willing to put forth the openness and vulnerability that is necessary to make such connections. My hope is that this small book contributes to the deconstruction of the mutually-hostile ideologies that separate Muslims and non-Muslims living in the West, i.e. the ideological foreclosure of the Enlightenment by the western Enlightenment fundamentalists and the fundamentalist foreclosure of the revolutionary and emancipatory nature of Islam into a diminished religious ideology of reactionary extremism and violent terrorism. In my view, both foreclosures make a mockery out of what they both claim to defend. Both the Enlightened and the Muslims have powerful resources and capabilities by which they can sincerely listen to the views of the other, be-with the other, and learn from the other, if only they can muster the courage to step into the arena of mutual-respect and mutual-recognition, and in doing so, remember the innocent victim, who can only be partially redeemed if we, in the present, choose to vacate the conditions that caused their victimhood.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Rudolf J. Siebert of Western Michigan University, Department of Comparative Religion, who has been the most formative influence on my work as a Critical Theorist. His Critical Theory of Religion and Society, which is a delta in which the sea of Socratic philosophy meets the powerful river of prophetic religion, has fertilized and nourished numerous academic disciplines for the past fifty-plus years. From philosophy to sociology, religion to psychology, history to anthropology, Dr. Siebert's uncompromising commitment to prophetic truth-telling, witnessing and confessing on behalf of the victims of nature and history, and his determination to struggle against all forms of neo-fascism, nationalism, racism, class domination, and modern idolatry, serves as a guiding light in what Max Horkheimer once described as the "totally dark world" of Hegel's Golgotha-history.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Michael R. Ott, the most prophetic and truly human person I have ever met. With his lovely wife, the indomitable Mary Louise, Mike has repeatedly demonstrated to me what it means to forcibly broaden the concern for human frailty outside of the cold restraints of academia. The suffering, pain, and misery of the world cannot be just a matter of lectures, papers, and books; it must rather be a lived experience by which the suffering of others becomes one's own. Mike embodies this *contra-zeitgeist* – which rejects the cold and uncaring world of consumption and acquisition – more so than anyone else. Together we traversed Dubrovnik, Rome and Assisi in April/May of 2016, in the spirit of brotherhood – learning all that we could about religion's capacity for acceptance, mercy and compassion in the face of its all-too-often non-acceptance, harshness and brutality. If the apophatic spirit of resistance lives on in the world after the god of cataphatic theology has died, then it lives on in Michael R. Ott.

I would also like to acknowledge Olivet College, whose charter still embraces, in 2016-2017, the prophetic and emancipatory geist it was founded upon when Father Shipherd and his abolitionist companions established the college in 1844. Their insistence that all Americans, including women and African-Americans, have the God-given right to a quality higher education, was subversive for its time – and in many ways still is today. Despite the state of Michigan's early reluctance to charter the school due to its insistence on Christian equality, Olivet nevertheless stood its ground on behalf of those who were marginalized in a racist and patriarchal country and began to educate its students without the state's permission. That is the kind of tenacious and prophetic example that is sorely needed in today's globalized neo-liberal world.

I would also like to thank my many wonderful friends, colleagues and professors at Western Michigan University and Michigan State University, specifically the Department of Comparative Religion at WMU, the Department of Philosophy at MSU, and the Religious Studies Department at MSU. There is ground-breaking work that advances the cause of humanity being done in all three of these departments.

Lastly, I must acknowledge the many nameless and anonymous *precariats* who suffer at the hands of those who “think” they are protecting something greater, nobler, more heroic when they mock, ridicule and belittle those who they view as being beneath them. With the growing number of neo-fascists in the world, many of whom are in the highest political and corporate positions in the West, nothing is more important

than to side with their victims: the poor, abused, discarded, excluded, and marginalized. Regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, they deserve solidarity and *sympathy* (to suffer with). It is precisely in a sincere *being-with* ethic – being with the *wretched of the earth* – that Judaism, Christianity and Islam, recover their prophetic spirit as well as discover the elusive presence of the divine. It is their suffering that those of us in a privileged position must dedicate ourselves to. When that commitment is abandoned, either in its religious or secular form, the likelihood of more racist, neo-fascist attacks, such as we've witnessed in Oslo and Utøya island, Paris, Brussels, Baghdad, Berlin, Nice, New York, San Bernardino, Cairo, Istanbul, Quebec, Charleston, etc., increases.

