

ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN *CHARLIE HEBDO*:
LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM AND ORIENTALISM

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Abstract

France was a major European imperialist country and increased its reach by colonizing many parts of Africa, Asia, North America, and the Caribbean. This brought the French into contact with different cultures and religions and simplified immigration of the colonists to France, from the French colonies of North Africa. It is in this way that some non-Christian religions were imported to France and that Islam was brought to France from North Africa. This thesis will reflect on the way Islam and its followers were treated by the French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, while living in France's secular *laïcité*'s society. Although *Charlie Hebdo* published other cartoons about Islam and Muslims, it was the publishing of the infamous cartoons depicting Muhammed in an irreverent manner that had deadly consequences, both within France and internationally. The outcomes were difficult to control and supported differing global opinions regarding the republishing of the cartoons, terrorism, and the limits of freedom of speech. Most importantly, the portrayal of the religion of Islam and its Muslim followers by the magazine promoted a perspective that questions if Muslims could indeed become genuine members of French society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Charlie Hebdo is a French weekly magazine known for its biting and uncompromising French tradition of satire, often referred to as *gouaille* or cheeky.¹ *Charlie Hebdo*, considers itself as politically left, stands by its philosophy of promoting public debate by highlighting hypocrisy and extremism, especially in religion and French politics.² The magazine was not particularly well known, or read, in France until it published a series of offensive front-page cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. This resulted in violence from a small group of deeply offended Muslims and brought the magazine national notoriety, culminating in walks in favor of, and protests against, the magazine. Although *Charlie Hebdo* continued with its practice of mocking the insincerity in politics and religion, it became more focused on Islam and Muslims, stereotyping them and questioning their place in French society through their cartoons.

The magazine's preoccupation with Muslims and Islamophobia initially started under the editorship of Phillippe Val who was editor of the magazine from 1994 to 2009. Because of his senior position in the organization, Val was able to "promote a link between anti-Semitism and Muslims and produced a narrative that harbored Islamophobia" (Neffati, 2021, p 280). However, there were those within the organization that did not support this view. Val consistently defended Jews and Israel while including all Muslims, from North Africa to Asia, as inherently one homogeneous anti-Semitic group. This was hypocritical, as Val denounced the repeated associations of all Jews with the state of Israel and the far right but did not oppose a

¹ "While not apolitical, "gouaille" does not seek to stake out a political position or mock one political party to the benefit of another. Rather, it is directed against authority in general, against hierarchy and against the presumption that any individual or group has exclusive possession of the truth" (Stimmer, pp. 16-17).

² It stands by this conviction even through threats and terrorism as witnessed by continuing to publish cartoons of Muhammad even after the first attack on its headquarters.

uniform representation of Muslims.

The magazine claimed to equally offend all organized religion and their followers, it showed a more responsible attitude when the target was Jews, while not affording the same concern towards Muslims. Val hired journalists who shared his point of view which then shaped the magazine's set of beliefs and attitudes towards Muslims after his departure.³ In addition, the magazine slowly changed its position from criticizing certain governmental policies to one of agreement, especially regarding the question of Islam and French identity-politics (Neffati, 2021).

However, it was not only *Charlie Hebdo* that exhibited a double standard protecting certain people or organizations, in fact, *Charlie Hebdo*, was founded because of the French government's hypocritical stance on free speech when criticizing de Gaulle. Making fun of politicians was a regular feature of the magazine but the original *Charlie Hebdo* a monthly magazine named *Hara-Kiri*, was banned by the French Government after making fun of the medias' pious response to the death of Charles de Gaulle in 1971. The media gave very little attention to a disastrous fire in a night club that killed 146 people and caused much grief to ordinary people.⁴ The fire had occurred at about the same time as de Gaulle's death (Weston, 2009, p.111) but was completely eclipsed by the ostentatious public display of grief for de Gaulle.⁵

The title of the magazine, which was launched in July 1992, was changed to *Charlie*

³ Val allowed only a small section in the magazine for differing opinions. He considered this as complying with the philosophy of free speech.

⁴ In November 1969, *Hara-Kiri* was banned and re-named *Charlie Hebdo* by Francois Cavanna (Vauclair, 2015). France's interior minister issued a decree effectively banning the paper, citing a law against selling indecent material to minors.

⁵ The final issue of *Hara-Kiri* read "Tragedy in Colombey: 1 Dead." (Horsman,2020).

Hebdo, *hebdo* being short for *hebdomadaire* (weekly) to sidestep the ban. The name, Charlie, was taken from, Charlie Brown in the comic strip, *Peanuts*, which it had previously published, and which was featured in its first issue. Charlie was really a deceptive comic-strip review used by the former staff of *Hari-Kiri* to continue publishing after the imposed ban. However, including the name, Charlie in the title of the new magazine, was also thought to be an inside joke referring to Charles de Gaulle (Weston, 2009).⁶

Charlie Hebdo's editor's claim that nothing is restricted or out of bounds for this magazine, nor does it respect boundaries outside of France for its subject material. It offends various groups leading to many contradictory views about the magazine. *Charlie Hebdo*⁷ has been described as both "racist" and "anti-racist," "Islamophobic," "left wing," "non-conformist," "a childish Muslim baiter," "secular," "anti-clerical," "a martyr to free speech," "a hero," and "anti-immigration" to name a few. It republished the offensive cartoons of the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, published an editorial linking all Muslims to the Brussel's bombings, connected the mature Aylan Kurdi to New Year's Eve revelers in Germany, and it was the magazine's cartoons that the murdered teacher, Samuel Paty, used in his lecture to illustrate free speech to his class.⁸ The magazine has polarized opinion in France and abroad. It has led to various lawsuits put forth by the Catholic Church, Muslim groups, and politicians such as Marine Le Pen, and has been prosecuted many times for hate speech (Crouch, 2015). The three terrorists' attacks on its headquarters in 2011, 2015, and 2020 are presumed to be responses

⁶ *Charlie Mensuel*, a monthly magazine, was published between 1970-1981. Many of the same cartoonists that worked for *Charlie Mensuel* went on to be cartoonists for *Charlie Hebdo*. The covers of their magazines often featured the characters, Charlie Brown and Lucy from the comic strip, *Peanuts*.

⁷ *Charlie Hebdo* promotes the same type of humor, "bête et méchant," "stupid and nasty" as did its parent magazine, *Hara Kiri*.

⁸ One of the two cartoons used by Samuel Paty featured a man on his hands and knees, with his genitals exposed and a star covering part of his backside. The cartoon's caption read "Muhammed, a star is born (See "Appendix A" for image).

to several controversial cartoons published by the magazine depicting the Prophet Muhammed in an unflattering manner.

Christianity, in particular the Catholic Church, had been the brunt of most the religious satire in *Charlie Hebdo*. This was to be expected, as the religious history of France over the past two centuries had been filled with conflict and turmoil between the Catholic Church and the French Republican government. The magazine, which prided itself on being offensive to everyone by including topics of politics and religion, then added more offensive coverage of Islam to its many criticisms of religion. It frequently targeted Islam, often linked to anti-Semitism, terrorism, immigration, or laïcité.

However, it is the magazine's treatment of Islam, specifically cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammed in degrading or violent representations, that has caused the most controversy and global attention. Targeting Islam was a natural progression for *Charlie Hebdo*, as Islam is now the second largest religious demographic in France with its numbers climbing all the time. Immigration has brought about a dramatic change in the religious demographics of France and a new group for *Charlie Hebdo* on which to focus. *Charlie Hebdo* ridiculed and downgraded Muslims in their cartoons. They insulted the prophet Muhammed, drew him naked and made him the brunt of their jokes. In doing so, *Charlie Hebdo* perpetuated a certain stereotypical image of Muslims. This false and stereotypical interpretation of the East as being inferior to the West persists today and is referred to as Orientalism.

Orientalism is a style of thought which has as a key premise that there is basic dichotomy between East and West. It involves the imaginative way that the West, the Occident, organized

and contrasted the perception of the East, the Orient.⁹ Bryan Turner defines Orientalism as a discourse as being “exotic, erotic and the Orient as a strange comprehensible intelligible phenomenon” (Turner, p. 22 in Prakash, 1995). This includes a knowledge of Islam and Muslims being preserved into late 18th century as well as the study of the history, languages, and cultures of the East.

The term “Orientalism” was coined in 1978 by Edward Said who gave that title to his well-known book. He put forth a different and more complimentary view of the Orient. His book, *Orientalism* has influenced academic scholarship and public policy concerning the Middle East and Asia. He argued that the West has a constructed understanding of what the Orient is, the goal of which was to facilitate imperialistic actions in the Middle East and Asia. He questioned the misrepresentations of the Orient and the claim that they were inferior to Europeans and needed domination. Edward Said and Bernard Lewis have differing views as to what Orientalism means. Bernard Lewis, one of Said’s Orientalists, considered Orientalism to be an “ideological and illegitimate intrusion of politics into the world of scholarship” while Said’s interpretation was that “Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine, that the course of the Western pursuit of truth, crisscrossed with racist power and cultural supremacist, licensed the pillage of “Other” cultures in the name of disinterested scholarship” (Prakash, 1995, pp. 199-212). Said also considered Orientalism to be a style of thought that legitimized Western power over the East (Said, n.d.).

⁹ Although historically, Orientalism emerged as a means to honor Eastern cultures, it also legitimized colonization and the taking of the colonies’ raw materials by European imperialists. In more modern times, it provided the justification for invading other countries or controlling their oil. Orientalism spread to the West through globalization, European imperialism and colonization, cultural activities such as world trade fairs, the arts, including literature and movies, and immigration. Although Oriental vs. Occidental seems irrelevant in a modern globalized world with increasing inter-racial populations, some aspects of the divide remain very much alive.

The term Orientalism has also been used in a disparaging way referring to the East as once having a great civilization that has since fallen to a state of decay. This simplistic stereotype and demeaning view of Oriental culture and religion as being inferior was part of the French attitude towards the colonists and its roots permeate French society even today.

I have chosen to focus on the treatment of Muslims, in the magazine, *Charlie Hebdo* because cartoons depicting the Prophet, Muhammed, the religion of Islam and its religious followers, Muslims, have increased in the number of times they are showcased, especially on the front covers of *Charlie Hebdo*. Although Islam is now second in the top four religions in France, with its numbers climbing all the time, it has been disproportionately featured in *Charlie Hebdo* in comparison to the usual targets of politics and the Catholic Church.