*Nur um der Hoffnungslosen willen ist uns die Hoffnung gegeben*²

~ Walter Benjamin

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² It is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Just days before the January 7th, 2015 attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, its editor Stéphane Charbonnier, better known as “Charb,” finished writing his manifesto entitled *Open Letter: On Blasphemy, Islamophobia, and the True Enemies of Free Expression* (2016). The satirical weekly magazine published in Paris was known for its signature derision of religion and religious figures. In his manifesto, he attempted to explain his ideas of what Europe, and especially France, was facing in regards to the growing problem of Muslims. Politically coming from the secular Left, especially from the perspective that has come to be called the “Enlightenment fundamentalists,” Charb disagreed with those who accused him and his magazine of practicing a blatant form of bigotry, racism and Islamophobia. Believing racism, in the strictest meaning of the word, to be a vile ideology, too often practiced by the political and cultural Right in France, Charb believed his magazine engaged in an irreverent yet socially necessary critique of religious beliefs and practices that could easily be disentangled from racial politics. In other words, Charb was not a racist, but rather viewed himself as a defender of the liberal culture of modern France as well as its republican institutions, which anyone of any racial background could adhere to. For him, a critique of any group’s practices and cultural beliefs was legitimate, as nothing in those individuals’ DNA forces them to hold beliefs contrary to prevailing cultural norms and beliefs within modern French society. For Charb, race and ideology are separable and must continue to be understood as such. Racism, he believed, was an irrational hatred of a given racial group, while ideology critique is a rational practice that attempts to unveil purposely-camouflaged truths. To confuse the two was to contribute to the prevailing confusion brought on by the word “Islamophobia,” which he rejected as an inadequate description of his work.

Although Charb preferred to distinguish between race and ideology, the methods used to critique religion, religious believers, and especially Muslims in France, did not lend themselves well to the intricacies of his

arguments. The dominant form of his acerbic attacks on the “ideology” of Islam and Islamic practices came through crude and often infantile cartoons. He not only published cartoons that were religiously, politically, and culturally irreverent, but also published cartoons that tastelessly mocked the most sacred of entities among the religious communities in the most disrespectful ways: a three-way sex act by the trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), a “sex-ring” of Catholic Cardinals, Prophet Muhammad bent over waiting for anal sex, and various other cartoons that blurred the distinction between violent *takfirī*-terrorists and average Muslims.¹ To criticize an ideology while taking the claims of the opponent seriously usually invites meaningful discourse, while a monologue of mockery and derision too often invites violent retaliation, especially when there’s an imbalance of social and political power. No less than Pope Francis attested to this social dynamic when he explained that if anyone were to curse his mother, to “expect a punch.”² Unfortunately, on January 7th, 2015, the violence that was stoked by the constant barrage of ridicule against the Prophet Muhammad, the central and most beloved figure in the Muslim community of over 1.6 billion believers, came to fruition as two young jihādists brothers, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, stormed into the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* and massacred Charb and eight of his staff with their AK-47s.³ Ironically, the two also executed a Muslim police officer, who shared a similar devotion to Prophet Muhammad as the perpetrators, as he rushed to the aid of the publisher.⁴

Unfortunately, the coordinated ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) attacks on Paris, which occurred less than a year later, on the 13th of

¹ I understand the word “*takfirī*” in this case to mean those individuals who self-identify as Muslims but place themselves outside of the bounds of Islam through their violent activities directed against innocent civilians and/or adherence to heterodox beliefs.

² “Pope Francis: ‘Curse my mother, expect a punch.’” BBC News, Accessed 2/4/2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30838667> We should state that in no way did Pope Francis condone the terrorist attacks on Paris, but rather was attempting to explain the nature of the reaction that can occur when the sacred is mocked, whether it be a family member or a beloved religious figure.

³ Adam Gopnik in Stéphane Charbonnier. *Open Letter: On Blasphemy, Islamophobia, and the True Enemies of Free Expression*. New York: Little Brown and Co., 2016.

⁴ The official story about the police officer murdered that day has been challenged and is therefore not universally accepted. See Kevin Barrett (ed.), *We are not Charlie Hebdo: Free Thinkers Question the French 9/11*. Lone Rock, WI: Sifting and Winnowing Books, 2015.

November, 2015, demonstrated that the distrust, suspicion and even hatred between disaffected and alienated Muslims and their religiously-deaf European counterparts, continued to breed violence. Following the “law of retaliation,” or *Lex Talionis*, western militaries – led by the United States – attacked radical Muslim groups in the heart of the Middle East, which in the course of time led to their retaliatory strikes on western civilians in Europe, which led to more airstrikes in Syria and Iraq, which led to more retaliatory strikes on civilians in places such as San Bernardino, New York, and Orlando, where Muslims “inspired” by ISIS sought revenge upon their fellow Americans. Unfortunately, if Charb wanted to diminish the hatred between groups in France by critiquing the ideology he believed was partially responsible for fermenting such antagonisms, he failed miserably. *Charlie Hebdo’s* provocative cartoons only fanned the flames of bitterness, resentment and hatred, which translated into continued barbaric violence.

The False Choice

In 1876, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche published his book *Unfashionable Observations (Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen)*, which questioned society’s pressure to conform to a uniform way-of-being. In this sublimely truculent book, he wrote an essay entitled “Schopenhauer as Educator,” in which the opening lines diagnosed the pervasive sickness of his time. He wrote,

When a traveler who had seen many lands and nations and several continents was asked what characteristics he discovered to be common to all of humanity, he replied: “they have a tendency toward laziness.” To many it will seem that his reply would have been more accurate and valid if he had said: “They are all fearful. They hide behind customs and opinions.” At bottom, every human being knows perfectly well that he lives in the world just once, as a *unicum*, and that no coincidence, regardless how strange, will ever for a second time concoct out of this amazing variegated diversity the unity that he is. He knows this, but he conceals it like a bad conscience. Why? Out of fear of his neighbor who demands convention and who cloaks himself with it. But what is it that forces the individual to fear his neighbor, to think and act like a part of a herd instead of taking pleasure in being himself?... In most instances it is convenience, indolence – in short, that tendency toward laziness of which the traveler spoke. He is right: human beings are lazier than they are

fearful, and what they fear most are those hardships and that unconditional honesty and nakedness would foist upon them.⁵

What Nietzsche makes clear in this passage is twofold; first, humanity is prone to engage in groupthink – a reactionary rejection of individual autonomy, i.e. the courageous practice of insisting upon one’s own critical analysis regardless of the pressure asserted by the herd. Second, this intellectual lethargy stands in opposition to discovering the Truth of any given matter – for it is not the herd that struggles to pry open the ugly clam to reveal the pearl, but rather it is the unbounded individual who takes as their task the hard work of traversing through the muck and mire in pursuit of Truth – the pearl hidden within the ugly. Another lesson can be learned from Nietzsche’s keen observation; it is true that intellectuals tend not to be “fearful” when analyzing events in the world, so fear does not usually organize and determine their thoughts, but it often does in the herd. However, in light of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, many secular intellectuals, including the philosophical heirs to Nietzsche, who became fearful of reprisals from Islamic fundamentalists or a backlash from the frightened herd, abandoned their independent judgement and critique for the comfort of reactionary groupthink. Like Nietzsche’s own disturbing critiques, which disturbed the sensitivities of his society, after the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, it became *unfashionable* to critique the prevailing liberal ideology: *Je suis Charlie*; it became *unfashionable* to question the motives of *Charlie Hebdo*’s editor Stéphane “Charb” Charbonnier and his cartoonists who “trafficked in mockery,” as Yeats wrote; it became *unfashionable* to accuse both *Charlie Hebdo* and their attackers of both being engaged in demonizing the “other” and engaging in divisive identity politics.⁶ With the pervasive climate of fear, intellectuals were told “you too are *Charlie Hebdo*, whether you agree with it or not.” However, it is precisely when it becomes *unfashionable* to be critical that critique is called upon to be most forceful, lest we abandon the search for Truth for the political expediency of fashionable groupthink. Lest we forget history, it is *unfashionable* thought that blocks the descent into intellectual uniformity; it is *unfashionable* thought that struggles against the congealment of society that is the precondition for genocide; it is *unfashionable* thought that, in

⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Unfashionable Observations*. Trans. Richard T. Gray. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

⁶ “I am Charlie” was the fashionable slogan in support of *Charlie Hebdo* after the attack on its offices.

the words of the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, makes repeating Auschwitz impossible.⁷