This trend started in 2006 with the republishing of the cartoons of the Danish daily newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*. These cartoons were again republished in September 2020 on the eve of the trial of suspected accomplices in the 2015 attacks on their offices. *Charlie Hebdo* had published a series of degrading cartoons depicting Muhammed perpetuating this theme in 2012 as well. The magazine's trend of targeting Muslims is in stark contrast to the treatment of France's two other main non-Christian religions, Judaism and Buddhism. Judaism is protected by anti-Semitic laws while Buddhism is noticeably absent as a regular feature.

The question that I have set out to answer is "How does the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, portray Muslims, and, secondly, what are the factors that may have contributed to these representations? My hypothesis is as follows. The satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, claimed that under the French laws of free speech, the magazine should be allowed to mock all groups, religious and political alike. However, the representation of Muslims was treated differently in

the magazine then other non-Christian groups such as Jews and Buddhists. The treatment of Muslims in the magazine perpetuated Orientalist and racial stereotypes, Islamophobic clichés and a rhetorical implication that Muslims could not truly assimilate and become genuine French citizens.

This is an important topic to investigate because there have been violent reactions by some Muslims to the publishing of the caricatures of Muhammed by the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine. The headquarters of the magazine were targeted on three separate occasions after the publishing of the cartoons, so one can reasonably assume that the printing of the cartoons was the trigger for the attacks. *Charlie Hebdo* has falsely declared itself as both neutral towards all and an advocate of free speech, but there appears to be a bias against Muslims. Satire usually targets the powerful, but *Charlie Hebdo*'s satire was aimed at a group that already faced discrimination. Muslims, who already faced a difficult time in France, were associated with the tragedy, as if Muslims were a homogeneous group, thus adding to their problems of poverty and unemployment.

French leaders either fueled or decreased tensions between the two groups with their public comments about free speech and Republican values¹⁰. Considering the rapid rise of Muslims settling in France, it is important for White French citizens and the rising immigrant population to live together in peaceful and respectful co-existence.¹¹ France must recognize that it is no longer a homogeneous society, and that the large Muslim population has changed historical France. In addition, there are important philosophical questions and concerns to be

¹⁰ Jacques Chirac asked for calm and issued a statement that “freedom of expression should be exercised in a spirit of responsibility and that anything that can hurt the convictions of someone else, in particular religious convictions, should be avoided.” On the other hand, Emmanuel Macron’s inflammatory words included “Islamists want our future” and vowed not to give up the cartoons possibly to appeal to right-wing voters.

¹¹ Although the term “White” is not a term officially used in French society, it is often used to denote those of native French- European origin.

considered. No matter what one's opinion was of the cartoons, what point(s) was *Charlie Hebdo* trying to prove or highlight by publishing these cartoons on three separate occasions, each one followed by violence?

Charlie Hebdo is a business which must sell magazines to pay its expenses, and at the time, its sales were quite down, that is until the attacks on its premises.¹² Sensationalism, violence, or conflict get a prominent position or emphasis in the media and Muslims were an easy target. Western Europe had been feeling the pressure of immigration for some time. France was witnessing the fastest growing Muslim population in Europe. Combining that fact with the increase of Islamophobia heightened by the 9/11 attacks in New York, *Charlie Hebdo* was able to find the perfect subject for its cartoons by perpetuating the stereotypical Muslim. The violent reactions to the publications of the cartoons had the effect of reinforcing racist tropes in wider French society about Muslims as inherently violent and uncivilized, and questioned if it were possible for them to truly assimilate and become genuine French citizens. However, one very important consequence of the attacks and its coverage was that it deflected conversation about the poor living conditions and sense of hopelessness of the French Muslim population and directed it towards Muslim radicalization instead.

The outline of my paper is as follows. First, I will explore the history of France's relationship with Muslims including a discussion of Orientalism, the stereotypical way the French portrayed their colonists, and the factors such as, imperialism, colonization, immigration,

¹² *Le Canard Enchaîné*, another weekly satirical magazine with headquarters in Paris, had been doing increasingly well despite being privately owned, mostly by its employees, and not accepting any advertisements. It was noted for its focus on scandals in the French Government and business circles, although it also featured social issues and the arts. It published a monthly magazine dedicated to one subject involving a French perspective on social, political and global issues Jean Maurice Cubit, pen name Cabu who was killed in the 2015 attack on the *Charlie Hebdo*'s headquarters, was once a staff member of this magazine (Cohen, 2018). The front page was mainly print, but occasionally contained political cartoons.

and Islamophobia that the French believed supported this view. I consider these topics to be of importance for explaining the ongoing relationship between the French and the North Africans and the subsequent portrayal of Muslims in *Charlie Hebdo's* cartoons. Then I will investigate the background and history of the magazine, the representation of Islam and Muslims in *Charlie Hebdo*, and the resulting *Charlie Hebdo* controversy. Finally, I will examine certain French legislation governing the press and the controversy surrounding the limits of free speech vs. censorship as it relates to *Charlie Hebdo's* magazine. The last section of the paper, the Conclusion, will attempt to bring all these points together.

Chapter 2: A History of France's Relationship with Muslims.

This chapter will examine the experiences of the last three centuries that brought the French and North African Muslims together in an enduring relationship that culminated in many North Africans immigrating to France. Centuries before the colonization of North Africa by imperialistic France, there had been times such as during the Crusades and the spice trade that the two groups had met. However, when France colonized North Africa, it changed the social dynamics between the two groups, White French Europeans felt they were superior to North African Muslims, even when the latter became French citizens.

The chapter is divided into five sections or themes, Religious Globalization, French Imperialism, Colonization and Superiority, The Orient as depicted in the Arts, The Effects of Recent Immigration, and Islamophobia. The description of the history of this relationship between White French Imperialists and North African Muslim Immigrants aids in understanding *Charlie Hebdo's* portrayal of Muslims years later. The relationship was never one of equality even when the North Africans became French citizens. They would always be considered the "other."

Religious Globalization

Globalization is narrowly used to describe the phenomenon of global interconnectivity, firmly linked to capitalization and communication made possible by advances in technology. However, it is much more than that, also involving the spread of cultures, politics, and religions around the world (Beyer & Beaman, 2007, pp. 336-337).¹³ There have been pivotal times in

¹³ Globalization, strictly speaking, is not a new phenomenon, but rather has accelerated and become more complex in modern times and is referred to as "thick globalization" (Nye & Donahue, 2001).

history such as the silk and spice trade, the discovery of the Americas and the slave trade, when there was a natural merging of civilizations and where religion became an integral part of globalization (Khaled, 2007, p.5). For the purpose of this paper, globalization is only narrowly considered in the context of the spread of religions throughout France and its colonies and how it contributed to the change in the religious demographics of France.

It was France's imperialistic policies of the early nineteenth century, colonizing parts of North Africa and Vietnam, that brought the French in continuous contact with non-Christian religions.¹⁴ In the later years of the twentieth century, descendants of these colonists immigrated to France, bringing their culture and religion with them. In less than half a century the religious demographics of France changed as Islam became the second largest religious denomination in France, second only to Christianity.

French Imperialism, Colonization, and Superiority

France, like other European imperialist countries such as England, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium, began colonizing Africa, the Americas, India, Pakistan, and Asia during the mid-19th century to augment their own political- economic power.¹⁵ The French colonies of the Maghreb

¹⁴ Reza Aslan writes that there is no single force that could have had a greater impact on propelling globalization forward than religion, which has sought to spread its message across the boundaries of borders, clans, and ethnicities (Aslan, 2010, p.18).

¹⁵ In 1953, France provided 80 billion francs in exports to Indochina. However, each year it decreased (Lawrence, & Logevall, 2007, p. 271).

and Indochina were considered colonies of exploitation or extractive colonies¹⁶ as opposed to serving as a permanent settlement for the citizens of France.¹⁷ They also served as markets for French exports, especially building materials. However, by 1930, over 550,000 French were living in Algeria, being promoted as a part of France separated only by the Mediterranean and having a climate similar to southern France (Hale, 2008).

The period of colonization provided the French with an opportunity to have extended interactions and face to face contact with followers of Islam.¹⁸ The French being white and Christian, considered themselves as superior to the colonists. The French believed that part of their responsibility, referred to as “*mission civilisatrice*” was to educate the colonists in Eurocentric values, culture, religion, customs, and laws. Although France publicly denies being racist, some of this superiority attitude, a remnant of past colonial days, still lies subtly deep within the white French psyche.

The French colonizers had a very unusual way of avoiding being seen as racist. Although during the age of imperialism the French considered themselves to be superior, they paradoxically did not want to be viewed as racist. They considered race not to be biologically determined or static, but rather based on “an individual’s or group’s potential for civilization” (Hale, 2008, p. 13). This was to facilitate certain political situations and the perception of government officials by the public, the press, and other influential people and to redefine oneself

¹⁶ The explanation of France’s justification of this exploitation of the colonies and extending its empire was explained in such academic papers as “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crises” by Lynn White jr. According to White (1967) religion played a role in the exploitive and destructive attitude towards the natural world, a view held by Christian European countries. This view was based on scripture and the Christian influence of the Middle Ages which asserted man’s dominance over nature and which, in turn, provided him with resources for his consumption. He added that Christians are not concerned with earthly matters but are preoccupied by God’s future plan of renewal and perfection (White, 1967).

¹⁷ France was unable to make Algeria a settler colony and included a military campaign that cost thousands of lives (Bigon & Njoh, 2018).

¹⁸ Centuries ago, the French fought in the Crusades against Muslims.

and others as the need arose.

The French developed a hierarchy of “racial and evolutionary developments” based on the assumed ability to be civilized. They placed themselves at the top, followed by Asians, Arabs, and Sub-Saharan Africans in that order. According to this document all groups could be civilized to some extent, but only white Europeans could be truly civilized (Hale, 2008, p.13).¹⁹ Post-Colonial theorists have studied the effects of centuries of colonial rule and exploitation on the colonists and their culture, even decades after they received their independence. What was considered to be colonial racist ideas span a time frame much longer than the period of European colonialization. These ideas now shape the modern view of former colonists, many of whom have immigrated to France (McDonnell, 2010, p.1).

This hierarchy of racial ideas can be viewed through the lens of France’s world fairs, colonial expositions, and commercial trademarks of the early 20th century. The Indochinese section of the 1900 Exposition Universelle depicts a stereotypical image of “gentle subjects” who accepted France’s rule without protest. They were shown as reliable, diligent, and skilled workers with a glorious southeast ancient Asian civilization. Many designers created a peaceful atmosphere with drawings of nature scenes, flowers, and flowing water. The French imperialists did not consider that the Indochinese needed much “civilizing” and instead emphasized the untapped potential of a skilled Asian population with a glorious history of achievement. Their culture was celebrated. French Indochinese were distinguished from those of the Far East by picturing them with traditional wide-brim straw hats. Indochinese culture, religion, work ethic and history were celebrated (Hale, 2008). This impression of Indochinese carried over to modern France.