This book is meant to give voice to the critics of *Charlie Hebdo* and Islamophobia, whose criticisms have become *unfashionable* in a fearful society. In addition to those who could not join their fellow citizens in the *Place de la République* in Paris on January 7th, 2015, proclaiming “Je suis Charlie,” it is also meant to give voice to those who could not condone in any way the violent and murderous attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, which took the lives of Frédéric Boisseau, Franck Brinsolaro, Jean Cabut (Cabu), Elsa Cayat, Stéphane Charbonnier, Philippe Honoré, Bernard Maris, Mustapha Ourrad, Michel Renaud, Bernard Verlhac (Tignous), and Georges Wolinski, as well as the Paris police officer Ahmed Merabet. Just as there were thousands in the plaza that evening, standing in solidarity with the victims, there were an equal number of citizens who would not join them in good conscience, due to the condescending and disrespectful nature of the victims’ work. These conscientious objectors from the groupthink that followed the *Charlie Hebdo* attack should not be accused of sympathizing with the murderers, for it is clear that they do not. It should be emphasized that refusing to join the crowd in proclaiming *Je suis Charlie*, and critiquing Charb and *Charlie Hebdo*, should not be confused with an endorsement of the violence of ISIS or al-Qa’eda; they are not. Likewise, to critique ISIS and al-Qa’eda is not to endorse *Charlie Hebdo*’s Islamophobic cartoons. The dichotomous choice here is false: *Je ne suis pas Charlie et je ne suis pas avec les terroristes*.⁸ To limit our perspective to only one of these two extremes – the extreme of “Enlightenment fundamentalism” or religious fundamentalism – is to abandon every sane argument that rejects the insanity of them both. Thus, to settle for the false choice would be to forgo dialectical imagination, i.e. the ability to see the *creeping villainy* of both. The honest dialectician, following Nietzsche’s critique of intellectual laziness, wants the individual to think through the lenses of the western Enlightenment as well as through the lenses of the religious believer in an attempt to come to a better, and hopefully more peaceful, alternative for the future. However, this kind of mutual-perspective taking is dangerous; it leaves open the possibility of empathizing with the “enemy,” and thus it is suppressed during “times of war,” wherein the combatants must refuse to humanize the already dehumanized other. However, in order for us to understand those who

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 19-33.

⁸ “I am not Charlie and I am not with the terrorists.”

oppose the dominant way of thinking and the dominant way-of-being, we must be open to understanding their grievances, their trials and tribulations, and their suffering, even if we have to become self-critical or even, in some cases, self-condemnatory. We must not only be the grand inquisitor of the other, but must begin with our own civilization and our own misdeeds. If we can think dialectically through the opposite sides of a given argument, in this case the clash of fundamentalisms, we should begin to see the conditions necessary to bring about the possibility of a real and lasting solution. When we close our eyes to either side, and engage in reactionary groupthink, we become blind, mute, ineffective, inarticulate and incapable of offering any substantive alternatives. Therefore, I make no apologies for arguing against *Charlie Hebdo* while at the same time mustering no sympathy for terrorists who respond to cartoon provocations by killing critics and dissenters. In my opinion, both need to be studied and opposed on a social, political, economic and intellectual basis. The violence that has been bred by these two hermeneutically sealed ideologies has led to nothing but bullets and bombs, increased misery, and perpetual retaliation, which has neither helped Muslims nor non-Muslims living in Europe and the West in general.

Purpose and Scope

The ultimate purpose of this short book is to explore and critique the ideological claims of Stéphane “Charb” Charbonnier, which are indicative of the broader phenomenon of Islamophobia. This book does not simply retell the story of *Charlie Hebdo* and its history of provocation against religious groups, especially Muslims, but rather demonstrates the inadequate, inaccurate and wrongful nature of Charb’s thoughts on Islam, Muslims, pluralism and the meaning of free speech. Additionally, this work will be critical of the critics of Charb, who refuse to take the essence of his critique seriously, and therefore pretend that the Muslim community in Europe is blameless and without need of self-reflexivity. Ultimately, I conclude that both secular/post-Christian native Europeans and their Muslim counterparts – both immigrants and sons and daughters of Europe – need to engage in a robust dialogue, discourse and debate over the nature of what it means to be both European and Muslim in a “post-secular” age, for without such an honest and friendly rapprochement, the future of Europe will be increasingly saturated with suspicion and internecine violence. Most poignantly, this violence will not follow the traditional political *left versus right* dichotomy, but rather will be between those who

want to “defend” European culture, both traditional and modern, against non-European influences, especially Islam. With the massive influx of Syrian, Iraqi, Afghani and African refugees and immigrants into Western Europe, which has further strained the patience and tolerance of a populace that is already weary of their intentions, Europe cannot afford to avoid a comprehensive discourse with its Muslim communities, as pluralism and multiculturalism, regardless of its failing track record, is its reality. Nothing short of another Auschwitz will change that.