¹⁹ This is often referred to as “cultural racism.”

In contrast, the North Africans were depicted as mysterious people, seductive, exotic and alluring, with North African men portrayed as turbaned fighters and devout Muslims while the women were pictured as simple peasant girls or beauties hidden under veils. The geographical position of North Africa to France and the fact that both practiced a monotheistic religion were first celebrated as positive connections to each other. However, these connections eventually evolved into a modern crisis in France, as more and more Muslim Arabs from the Maghreb immigrated to France publicly practicing a religion now seen as hostile to Christianity. When Algeria was declared to be a province of France in 1848, Algerian Jews but not Algerian Muslims were granted French citizenship (Prochaska, 2004, p.139) devaluing Muslim culture and religion in comparison to the Jewish culture and religion in the eyes of the French.

This way that the French have categorized and ranked their colonists who have immigrated to the “Mother Land “has implications for the way modern Vietnamese Buddhists are seen as more desirable French citizens than Muslims from North Africa. This stereotyping led to less employment opportunities and poverty for the North Africans. Their lack of education, especially for young Muslim males, has led to high unemployment, boredom, frustration, and problems with the law. This continuing unpleasant situation created other problems, both agitating each other, which supposedly provides evidence as to their lower value in the eyes of the French. This stereotyped representation and colonial patronizing attitude of the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa by the West is rooted in Orientalism.

The Orient as Depicted in the Arts

European stereotypes about the Orient originated and were kept alive in literature about the Crusades, books, paintings, movies, musicals, household decorations, and even video games. The book, *One Thousand and One Nights*, also known as *The Arabian Nights*, fueled suspicion

and intrigue towards Arab Muslims (Hale, 2008) while Antoine Galland gave the first French translation of the *Arabian Nights*, adding *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* to the original. Disney made a movie, *Aladdin*, out of its interpretation of the book, which came with a warning that some of the cultural representations were outdated. Other adaptations of *The Arabian Nights* included a Broadway musical and a video game. Another movie, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), which showed the Algerian resistance movement, was once viewed as a criticism of racism, empire and occupation, and a right to self-determination and freedom. This is now also viewed as celebrating Muslim violence. The classic film, *Casablanca* (1941) was filmed in the setting of Morocco, portraying an example of Muslim society.

Voltaire, a French writer, historian and philosopher, was an advocate of freedom of religion, freedom of expression and separation of Church and state and whose views served as the template for France's present-day secularism. He often attacked the Catholic Church. His book, "*Mahomet*" written in 1741 depicts the prophet as an imposter, a false prophet, a hypocrite and a fanatic. A theatrical version of the book, entitled "*Fanaticism*" or "*Mahomet the Prophet*" that was scheduled for a performance about a year after the Danish cartoon affair, had to be cancelled because of fear of riots.

The painting, *The Snake Charmer*, (1879) by Jean-Leon Gerome, shows a naked youth holding a snake while an older man playing the flute charms both the boy and the serpent, as if this was a regular public occurrence. That painting was used on the first edition cover of Said's book. It is on display at the Sterling Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts. Henriette Brown's painting, *A Visit: Harem Interior, Constantinople* (1860), part of a private collection, depicts an exaggerated feminized and sexualized culture of the Orient.

The Grand Odalisque, an 1814 oil painting by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres is displayed in Musée du Louvre, Paris. It depicts a confident Turkish nude concubine reclining and holding a peacock feather. It was painted for Napoleon's sister and Queen of Naples, Caroline Morat, and is considered one of the first examples of visual art depicting Orientalism (See "Appendix B" for images). The use of decorations, clothing or ceremonies taken out of context, such as geisha wigs, ninja costumes or snake-charming ornaments, is not an honest reflection of their significance in Eastern culture. All of these examples instill a lasting misrepresentation of the Orient as erotic and exotic in Western minds.

The Effects of Recent Immigration

Immigration has been a very contentious issue in Europe during the last few decades. Immigrants come for various reasons, a better life, education, escape prosecution, refugees, unite with family members or work. Many French colonists have chosen to immigrate to France because of the familiarity with the French language and customs. Not only have they brought with them their own culture, but also their religious beliefs. It is difficult to get accurate immigration statistics, especially statistics regarding religious affiliation, ethnicity, or country of origin because of the narrow scope of questions asked in the French census.²⁰

There are more than five million Muslims in France, the largest Muslim population in Western Europe (Ganley, 2012). Most of France's immigrants come from its North African colonies whose traditional organization of their society was challenged by the French. The French imposed compulsory schooling but there were restrictions as France did not want to equip

²⁰ France protects the privacy of its citizens relating to matters of both ethnicity and religious affiliation and since 1978 has enforced a law which restricts official recordkeeping regarding racial and ethnic data (Laurence & Vaisse, 2007). The 2020 French census is open to anyone living in France for one year, including foreigners, so the data includes migrants, students, and temporary workers. It is not necessary to be a citizen or to have a *carte de séjour* in order to be counted if you have been in the country for twelve months. A census is done each year but releases every five years.

the students with the knowledge to challenge their authority (Akkari, 2004).

Initially Muslims from North Africa came to work at jobs that the French did not want, setting an unequal social relationship of power and wealth, and adding ethnic and religious complexity to the existing working class.²¹ Pro-French Algerians increased in numbers due to wars of liberation and the ongoing process of decolonization (Shepard, 2008). Many Muslims in France were faced with various elements of discrimination and domination despite being in the country for generations. Muslims are a “highly diverse group some being secular while others being observant” (Kille & Wihbey, 2015). In addition, many Muslims who are of Arab or African descent may assimilate culturally but are excluded socially (Keaton, 2006) creating another social hierarchy in France’s society. Most of France’s immigrants came from North Africa, in particular Algeria. They lived together in poor communities on the outskirts of major cities with a sub-citizen status. When the Algerian conflict broke out in 1954, many Algerian Muslim soldiers remained committed to France, ostracizing them and their families from faithful Algerians. Many who were in grave danger, escaped to France to avoid torture and murder. The French government, under President de Gaulle, neglected these Algerians that fought with the French forces and was unsympathetic to the soldiers who were denied pensions that were given to the French soldiers for their war service. This injustice was finally rectified by President Jacques Chirac (Stam-Hulsink, 2012).

They suffered high unemployment rates, resulting in high levels of poverty, a situation which made delinquency and boredom more common. Not surprisingly they were over-represented in the criminal justice system as many were denied legitimate means to attain the

²¹ During the 1960’s, immigrants to industrial Europe were directed to lower paying labor jobs that the national citizens considered undesirable and beneath them. This exploitive practice was legitimized by the perceived inequality of the races (Flecha, 1999, p.154).

lifestyle they had hoped for. In 2005, second and third generation youth in these Arab-immigrant suburbs, erupted into riots which eventually spread to more than 300 French towns, bringing attention to their frustrations (Ireland, 2007). When the colonists first immigrated to France to improve their economic situation, they accepted employment considered “beneath” the French. Now years later, after they have become French citizens, generations of North Africans are frustrated and disillusioned with their place in French society.

Islamophobia

The term, “Islamophobia” literally translated means fear of Islam. The term was first published in a February, 1991 American periodical and has been included in the Oxford English dictionary since 1997 (Sheridan, 2006). The more common understanding of Islamophobia is that it involves irrational fear, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or the people who practice Islam. Anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic sentiment often overlaps with xenophobia or racism and in the extreme is seen as a geo-political force or a source of terrorism. However, it also involves the misrepresentation that there is one Islam, and that the phobia can be directed at this homogeneous group. This obscures the diversity of the Muslim populations and prevents different groups of Muslims replying to attacks on an individual basis (Halliday, 1999).

“Liberal Islamophobia claims to target religion and belief, Islam on behalf of liberalism as opposed to the people, Muslims” (Mondon & Winter, 2017, p. 32). This structure of Islamophobia was more acceptable to mainstream French political discourse than the racist hate and right-wing authoritarianism extreme of the Front National. Many French saw Muslims as the natural enemies of the Republic and a group not to be trusted. Muslims, as a homogeneous group, were seen as representing a global threat, and an imaginary clash of civilizations. However, extremists were a small minority, but provided justification for systematically

discriminating against all Muslims, a contradiction to the egalitarian values of the Republic.

The previous sections follow the evolving history of the deteriorating relationship between the White French imperialists and the North African Muslims. The French have had a long legacy of anti-Muslim hate dating back to the days of colonialism. The French had placed Arabs close to the bottom in their hierarchy of groups that could be “civilized.” This disdain for Islamic culture and the adversarial relationship westerners had with Arabs probably grew out of their experiences in the Crusades (Hale, 2008, p.13).

However, this dislike for Muslims permeated much of France’s society as more and more Muslims immigrated to France, changing the religious demographics of the country. The events of 9/11 and the resulting Islamophobic reactions, the publishing of the cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammed and the violence that followed all contributed to the fear of the “other,” the Muslims who were going to overtake the French Republic and change its values. They were now seen as the invaders. Phillippe Val promoted a view of Islamophobia that linked Islam inherently with anti-Semitism and set a certain lasting perspective in *Charlie Hebdo’s* editorial line while the magazine continued to publish cartoons that portrayed a stereotype of Muslims as violent and unable to be civilized.²²

²² In 2018 Val drafted a highly controversial manifesto, “Before France is no longer France.” signed by 250 important French personalities.

Chapter 3: *Charlie Hebdo*'s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed, Muslims, and Islam.

Charlie Hebdo was known in France as a satirical magazine that exposed the hypocrisy and extremism of politics, the powerful, and religions. It was the cartoons that depicted the Prophet Muhammed that was the catalyst for the attacks on its headquarters. However, in addition to disrespecting the Prophet Muhammed, in these instances, the magazine continued to use satirical cartoons to perpetuate a certain unflattering stereotype of Muslims, a group that was already marginalized.

For ease of discussion, I have divided these cartoons into four themes, “*Charlie Hebdo*'s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons Depicting the Prophet Muhammed, *Charlie Hebdo*'s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons Depicting their Relationship with Immigration, *Charlie Hebdo*'s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons Depicting their Relationship with Laïcité, and *Charlie Hebdo*'s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons Depicting the 9/11 Attack on the Twin Towers.” In addition to a description and discussion of the cartoons under each heading, there is also an “Appendix A,” under four corresponding headings, that show the actual cartoon. In every cartoon Muslims are degraded or ridiculed. There is also an “Appendix C”, “*Charlie Hebdo*'s Cartoons on Various Themes,” that shows cartoons illustrating the magazine's stand on politics, certain politicians, and other religions, mainly the Catholic Church. These topics may be alluded to throughout the thesis but are not examined in any depth.