CHAPTER TWO

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Stéphane “Charb” Charbonnier begins his manifesto with this opening salvo: “Let’s face it – the term ‘Islamophobia’ is poorly chosen if it’s meant to describe the hatred felt by a few morons for Muslims. And it’s not just poorly chosen, but dangerous.” Originating with the French Orientalist Étienne Dinet, in his 1922 essay *L’Orient vu de l’Occident*, the word “Islamophobia” did not enter into the West’s common lexicon until the 1990’s when it denoted the growing discrimination Muslims were experiencing in Western Europe.¹ Etymologically, “Islamophobia” means “fear of Islam” – a fear that in most cases is irrational. Similar to Charb’s critique, the American “New Atheist” Sam Harris believes that Islamophobia is “a word created by fascists, and used by cowards, to manipulate morons.”² Many Europeans and North Americans, who have little experience with Muslims, or have had exclusively negative experiences with Muslims, fear what Islam means for their supposed open, pluralistic and “tolerant” western societies. After September 11th, 2001, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the frequent terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States, and the growing militancy of some within the Muslim communities in the West, it would seem likely to many observers that terrorists could strike at any place and at any moment. Coupled with the anti-Islam media industry, that has pushed the ubiquitous “Behind the Veil of Islam” rhetoric in books, videos and guest appearance on major corporate news outlets, it is no wonder that a large percent of Americans and Europeans fear the presence of their Muslim neighbors; they have become the proverbial “boogey-man” that replaced the menacing communists in the West.³ However, even if this fear cannot be universalized,

¹ Jocelyn Cesari, “Islamophobia in the West: A Comparison between Europe and the United States,” in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st century*. Ed. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.

² Arsalan Ifikhar, *Scapagoats: How Islamophobia Helps our Enemies and Threatens our Freedoms*. New York: Hot Books, 2016.

³ *Ibid.* pg. vii

it cannot simply be dismissed as inauthentic, even if it is highly manipulated by corporate media and opportunist politicians. Many good people express a genuine fear of the unknown (xenophobia) or the new (neophobia), especially when the images of the unknown and new are almost uniformly negative, violent and “culturally backwards.”

Yet, Charb does not present the word “Islamophobia” in such a way; he believes that the notion of Islamophobia prevails among the French populace due to their “ignorance, laziness, and error”; it is not well thought out and therefore needs to be reconsidered.⁴ Additionally, the good-heartedness and naiveté of “those who militate against Islamophobia” (i.e. those who “defend the religion of the Prophet Muhammad” as opposed to individual Muslims), is misguided in Charb’s view. He believes racism is real, and is a threat to the cohesive fabric of French society, but “Islamophobia” is a rhetorical ploy posited by the foolish and the misinformed for the purpose of defending a religious ideology that should demand rigorous critique on the basis of secular French values.

For sure, “Islamophobia” as a word and concept doesn’t adequately encompass what seems to be less than *fear* and more than *hatred*; we shouldn’t underestimate the degree to which both Islam and Muslims are indeed absolutely detested by many within western society – both among the religious – mainly conservative evangelical Christians in America – and the secular working class and middle class of Europe. As stated before, where communism was once used as the object of fear through which political forces coalesced western society into a more-or-less monolithic mindset, today Islam has replaced communism as the “specter that is haunting Europe.” The theologian and jurist of the Third Reich, Carl Schmitt, taught that the *essence of politics is the identification of the enemy*, and today the enemy of western civilization is no longer “godless Bolshevism,” but is god-abundant Islam.⁵ To illustrate the point, because of the insipid growth in right-wing nationalism, with its aggressive anti-immigrant politics, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek has routinely pointed out that hateful rhetoric that could not be said in public twenty years ago about racial and religious minorities, due to the pervasive shadow of Nazism and

⁴ Stephane “Charb” Charbonnier, *Open Letter: On Blasphemy, Islamophobia, and the True Enemies of Free Expression*. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2015), 4.