***Charlie Hebdo*'s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons Depicting the Prophet Muhammad**

On September 30th, 2005, Kurt Westergaard, a cartoonist for a liberal Danish newspaper,

Jyllands-Posten, published a series of twelve editorial cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohamed, one portraying the Prophet wearing a turban in the shape of a bomb (See “Appendix A” for image). Although *Charlie Hebdo* had earlier published other cartoons depicting Muslims, such as Bin Laden, it was the republishing of certain cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed that offended a particular small group of Muslims so much so that they retaliated with violence to avenge such an act.

Although there were various views within Islam on religious imagery, these, in particular, were considered to be extremely and deliberately offensive, and outraged many Muslims worldwide. Afterwards Westergarrd received death threats and moved to a heavily fortified home with bodyguards.²³ The paper defended the publishing of these cartoons as part of an ongoing debate about self-censorship, the tolerance and limits of free speech, the ability to discuss Islam without fear of terror, and the relationship of the minority Muslim population to Western society in general. Another rather curious defense was that similar cartoons were made about other religions, meaning that Muslims were being treated as equals. However, it is interesting to note that the British and American press covered the story without the publication of the cartoons.

The *Charlie Hebdo* magazine is no stranger to inviting controversy. The staff refused to bow to the pressure of Islamic fundamentalists, deciding to reprint the 2005 twelve infamous cartoons from the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands- Posten*, which depicted the Prophet Muhammed and other Islamic subjects in an unflattering light. The magazine had an original cover

²³ Similarly, Lars Vilks, a Swedish artist became a target for Islamic extremists after he drew the Prophet Mohammed ‘s head on top of a dog’s body and needed police protection. Al-Qaeda offered a \$100,000 bonus for his death.

illustration for this special issue.²⁴ The title was, “Muhammed and the Fundamentalists” and showed Muhammed, head in hands sighing, “It’s hard to be loved by idiots.” Inside the magazine were two especially inflammatory republished cartoons.²⁵ One showed the Prophet Muhammed wearing a turban with a bomb inside. The other showed the prophet welcoming suicide bombers to heaven saying, “Stop, stop, we have run out of virgins” (Bleich, 2011). (See “Appendix A” for image). This fits into Charlie Hebdo’s stereotyping of a war-like nature of Islamists with so many willing to die for their faith in return for virgins awaiting them after death. This publication was met with protests and unsuccessful lawsuits by Muslim groups.

Another special spoof issue renamed “*Charia Hebdo*” had the Prophet Muhammad himself as the guest editor.²⁶ He was portrayed as a “good, humored voice of reason.” This was in response to recent news of the post-election introduction of Sharia Law in Libya and the victory of the Islamic party in Tunisia. The cover showed Muhammed threatening the reader with the words, “100 lashes of the whip if you don’t die laughing” (See “Appendix A” for image). This implies that Muslims are too sensitive, have no sense of humor and cannot take a joke as do the rest of French citizens. Inside, Muhammed also had editorials on halal drinks which are permissible under Islamic Law and a perspective on Islamic veils which had been recently banned in France (Crouch, 2015, p. 10). The editors wanted to show their disappointment in the lack of progress in the Arab world after the Arab Spring” (de Leeuw, 2015, p. 61). The edition sold out within hours.

This incitement resulted in the first terrorist attack on the early morning of

²⁴ This is an unusual alignment of a right-wing newspaper with a liberal magazine.

²⁵ *Charlie Hebdo* drew unusually high sales and gained as much notoriety as the Danish newspaper.

²⁶ This is in reference to “Sharia Law, “Sharia translated from Arabic means “the way.” Sharia Law is the Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Koran and the traditions of the prophets (Hadith and Sunni). It prescribes both religious and secular duties and sometimes retributive penalties for law breakers (Oxford Language Dictionary, n.d.).

November 2, 2011, when the newspaper's offices were fire-bombed, and its web site hacked. There were no injuries, but the damage was so bad that the offices had to relocate. Muhammed Moussaoui, head of the French Council of the Muslim Faith, issued a statement deploring the mocking tone of the paper towards Islam and the prophet, but also condemning all acts and forms of violence. Francois Fillon, the prime minister, Claude Gueant, the interior minister, and feminist writer, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, all voiced support for *Charlie Hebdo* citing freedom of the press. The cover of the next edition responded to the attack by depicting a male cartoonist wearing a *Charlie Hebdo* tee shirt kissing a Muslim man on the lips with the caption, "Love is stronger than hate" (See "Appendix A" for image) (Crouch, 2015, p. 10).

These incidents did not stop the publication of more satirical cartoons of Muhammed. The justification put forth by the staff for publishing these cartoons was that freedom of speech should have no limits. In September 2012, just a year after the fire-bombing attack, the magazine published yet another series of cartoons depicting Muhammed, one bending over naked and asking to be admired. The other cartoon has Muhammed on all fours with a star covering his anus (See "Appendix A" for images). Following the publication of the cartoons, France put all its embassies worldwide on high alert. Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, and White House spokesman, Jim Carney questioned the judgement, but not the right, behind the publishing of the cartoons (Crouch, 2015, pp. 10 -12). Later, that month, in an address to the United Nations, President Obama condemned, in broad terms, the slander of all religions.

"The magazine was sued in the Criminal Court of Paris by the League of Judicial Defence of Muslims as an "incitement to racial hatred" for a cover cartoon with Muhammed holding up the Qur'an riddled with bullet holes. The cover reads, "The Qur'an is crap. It does not stop bullets," depicting the followers of Islam as being violent. On October 1, 2014 the magazine

again pictured Muhammed. This time the cartoon featured a member of ISIS about to behead Muhammad and calling him an infidel. The caption reads, “If Muhammed were to return.” Muhammed answers, “I am the stupid prophet” (See “Appendix A” for image). According to the magazine’s editor, Charb, this cartoon was to show that ISIS has failed to understand the concept of Islam, even to the point where they could consider the Muslim prophet an infidel” (Jacobs, 2015, pp. 9-12).

The most serious attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters occurred on January 7, 2015, at approximately 11:30 a.m. when two French born Muslim brothers, Saïd (1980-2015) and Chérif (1982-2015) Kouachi forced their way into the offices of the satirical newspaper. They were born on French soil, educated in its schools and socialized on French streets. They were legitimate full -fledged French citizens.²⁷ They were not newly arrived Muslim or Arab immigrants. The gunmen shouted, “Allah Akbar,” Arabic for “God is great. We have avenged the Prophet Muhammad! We have killed *Charlie Hebdo*!” These words are significant as it leaves no doubt as to the attackers’ motives.²⁸ The offender was *Charlie Hebdo* and its assault on the sacred and they had come to put an end to this behavior. The office had moved to an unmarked location after the firebombing of their previous location that had occurred in 2011 along with the website being hacked. This time the losses were not in furnishings and computers, but in human lives.

It is customary in France to offer New Year’s greetings until the end of January. Keeping

²⁷ The Kouachi brothers were two of four children born to Algerian parents that spent much of their childhood in foster care and orphanages following the suicide of their mother. Chérif known as Abu Issen, had been in trouble with French law on charges, including terrorism and had spent time in prison. The United States Intelligence provided information to France that the brothers had travelled to Yemen in 2011 and had undergone training there (Barnes et al; 2015).

²⁸ The United States Intelligence provided information to France that the brothers had travelled to Yemen in 2011 and had undergone training there (Barnes et al; 2015).

with this tradition, in the first week of January *Charlie Hebdo* posted a cartoon of a turbaned man with a rifle strapped to his back. The caption read, “There haven’t been any attacks in France,” to which the man replied, “Wait! We still have until the end of January to extend our wishes.” (Crouch, 2015, pp. 1-2). On the morning before the news of the attack had hit the airwaves, a cartoon was tweeted from *Charlie Hebdo*’s account. It showed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a leader of the jihadist Islamic State responding in a politically correct manner to a caption that said, “Best wishes. To you too, Ali-Baghdadi.” In reply, the figure says, “And especially good health.” It was time stamped Wednesday morning Paris time. It is unclear if this macabre tweet was sent before, during or just after the massacre (BBC Trending, 2015, p. 1).

The response to this attack was swift. French President Holland called the attack an act of barbarism. It was an attack “on the expression of freedom ...that is the spirit of the republic.” Many gathered and marched at The Place de la Republique to show solidarity with *Charlie Hebdo* and to give support for the principle of free speech, a message which was posted on its home page.²⁹ Monetary contributions poured in on its web site in for the financially strapped small circulation weekly. The web site declared, “Je suis Charlie, “with an image of an upraised arm clenching a pen with a headline, “The pen is higher than barbarism.” The lights at the Eiffel Tower were extinguished in respect for the victims while supporters from around the world identified with Charlie.³⁰

The following week the magazine published what it called, “the Survivor’s Edition.” The

²⁹ A statue of Marianne, a symbol of the French state, is central to the Place de la Republique. In her right-hand Marianne clutches an olive branch, a symbol of peace, and in her left hand she holds a tablet inscribed with the Rights of Man. The stone column is decorated with allegories of liberty, equality and fraternity. It is the site of many demonstrations.

³⁰ There was no outrage in European countries when in 1999 NATO bombed Serbian state T.V. headquarters, killing 16 journalists. In 2001 and again in 2003 the U.S. bombed AL Jazeera’s offices in Kabul and Baghdad killing a journalist and a staff member Again no public outrage.

demand was so great that the usual one million copies had to be increased to five million. There were Italian and Turkish print editions and English, Spanish and Arabic digital editions. The French government granted nearly 1 million euros to support the magazine. The cover showed a turbaned, sad Muhammed holding a sign that reads, “I am Charlie.” Above his head was the caption, “All is forgiven” (See “Appendix A” for image). This is a rather ambiguous message, especially considering the events of the past week. Again, this was a caricature of Muhammad, an insult to some Muslims. He is shown holding a sign identified with the supporters of the magazine. It is unclear who is forgiving who (Crouch, 2015, pp.43-44).

On January 11 approximately forty presidents and prime ministers representing some of the most powerful people in the world joined an estimated million strong walking together with a message against terrorism.³¹ They walked down the boulevard named after Voltaire, the French writer whose name is synonymous with freedom of expression while other marches in solidarity with the cause were held in many countries around the world. Among the leaders present for the march were Francois Hollande, Angela Merkel, Mahmoud Abbas, Binyamin Netanyahu, David Cameron, Donald Tusk, King Abdullah II and Justin Trudeau.³² Some Muslim organizations were also represented in the march. Noticeably absent was Barack Obama who cited heightened security reasons and a source of distraction for not attending, but the United States did send a representative. However, some critics commented that many participants in the march were driven by prejudice towards Muslims and while other participants denounced violence, they did not support *Charlie Hebdo* (Zerhouni et al, 2016).

³¹ Some leaders in attendance for the march had dubious records on human rights and freedom of the press in their own countries. Prime Minister Davutoglu represented Turkey which has one of the highest numbers of jailed journalists in the world.

³² Trudeau defended free speech in response to a question about caricatures deemed blasphemous as shown in the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine but added that “freedom of expression is not without limits” (Dawn, 2020). Also, Pope Francis commented that “One cannot make fun of faith. Every religion has its dignity. There is a limit” (Time Magazine, n.d.).

The Paris suicide attacks of November 13, 2015, that killed 130 people, is said to be the largest terrorist attack on French soil since World War II. It also included an attack on a Buddhist establishment, Little Cambodia, killing 15 people. Just like the fallout from 9/11, regular law-abiding Muslims were targeted by the general population as if they were all capable of terrorism. The Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the attack in retaliation for French airstrikes in Islamic targets in Syria and Iraq. This resulted in a three-month state of emergency in France, banning all demonstrations. Although this attack cannot be directly attributed to the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons, France had become increasingly Islamophobic and on high alert since the terrorist attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters and the subsequent continuing publication of the cartoons by the magazine featuring aspects of Islam.

The trial of Salah Abdeslam, the only survivor, along with other suspected perpetrators in the attack is underway as of now with much heightened security. However, on September 1, 2020, just ahead of the trial, *Charlie Hebdo* announced that the magazine would republish the same caricatures depicting Muhammed that sparked such violent protests before. Two weeks after the republications two people were critically injured outside the former headquarters of the magazine. Zaheer Hassan, a twenty-five-year-old who claimed to be an unaccompanied refugee from Pakistan, confessed to his actions which he said were in retaliation for the republications of the cartoons. In addition, Emmanuel Macron made the situation worse by only defending the cartoons and Republican values rather than asking for calm.³³

In October 2020 *Charlie Hebdo*'s offensive cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed were again on display, this time to a much younger audience in school. The magazine projected itself as a champion of free speech and the teacher, Samuel Paty, used the cartoons as a teaching tool

³³ This resulted in a boycott of French products in some Muslim countries such as Kuwait and Qatar. European leaders supported Macron's remarks.

to explain this concept. Paty was teaching a civic education course in accordance with the French curriculum and showed his students a caricature of Muhammed from a *Charlie Hebdo* magazine to illustrate and discuss the limits of freedom of speech. This was not the first time Paty had used such caricatures, one of which showed Mohammed, naked with his genitals showing.³⁴ Muslim students were permitted to leave the classroom if they so wished. Considering teenage peer pressure to fit in and the age of the students, young Muslim students were placed in a position where their religion and they, by association, were then ridiculed in front of their peers. The other classmates, who most likely lacked the sophistication to fully grasp the reasoning behind showing such pictures, were given a false impression of what Islam teaches, an impression that may stay with them for some time.

The series of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammed had become much greater than ever anticipated. They portrayed the Prophet Mohammed in very unflattering disrespectful ways. *Charlie Hebdo's* defense in using Muhammad in the cartoons was that people laughed at the caricature of Muhammed, but not the person himself. However, the cartoons depicted Muslims as violent, war-like and uncivilized with no sense of humor, keeping alive the old stereotypes described in the past.

The common thread of all these violent incidences is a magazine ready to push the limits of free speech by publishing provocative religious cartoons, horrifying a small number of an already targeted, marginalized minority group with a small number of this group responding to these insults in such a terrifying manner. A post to Flicker in January of 2015 reads, "Je ne suis pas Charlie. Je suis Ahmed." In a smaller text below is, "I am Ahmed the dead cop. Charlie

³⁴ Brahim Chnina, a female student's father, filed a criminal complaint against Paty for disseminating pornography to students. Paty responded by filing a complaint of defamation of character against Chnina.

ridiculed my faith and culture and I died defending his right to do so,” illustrating the fact that French Muslims are not a homogeneous group and have different opinions on important political and religious matters, while for all the innocent Muslims this slogan did not get the same coverage as “Je suis Charlie Hebdo.”

Charlie Hebdo’s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons Depicting their relationship with Immigration

Immigration has been a very controversial topic during the past two decades in Europe, especially in France and Germany. Protests and riots against immigration have been common. Immigrants came to make a better life for themselves and their families or to avoid war or persecution. Many North Africans became French citizens as they were familiar with the French language and culture due to French colonization of their countries. This made the transition to their new country, France, easier. When the North Africans immigrated to France, they not only brought their culture to France, but also their religion, Islam, which is now second in the top four religions in France, with its numbers climbing all the time.

Opposition to immigration often revolved around the local peoples’ belief that immigrants were taking jobs from them, immigrants are a burden on the welfare system or that immigrants just do not belong.³⁵ These negative sentiments were common among White European French citizens and *Charlie Hebdo* turned these negative feelings about immigrants into a series of cartoons. The unflattering cartoons depicting immigrants were usually those of Muslims. They were depicted as potential criminals, lower class, backward, welfare recipients, ungrateful, and the “other.”

³⁵ The North Africans worked at jobs that the French would not take.

There had been very little coverage in the French media regarding the Syrian refugee crises, even though Syria was once a French colony. In time, the long-drawn out Syrian war brought a new flood of Syrian refugees to many countries of Europe, including France. This influx of migrants spurred much public discussion, mostly negative, about the Syrian refugees who were mainly Muslim. However, the world was shocked at the photograph of the young Aylan Kurdi's body washed up on a beach in Turkey, dead after a failed attempt to escape the war in Syria. It was dangerous but the family was so desperate to escape that Aylan and his family risked their lives to get to Greece. The image of the two-and-a-half-year-old, Alan Kurdi (Shenu), along with the bodies of his mother and brother, brought the world's attention to their plight. However, at the time much of Western Europe was in violent protests over immigration, so that angle of the story had been given more attention than the dilemma of the refugee crises itself (See Appendix A" for image).

Aylan Kurdi appeared in several *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons over the next few months. Editor and chief cartoonist, Laurent Sourisseau, who goes by the pen name Riss and who was injured in the attack, drew the toddler's body in T-shirt and shorts washed upon the beach face down next to a McDonald's advertisement on a pole. This advertisement which was written in French was to promote a special deal on kid's meals. The caption read, "So close to making it." (See "Appendix A" for image).

Charlie Hebdo said that it printed the cartoon to show the hypocrisy of the Christian European mass medias' response to the migrant crises that favored limiting or ceasing immigration but had jumped on this sensational story for their own benefit (Love, 2015). Hebdo's cartoonist, Corinne Rey, who uses the pen name Coco, responded to the McDonald's image in the cartoons, and said that the image criticized the consumerist society we are being

sold and that it was also to denounce the inertia of European nations in failing to deal with the crises before it reached that point (Mackey, 2015). Another interpretation was that to Europeans, a French child is worth more than a Syrian child. Although there was an outpouring of solidarity after the January attack, these new cartoons caused anger and frustration in many social media networks. The slogan, “Je suis Charlie,” or “I am Charlie,” turned to a new Twitter hashtag, # Je ne suis pas Charlie” or “I am not Charlie.”

A similar sentiment was expressed through Coco’s cartoon of September 14, 2015, depicting a migrant being mistreated by using him as a footstool. The words, “Welcome to refugees. This is your home,” accompanied the cartoon (See “Appendix A” for image). According to Coco it was meant to show the hypocrisy of Hungarian politicians proclaiming themselves to have Christian beliefs but rejecting non-Christian immigrants from Syria. A related cartoon, drawn by Mr. Sourisseau and other illustrators, showed the xenophobic, anti-immigration politician, Jean- Marie Le Pen, standing over the young boy’s body on the beach and shouting that the boy’s clothes were red, white and blue, the French tricolour for which the far-right group is named (See “Appendix A” for image).³⁶ Jean -Marie Le Pen was also depicted in one of the magazine’s cartoons sporting a moustache like Adolf Hitler’s moustache but covering his private area, a reference to the Nazi’s extermination of the Jews and other “undesirables.” Other cartoons using the beach scene and the young boy as a backdrop included cartoons depicting tourists on the beach, oblivious to the dead boy and another cartoon with a friendly dinosaur from a French children’s television program (Mackey, 2015), a commentary on how much attention should be given to immigrants and how unimportant they are.

³⁶ Politics, politicians and other public figures are frequent targets of the magazine and make up a substantial number of front-page cartoons in the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine (See “Appendix C” for images).

The attacks in Cologne, Germany during the 2015-2016 New Year's celebrations were the subject of another *Charlie Hebdo* cartoon. Over 1200 women were reportedly sexually assaulted during the celebrations, many as they assembled in public places. Some assailants were described as North African (Arab), dark skinned, or foreign. The magazine printed a cartoon of two women being chased by two men with outstretched arms. The men's faces closely resembled those of animals rather than humans. The caption read, "Migrants, what would little Aylan have become if he had grown up? A bum chaser in Germany"? (See "Appendix "A." for image) (Westcott, 2016). This cartoon portrayed Muslim men as uncivilized, lawless, and not able to control their sexual urges as well as a lack of gratitude from the immigrants or refugees after being allowed to stay in a "civilized" country

These cartoons appeared to attack the lack of concern for the safety of immigrants and also questioned their suitability to be law-abiding citizens. Nowhere in these cartoons is there a mention of a religion, even though Syrians and North Africans are mainly Muslims. Over half of French adults give failing grades to the media coverage of immigration which is noteworthy as much of anti-Muslim sentiment in France revolves around an anti-immigration attitude perpetuated by the media. In fact, "Islam has become a popular metonym for the question of immigration and immigrants are often referred to as Muslims" (Mattei & Aguilar, 2010 in Abdeslam, 2017, p.5).

However, another cartoon left no doubt as to *Charlie Hebdo's* opinion on the relationship between immigration and Islam. It showed a Jesus-like figure walking on the water while another smaller figure wearing shorts is drowning in the water. The former says, "Christians walk on water," while the latter says, "Muslim children sink." The caption underneath the cartoon reads, "Proof that Europe is Christian" (See "Appendix A" for image). Non-Christians

are not part of Europe's society.