⁵ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

the Holocaust, is now being voiced openly and loudly.⁶ Indeed, nationalistic rhetoric has drowned out much of the rational conversation concerning immigration in Europe with the disastrous effect that the political parties that embody this form of nationalistic xenophobia have gained political traction in many open and “tolerant” multicultural societies. While much of European society still enjoys the results of the hard-fought social welfare gains established predominantly by the post-WWII political left, Europe’s politics are steadily moving rightward in this new anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim paradigm. This is especially true in France, where the Islamists’ attacks on *Charlie Hebdo*, Paris, Nice and the assassination of the French priest Jacques Hamel in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray, have fueled the growing blaze of ultra-nationalism.

Yet, as this Islamic “enemy” has been increasingly made identifiable in the 21st century, so too has the opposition to these right-wing groups grown. A coalition of multiculturalist liberals, leftists and so-called “moderate” (read non-terrorists) Muslims has increasingly voiced their aversion to the rise of neo-fascism, nationalism and nativist anti-Muslim and anti-Immigrant politics. They have often taken action against such groups in the public sphere with counter-protests, especially during PEGIDA’s (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) politically charged rallies, as well as the rallies of Marine Le Pen in France.⁷ These “anti-fascist” (antifa) coalitions have branded their enemy’s anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence as being “racist” and/or “Islamophobic.” However, for Charb, the conflation of racism and Islamophobia is a conceptual mistake that must be corrected if the left is to rescue itself from the Islamist trap that he thinks it is now falling into. Clearing up this distinction is one of the main tasks of his *Manifesto*.

Racism

In his manifesto, Charb bemoans the recent increase of public displays of racism within France and Europe in general. Noting that there “will probably always be racists,” he believed that recent racist movements,

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Demanding the Impossible*. Edited by Yong-june Park. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013.

⁷ “*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*” was originally founded 2014 in Dresden, Germany, as a pressure group for anti-Muslim and anti-Islam policies. Since their founding, chapters of PEGIDA have been founded in many other countries, including the UK, France, Holland and Belgium.

which had previously been limited to the confines of the “family dinner,” have been given license to publically display their invective hatred towards foreigners and minorities with the permission of powerful politicians, including the former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and more recently by Marine Le Pen’s *National Front*.⁸ Eager to capitalize on the anxiety concerning the growing racial and ethnic minorities in France, some political parties – mainly in the center to center-right – have contributed to the overall climate of hate against those who have been seen as being *in* France but not being *of* France. This same phenomenon was also witnessed in America with the rise of the Tea Party – the far right libertarian wing of the Republican Party; the demagoguery of members of congress such as Representative Peter King of New York, and the 2016 xenophobic presidential candidacy of Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who called for the monitoring of all “Muslim neighborhoods” in the United States. Another presidential candidate, Ben Carson, stated that Muslims should not be allowed to be President of the United States, invoking a “religious test” as a necessity to keep them out. Although many of them were not hostile to Muslims in their personal life, they could not resist the temptation to stoke fear of Muslims and Islam in an already fearful electorate. For example, Donald J. Trump, in his attempt to court the ethno-nationalist and fascistic “Alt-right” on his way to the American presidency, suggested as a national policy the closing of the borders of the United States to all Muslims, a suggestion that led to the British Parliament’s debate on whether the United Kingdom should ban Trump from entering their country.⁹ He even suggested that the federal government create a registry for all Muslims in the United States, and soon after taking the oath of office, Trump banned refugees from around the world and Muslims from seven majority-Muslim countries from entering the United States. Like the Alt-right in the United States, European leaders have made the issue of Muslims in Europe not only a question of *national security*, but also a question of *national identity*. They ask, “are these people really Europeans, or are we witnessing a slow Islamic invasion that will inevitably lead to “Eurabia”?”¹⁰ “If the Muslims really are members of

⁸ *Open Letter*. Pg. 4-5. Nicolas Sarkozy was the President of France from 2007 to 2012. He was a member of the center-right *Union pour un mouvement populaire* (Union for a Popular Movement) party.

⁹ Donald Trump urges ban on Muslims coming to the US”

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35035190> Accessed 2/6/2016.

¹⁰ “Eurabia” is a word coined by Gisele Littman, or Bat Ye’or, to describe the ultimate goal of the so-called Islamo-French conspiracy to convert Europe to Islam.