*Charlie Hebdo's Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons Depicting their Relationship with
Laïcité*

Charlie Hedo depicted Muslims in an unflattering manner in several different scenarios. The immigration of so many Muslims to France meant that now they had to live under a different set of laws than those of their country of origin. One law in particular was difficult for Muslim women who wished to wear a veil in public. Public spaces were deemed secular and there were to be no identifying religious symbols worn there. *Charlie Hebdo* used this conflict between religious and civil laws to show that Muslims could not possibly be able to fit into French society. Again, they did not belong.

After over one hundred years of legal arguments, the French government adopted *Laïcité*, a special type of French secularism, or civil religion, that provides a division between the private and public lives of French citizens.³⁷ *Laïcité* is a form of secularism connected to France's history and identity which developed out of a struggle with the Catholic Church, culminating in the 1905 law that legally separated Church and state.³⁸ It is strongly nationalistic and the cornerstone of the identity of the French Republic which, among other things, demands public conformity.³⁹ However, it has also been a catalyst for different interpretations and debate as to how this principle should be applied. Certain religions feel that they have been treated differently under this law. For example, France still holds to some Christian traditions, such as school and

³⁷ It is important to note that the statistics used in the Stasi Commission, set up to review the application of the principles of *laïcité*, were not government statistics, but rather those from non-governmental agencies and organizations. These statistics have been challenged by some as inflating the situation in France (Terry, 2004).

³⁸ The word, *laïcité*, is derived from the Greek term for "the people" or "the laity" as opposed to "the priestly" class and is meant to find a balance between the authority of the state and the influence of religion stemming from France's particular history.

³⁹ The second principle of this law states that the Republic does not recognize, compensate or subsidize any Religion which but it is not the same as freedom of religion which is guaranteed in the Constitution.

bank holidays on special days usually observed by Christians. In contrast, Muslims feel they are treated unfairly and are targeted by these laws that prohibit religious symbols, especially head coverings, in public spaces. Yet, all religions are supposed to be treated equally under these laws.

Much of the English-speaking world has difficulty understanding the term *laïcité*, as there is no satisfactory equivalent for the word. Although often translated as “secularism” or the “lay principle,” to the French it also has historical significance and means much more than that. This law is of significance to the values of the Republic because since the beginning of this century French immigration policy has shifted to the right in its policy of assimilation. Consequently, there has been increased pressure for these immigrants to adopt French behavior and traditions. Countries such as France, struggle to find a balance between the authority of the state and the influence of religion which stems from its history.

Laïcité reflects this national policy to protect the secular French identity (Davis, 2011, p. 122) but conflicts with and finds difficulty with coexisting in the public sphere with Islam.⁴⁰ It recognizes the right of individuals to practice whatever religion they want privately, however in the public sphere each French citizen is equal to all other French citizen and cannot be identified as a member of a particular religion. Thus, the wearing of any religious dress or religious symbols is forbidden in the public sphere or public schools, preventing the identification of ones’ traditional religion. This includes the banning of Christian and Muslim veils, Sikh turbans, Jewish skull caps and any symbols associated with these religions, so the ban applies to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.^{41,42}

⁴⁰ The law also applies to tourists who are visiting French public spaces.

⁴¹ A French nun lost her spot in a retirement hometown of Vesoul, France after being told she could not wear her habit and headscarf as a resident. She had spent her whole adult life in a convent, wearing the habit and did not wish to live a life without it (Crowley, 2019).

⁴² Both the full body swimsuit, favored by some Muslim women as a symbol of maintaining modesty was instead

It is the wearing of the Islamic veil in several forms by some Muslim females that provoked clashes, resulting in debates about religious tolerance and the rights of citizens. Sharia law provides religious guidelines for practicing Muslims while French law is secular and provides guidelines for all its citizens. There are points of contention between the two. Therefore, an amendment was made to the original law allowing face coverings to be worn in places of worship so as not to violate religious freedom. The government of France erroneously believed that Muslim women would enjoy the freedoms and liberties provided by living in the West. However, Muslim women who were born and raised in Europe began to adopt the conservative values of Islam, including praying, fasting, avoiding alcohol, and the wearing of traditional modest clothing such as the *hijab* and the *niqab* (Khan, 2021).

It appears that in modern times French national secularism has caused minimal opposition from most organized religions or from French society, at large, that is except for pro and anti-Muslim sentiment. This changed dramatically with large-scale migrations after the decolonization of North Africa in the 1960s and the emergence of a new generation of French-born Muslims. The demographics of modern France indicate that Islam is now considered to have the second number of followers, a fact that would seem incredible a century ago. It was the first decade of the twenty-first century that two laws were passed by the dominant society, represented by the French government, to rule on different head and face coverings of Muslim women. Up until then, it did not appear to be a problem, let alone be considered an offence. In fact, Islam and France have co-existed for more than two centuries, starting with the conquest of Algeria in 1832. Muslim women who were expected to, or choose to, be veiled in a Muslim - dominated society were now in conflict with French law. These controversies have been fueled

viewed as a symbol of Islamic extremism and a threat to good morals and Secularism. This was known as the "burkini ban." Likewise, nuns in their religious habits were also forbidden on the beaches (Mangion, 2016).

or kept alive in the media by right-wing movements that are either anti- immigration or anti Muslim (Kelly, 2020).

Theoretically, all citizens of France are treated equally under the law. However, these laws were drawn up by members of the ruling class to support their vision of French society. They criminalized certain behaviors of subgroups that would be considered acceptable in their country of origin. The laws first targeted the wearing of religious symbols in schools, so that all children would be exposed to the principle of equality in the Republic. Then, additions were made to the original laws making it illegal to wear religious symbols in the public sphere. The public sphere, instead of being a space of neutrality, now became a space where the state was protected against religion. The government, rather than being neutral, had constructed a Muslim problem that antagonized French society, and which questioned Muslims' loyalty to France. It had positioned Muslims as a threat to secularism and an enemy of the values of the Republic. By its actions the government had constructed a state- sponsored Islamophobia.

Although the principle of *laïcité* applied to all religions, much of the debate has focused on Muslim practices, especially that of the wearing of head and face coverings by Muslim women in public spaces. It has put a huge burden on Muslim women to stay within the law and their desire to practice some aspects of their religion in public. Muslim women come in conflict with these intersections on several fronts; they are female, many are neither white nor Christian, low income, and probably their ancestors were colonists. They are seen as being worth little socially.

According to Berger (1999) some religions such as Islam can be considered orthopraxic, in that is every act during the day, from the moment of awakening until one return to sleep at night can be considered an act of worship. Muslims are not a homogeneous group and not all Muslims

adhere to this practice. But for some Muslims Islam can be a difficult religion to practice entirely in private and is now not tolerated in French public space.

The wearing of the veil, in its various forms, has become an impediment for Muslim women who wish to wear a head covering, to assimilate into French culture. Muslim women in traditional Islamic countries have been socialized to obey the male head of the household and to follow religious laws which are now in conflict with French laws. This amounts to a dual oppression of Muslim women. It has had a polarizing effect on different groups and has been one of the more controversial issues facing our modern global society, affecting travel, immigration, and citizenship for Muslims. It is viewed by some as a means of piety, protection, and safety, by others as a method of oppression and control. For some people it is a trigger for racist thoughts and actions and when violence occurred in France all Muslims were deemed guilty. Whether the veil is worn by choice, through cultural norms or by pressure, one of the main effects is that it virtually represents the separation and inequality of the sexes and the religious identification of the wearer.

Although this law has been in effect for over a century, Muslims were able to live in France, mostly without conflict, until relatively recently. The increase in the Muslim population in the last two decades has highlighted their differences with the White Christian French population. *Charlie Hebdo* capitalized on the peculiarities of this law, especially as it applied to Muslims and their difficulties in trying to stay within the limits of the law while practicing their religion as they would like. The cartoons were used to justify racist depictions of Muslims. They could not live within the law. They were the “other.” They could not become true French citizens.

One cartoon printed by *Charlie Hebdo* showed a young girl being pulled by her

appendages in four directions or corners. In each corner is a representative of major religions, Roman Catholic, Judaism, Islam and European Christian Orthodox tugging at her hands and feet. The caption reads, “La Laïcité. C’est par où?” Underneath it says, “ La Laïcité est dans l’entreprise, à l’école, dans la monde”... (“Where is Laïcité? Laïcité is in the company, in the school, in the world”) (See “Appendix A” for image).⁴³ Buddhism is a “foreign religion,” as is Islam, but it is not included in this cartoon possibly because the law is not considered as important or a challenge in the same way for Buddhists as it is for the other religions depicted in the cartoon.⁴⁴

The rules of laïcité had been extended to include all sports, recreational as well as competitive sports, parent school chaperones on field trips, and the beach, where modest bathing attire was more of a concern than near nudity. Based on these new rules, *Charlie Hebdo* published a cartoon that showed two naked Muslims running along the beach. This cartoon made fun of the difficulty that Muslims faced by obeying the secular dress code in public places, so much so that instead of wearing a very modest, full body swimsuit, which would identify them as Muslim, they had to go naked (See “Appendix A” for image).

Charlie Hebdo published another cartoon on the cover of its magazine before the conclusion of the anti-racism trial of 2007 in which several Muslim organizations unsuccessfully sued the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine for its republication of the controversial Muhammed cartoons from the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands- Posten*. It did this in solidarity for the newspaper’s right to free speech. It featured a Jew, the Pope, and an Islamic fundamentalist all shouting, “*Charlie*

⁴³ Many Jews are currently leaving France.

⁴⁴ Currently Buddhism is the fastest-growing religion in France, being treated with respect for some time because of its concise doctrines and rational approach to life. Being nontheistic, elements of Buddhism such as meditation, can be combined with other religions, and is often considered in the West as a “practice” that is atheist rather than a religion.

Hebdo must be veiled” (See “Appendix A” for image).⁴⁵

Considering that one of the more controversial components of *laïcité* is the prohibition of the veil or any head covering in public spaces, *Charlie Hebdo* depicts the three religions represented in the cartoon as wanting the magazine to be veiled and banned in public spaces. *Charlie Hebdo* indicates that the religious leaders want the magazine to be silenced for mocking their religions, just as Muslim women, who wish to wear a veil, are silenced and left to the confines of their homes. According to the cartoon the religious leaders were against free speech when it comes to *Charlie Hebdo*. Again, notice that Buddhists are not represented in this cartoon, giving more credibility that *Charlie Hebdo* did not see a difficulty with this group obeying the law as did the other three religious groups represented.

The *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons in this section depict some Muslims’ difficulties obeying the laws of *laïcité* in ordinary daily situations. This is especially true for Muslim women if they insist on wearing some sort of veil outside the home or wearing a very modest swimsuit at the beach. The intent is to point out that Muslims are so different than us (White French) that they could never become genuine French citizens.

For a more detailed discussion on certain aspects of this topic (See “Appendix D” - The Development and Application of French Secular Laws).

⁴⁵ This newspaper is noted for aligning itself with the Danish government and is an acclaimed champion of free speech. It also prints many articles on immigration which is a significant political issue in Denmark and throughout Europe (Marsden & Savigny, 2006).

Charlie Hebdo's Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons Depicting the 9/11 Attack on the Twin Towers.

There was a span of more than a decade between the events of 9/11 and the three attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters. *Charlie Hebdo* had used the attack on the Twin Towers to highlight the violent nature of Muslims. The events of 9/11 with the plane flying into the Twin Towers in New York resurrected feelings of Islamophobia.⁴⁶ Many remember seeing that image play over and over and over again. The villains were Muslims, not a group of Saudis who, among other issues, were tired of Westerners invading their sacred lands to take their oil. But in the midst of that chaos, one large group of humanity was victimized, not physically, but spiritually. Muslims all over the world were stereotyped, lumped together as rebels, extremists, or murderers and their religion, was tarnished with them as well. Whatever thoughts of Islamophobia lying dormant were revived. Muslims were not to be trusted. This fear of the “other” has remained with many in the West, especially when the “other” settled in a Western country. *Charlie Hebdo* kept the fear of Islam alive with these cartoons.

Western media coverage has changed, with much emphasis now on the threat of conflict with members of non-Judeo-Christian religions. This is a notable change from the Cold War era when the “other” was the Soviet Union, its allies and communism. Western media has put a particular focus on Islam with headlines, such as “Islamic terrorist,” “extremists,” “infidel,” or “radicalized” that link together religion and conflict. This gives a world view based on religious divisions and conflict between and within countries and states as opposed to borders. Although church attendance has declined in Western Europe, the integration of religion and politics has produced many headlines framing a connection between politics, security and the justification of

⁴⁶ U.S media often used such phrases as a “clash of civilizations” or “the world has changed forever” to describe these events.

intervention in foreign conflicts, often Muslim -dominated countries (Marsden & Savigny, 2016). The facts are that Muslims are not a homogeneous group; all Muslims are not terrorists and those that are considered terrorists do not necessarily practice any form of religion.

Charlie Hebdo published several cartoons dealing with the events of 9/11. Days following the attack the magazine published a cartoon showing all the stockbrokers except one, so completely absorbed in their computers that they did not see the plane flying near their window. The one stockbroker who noticed the plane yelled, “sell, sell.” *Charlie Hebdo* was commenting on capitalism and the West’s immoral obsession about making money. In 2001, just months after the September 11 attacks the magazine ran an issue titled “Crash de New York” that featured Osama Bin Laden bragging about carrying out the attacks with “no hands.” A May 2011 cover came on the heels of the U.S. Government’s announcement of Bin Laden’s death. It read “Bin Laden is alive!” It featured Osama bin Laden dressed as Elvis Presley, a reference to a conspiracy theory that Elvis was not dead when first reported. (See “Appendix A” for images).

These caricatures were mild in comparison to the way *Charlie Hebdo* dealt with Islamic terrorism later on. There was not even a connection made with Islam and terrorism as was the case in many other news outlets. The reason could be because the attack did not occur on French soil. Also at that time, the Muslim population was not as great a percentage in the French population or pose a threat to France’s view of assimilation as it did when Muslim immigration peaked. Osama Bin Laden was the main subject of the cartoons with no reference to the Prophet Muhammed, nor Muslims in general. In fact, the cartoons showed him in a rather positive light, smart, and just seeking revenge on the Western capitalists, quite a departure from the later cartoons depicting Islam and Muslims.

This suggests that, at this time, *Charlie Hebdo* was not on a crusade to be a defender of

free speech nor French Republicanism. Later on, when the magazine republished the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed in solidarity with the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, it did so to push the limits of free speech, with full knowledge that it was offensive to Muslims. France had been experiencing much discontent over high levels of Muslim immigration and their supposed inability to fully become members of The French Republic. The magazine then targeted Muslims, a minority group who had no voice, to illustrate these boundaries. These concerns were not as acutely present in France in 2001. However, the cartoons did portray Islam as violent, but subtly pointed out it was revenge for what the capitalistic West did to them. Although the attack on the Twin Towers was framed in the media as a clash of civilizations, it was not an attack on French Republicanism nor free speech which were *Charlie Hebdo's* later concerns.

The nature of all of the *Charlie Hebdo's* cartoons was to ridicule the hypocrisy and extremism in politics, certain politicians, and religions in France. However, satire usually targets the rich and powerful, those who have the means to fight back, but not a marginalized group with no real voice as were the Muslims living in France. Depicting the Prophet Muhammed as they did was especially hurtful and humiliating to the Muslim population. However, the magazine continued with their targeting of Muslims even after the first attack on their headquarters, treating them as a homogeneous group, and all guilty by association.

Chapter 4: The French Press

Time and time again, *Charlie Hebdo* kept alive the stereotype of Muslims as uncivilized, backward, and incapable of becoming genuine French citizens and indicating that they will always be the “other.” However, the magazine had to operate under French law in order to continue publishing. The forerunner of the magazine, *Hari-Kiri*, was shut down by the government after mocking the pious coverage of de Gaulle’s death while virtually ignoring a night club fire that killed over a hundred French citizens.

France has one of the highest readerships of magazines in the world (Lamizet & Tetu, 2007). *Charlie Hebdo* had been in financial difficulty before the attacks, but sales of the magazine very much increased after the attacks. In fact, before the terrorist attacks *Charlie Hebdo* was considered “a somewhat marginal and radical voice in the French media landscape, but because of the attacks and the existing discursive fault lines among immigration and Islam, it emerged overnight as a privileged voice and a unifying symbol of French and European forces that were rallying for freedom of speech, and democracy in general” (Hjarvard & Lundby, 2018, p.59).⁴⁷ Most Western media framed the attack as a terrorist attack against the freedom of expression, supporting the official responses of Western-orientated governments. However, with such global coverage, the cartoons and the attacks were interpreted in a variety of ways and sent sales of the magazine skyrocketing.

This chapter serves several functions. First, the section entitled, *Free Speech*, gives some background as to the type of laws under which *Charlie Hebdo* and other French magazines operated, makes public the opinion of many members of the prestigious American chapter of the

⁴⁷ Sales also increased after the republishing of the Danish cartoons.

PEN association regarding the giving of an award to the magazine and finally, a discussion on the difficulty in interpreting cartoons vs the written word as it applies to French media laws. The second section, *The Power of the Media to Influence*, does a short comparison with other French print, looking at partisanship and their portrayal of Muslims by the words they use to describe them and the number of times they are referenced.

Free Speech

Free speech is central to democracy, but it is not absolute. The French Press, including the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine, is regulated by a complex body of legislation found in Article XI in the 1789 *Declaration of Human Rights and the Citizen*.⁴⁸ Freedom of expression for every kind of press has been protected in France by the Law on the Freedom of the Press, 1881. It is not limited to the press but to all forms of public expression. It reasserts the freedom of public expression and defines limits. *Charlie Hebdo* justified its right to depict Muslims in a derogatory manner as being protected under these laws. When Muslim associations sued the magazine, the French courts ruled that the secularity principle involved both respect for all religions, but also the right to critique them. The cartoons might be offensive to Muslims, but they did not target them as individuals or as members of a group or a culture (Rakopoulos, 2015).

Judith Butler would agree with *Charlie Hebdo*'s assessment of protection under the laws of free speech. In her essay, *Limits on Free Speech*, she argues "that shaming or belittling someone against their will, no matter how offensive or humiliating is protected speech as long as it does not constitute a physical threat to that person." *Charlie Hebdo* was convicted in the courts for three cartoons on charges of incitement to racial hatred, "incitement being a term that refers

⁴⁸ It is often claimed that democracy is rooted in Christianity and is alien to Islam. In Christendom, unlike in Islamic countries church and state are separate entities.

to imminent illegal acts and typically violence. The standard for incitement is very high and goes beyond encouragement.” According to Butler, mockery does not meet that standard” (Wilkinson, 2017, pp.1-2).

However, the Pleven Law of 1972 prohibits the incitement of discrimination, hatred or violence on the basis of origin, ethnicity, nationality, race or religion This material would include hate speech, defamation, racist, anti-Semite, and xenophobic expressions, or any national, racial or religious discrimination (Ververis, Marguel and Fabian, 2019, p. 5). Although *Charlie Hebdo* had been brought to court many times by different groups under this law, it appears that the magazine had either won its cases or found it lucrative enough to pay fines and continue with the same type of material.⁴⁹

On May 5, 2015, The PEN American Center, a major literary association in America, gave the Freedom of Expression Courage Award to *Charlie Hebdo*. Since 1963 this award has honored many outstanding voices in literature across diverse genres. It is awarded to important writers with a world-wide audience, who show freedom of expression in face of danger and persecution, presenting the human condition in a powerful and organized way. When news of this award was made public, six PEN members who were to be seated at the head table, served notice that they would not attend in protest over *Charlie Hebdo*'s humor.⁵⁰ Then 145 members signed a petition to oppose the award, citing that giving such an award to *Charlie Hebdo* would endorse the content of the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons. Others felt it was “a bunch of powerful white men who were using their platform to punch down at poor and marginalized Muslims”

⁴⁹ Regardless of the number of court cases won or lost by *Charlie Hebdo*, it was still financially able to carry on publishing. A French court rejected the case of two Muslim Associations concerning *Charlie Hebdo*'s reprinting of the Danish cartoons.

⁵⁰ PEN is an acronym for poets, essayists, and novelists. Later playwrights and editors were added. Its motto is “the Freedom to Write.” It has 143 branches throughout the world. The award from the American branch was open to the U.S. plus world-wide contestants who fit the criteria.

(Stimmler., 2020, p. 9).

Staff at *Charlie Hebdo* had taken great pains to make the distinction between a critique of Islam and fundamentalist ideology and attacks on the Muslim community itself. To them, *Charlie's* sense of humor unmasked public or religious figures such as Muhammed and exposed hypocrisy. This attempt to highlight a common bond with their Muslim countrymen through a critique of fundamentalism backfired and, in hindsight, their needless continuing provocation on Islamic subjects was unwarranted. Although the cartoons were outrageous, it was the lack of attention that *Charlie Hebdo* gave to the desperation and ongoing discrimination of French Muslims and its blindness to the harm that such stereotypes may cause them that was very concerning. Journalist Laurent Leger sums up the philosophy of the magazine by saying, "Our aim is to laugh. We want to laugh at the extremists-every extremist. They can be Muslim, Jewish, or Catholic. Everyone can be religious, but extreme thoughts and acts we cannot accept" (Gibson, 2015, p. 4). The day after the firebombing, the publisher's editor, Stephane Charbonnier, who published under the name Charb told the BBC "If we can poke fun at everything in France apart from Islam or the consequences of Islam, that is annoying" (Gibson, 2015, p.4). He was killed in the next terrorist attack on the headquarters.

The relationship among *Charlie Hebdo*, Judaism, and free speech is confusing. Jews, Judaism and Holocaust denial are given some protection under French law. However, *Charlie Hebdo* targeted the Jews, especially in a series called "The Torah" which was illustrated by Charb.⁵¹ It made fun of the Jewish commandments but did not mention Yahweh. In 2009 Maurice Sinet, who writes under the pen name, Sine, wrote a column about the engagement of

⁵¹ Jews make up approximately 1% of the population of France but are the targets of approximately 51% of racial attacks. France is no stranger to anti-Semitic riots which included riots in the 1790s, 1848, and 1898. The Alfred Dreyfus affair caused a political crisis during the days of the Third Republic. Captain Dreyfus, who was Jewish, was falsely accused, convicted and finally acquitted of treason for selling military secrets to the Germans (Wilson, 1993).

President Sarkozy's son to Jessica Sebaoun-Darty, the Jewish heiress of an electric goods chain. It was rumored that he planned to convert to Judaism. Sine wrote, "He'll go a long way in life, that little lad," mocking Mr. Sarkozy for converting to Judaism, supposedly for money. This stereotype linked Judaism with financial success. When Sine would not write a letter of apology, he was fired from the magazine.

Charlie Hebdo did not touch some other rather interesting news stories involving Jews. There were no cartoons in *Charlie Hebdo* to explain why the terrorists went after a kosher supermarket. Another example was the incident of a young Jewish boy wearing a kippah who was attacked by a small gang of boys while walking in a public space to a tutoring class. One reason could be Val's support of Jews. Another reason could be that Jews are protected by particular anti-Semitic laws including Holocaust denial. Interestingly, *Charlie Hebdo* would not be allowed to exist at all in Israel which bans offending religious sentiment.

It is possible that some French citizens who really didn't like *Charlie Hebdo's* cartoons and brand of humor still felt they should defend the Republican's strict secular laws or fight for 'Freedom of Expression' which was guaranteed under its laws. Satire isn't always meant to make you laugh. Humor, even tasteless humor can point out the contradictions or hypocrisy in subjects in a way we don't want to think about. But satire usually targets the rich and powerful, not the downtrodden.

"The satire that *Charlie Hebdo* exemplified was more blasphemous than political, and its roots lie deep in European history, dating from a time when in order to challenge authority, one had to confront divinity itself" (Stimmer, 2020, p. 17). *Charlie Hebdo's* satire pushed the limits to test how far the freedom granted by these laws extended. Blasphemy is defined in some religions or religious laws as being insulting, disrespectful or disliking a deity, a sacred object or

something untouchable (Jones, 1980, p. 129). It can also be considered as an act or offence of speaking sacrilegiously about God or religious things, even considered as a religious crime in some religions. However, there are no blasphemy laws in France.⁵² The problem with sacrilege is that in a pluralistic society, there can be no agreement as to what counts as sacrilege. In addition, it is thought that the secular state should not play a role in arbitrating satire, especially religious satire (Smith, 2015) and that such controversies should be handled through the courts.

Satirical cartoons can be a method to get a particular point across in a short, concise way. However, the brevity of words accompanying the drawings plus the levels of interpretation characteristic of satire can lead to misinterpretations by the readers, especially those readers who may not understand fully the subtle nuances and background of the subject. Another problem with cartoons is that the artist decides how ambiguous the composition will be. Cartoons deliberately produced with a lot of ambiguity generate maximum controversy. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the cartoonist to weigh the possible interpretations, keeping in mind the biases, unconscious or otherwise of both the reader and the artist (Mondal, 2016). *Charlie Hebdo* was sued for only three of its cartoons, not as blasphemous, but rather an incitement to racial hatred.

The Power of the Media to Influence

The media can influence public opinion by deciding what to cover, the number of times an event is covered and the order of where it is placed in audio or printed news. Because of this staging of the news, the media possess a symbolic power which was previously held by the French clergy (Alexandra & Stefan, 2020). Notice that it was the cartoons on the front page of the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine that got most of the public's attention, not the editorials or other

⁵² The French Courts have overwhelmingly ruled that Charlie Hebdo's cartoons and editorials, though sacrilegious, were legitimate satire. Blasphemy laws are still actively enforced throughout many countries in the Muslim world.

sections. This placement of cartoons was very planned. Its function was to get the reader's attention and compel them to pick up the magazine.

Religion and politics are very much intertwined in France, so it was a logical connection to include satire about religion in its magazine. The next main target, after politics and politicians was the Catholic Church, understandably so because of the long conflict between the Catholic Church and the State (See "Appendix C" for images). Next on the list of targets were all the other religions combined. Buddhism, a religion brought to France from their colonies and whose numbers increased to become the fourth largest religion in France was basically ignored. However, there had been a major shift in the past two decades, especially noticeable as Islam had become a favored and aggressive target of *Charlie Hebdo*. It is as though *Charlie* was somewhat aligning itself with government policies regarding laïcité and mocked the difficulties some Muslims had in keeping within the law.

During a documentary on the TV channel, *France*, political scientist and columnist, Alain Duhamel, investigated the lack of representation of Protestantism in French media. Taking this study, a step further, a French professional historian researcher, Dr. Sébastien Fath, searched through the website of *Le Monde* in the sections titled "Catholicism," "Judaism," "Islam," "Buddhism," and "Protestantism" to find out the time frame of the last seven articles dedicated to each religion.

His findings showed excessive media coverage of Islam by the largest French daily. It took *Le Monde* only four days to publish and reference seven articles on Islam whereas it took five years and eight months to publish and reference seven articles on Buddhism. This is despite Buddhism being the fourth largest religion in France and growing in numbers (Fath, 2016). The coverage of Buddhism carried little weight in the French media than the numbers it presented in

real life and conversely, Islam received much more media coverage than its numbers justified.

Another distinctive feature about the coverage of Islam and their followers was the words or actions connected to the two groups. Words such as “extremists,” “infidels,” “fundamentalists,” or “terrorists” were commonly associated with the coverage of Muslims. The illustrations of Muhammed in *Charlie Hebdo* often included bombs, beheadings, or swords. Muslims were depicted as aggressive and warlike, perhaps a reference to the extent of fighting among themselves in civil wars in several Muslim majority countries.⁵³

Politics has always played an influential role in French journalism where even to this day national newspapers tend to be opiated and partisan” (Chalaby, 2004, p.1201). National newspapers aligned themselves with particular organizations, movements or political identities, *La Croix*, the Catholic Church, *L’Humanité*, the French Communist Party, *Le Figaro*, leftist Liberation, *Le Monde*, center left and *L’Aurore*, the extreme right of the political spectrum (Chalaby, 2004, pp. 1201-1202). *Charlie Hebdo*, which considered itself politically left, first came to fame because of its political satire. It had no political affiliation, in fact it prided itself on satirizing every government and politician alike (See” Appendix C” for images). However, in recent years and in keeping with the anti-Muslim sentiment exhibited by many of the French, its philosophy changed, and *Charlie Hebdo* eventually represented the government’s side on laïcité and against Muslims in its cartoons.

Charlie Hebdo showed carelessness towards its targeted group, Muslims, typical of the magazine’s arrogant attitude of using religion and politics to push the boundaries of freedom of speech (Miera & Sala Pala, 2009, p.398 in Mondon & Winter, 2017). However, what is different

⁵³ In 2012 there were civil wars in Syria, Sudan, Pakistan, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Yemen. Most of the rebel groups involved had an Islamist ideology.

here is that the usual target group for satire were not the rich or powerful but a marginalized group with no real voice. The magazine was not sued in court for blasphemy but rather for incitement to racial hatred. It hid behind the guise of freedom of speech in order to get away with racist and anti-immigration discourse. Negative opinions about Muslims were prevalent in France at the time and *Charlie Hebdo* capitalized on these sentiments. Maybe their depiction of Muslims and their inability to become genuine French citizens was what the staff believed or maybe it was a means to keep the public's attention and sell more magazines.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The question that I had set out to answer is how the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, portrays Muslims and Islam, and, secondly, the factors that may have contributed to these representations.

The magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, portrayed Muslims as aggressive, backward, ignorant and extremist. The magazine continued to describe Muslims as a homogeneous group, perpetuating the false stereotypical image as portrayed in Orientalism. *Charlie Hebdo* was similar to other media outlets in the number of times Muslims were news items that contained aggressive or violent words associated with the group.

Charlie Hebdo published many cartoons involving Islam, Muhammad, and Muslims in general. It was only the cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammed in a degrading manner, that seemed to bring about the attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* buildings and webpage. The other cartoons did not seem to spark much outcry.

The acceptability of depictions of Muhammed in Islam is open to debate.⁵⁴ Although oral and written descriptions of Muhammed are accepted by all traditions of Islam, it is the visual

⁵⁴ There is a marble frieze inside the walls of the US Supreme Court, in Washington, DC, which was built between 1931 and 1932 in time for the building's grand opening in 1935. On this frieze, there are images of lawmakers including the ancient Egyptian ruler Menes, the Prophet Moses, Hammurabi, Confucius, Napoleon, and John Marshall, Solomon, John Marshall, Charlemagne, and the Prophet Muhammed. The Prophet Muhammed is near Justinian, Charlemagne, King John, Louis XI, and Hugo Grotius. The US Supreme Court considers Prophet Muhammad to be one of the 18 greatest lawgivers in history. Harvard Law School, one of the most prestigious law schools in the world references a verse from the Quran, which is at the entrance of its faculty library. It regards the Quran as one of the greatest expressions of justice in history.

depictions that are contentious.^{55, 56, 57} The Quran does not implicitly or explicitly forbid images of Muhammed and to further complicate rational discussion the hadith presents an ambiguous opinion on that subject.⁵⁸ In addition, a majority of Sunni Muslims believe that visual depictions of the prophet Muhammed in a degrading manner, that seemed to bring about the prophet should be prohibited, as such images could encourage idolatry while Shia Muslims are not as strict in this regard (Gruber, 2015).

Charlie Hebdo did not take any of these concerns into consideration when publishing or republishing cartoons of Muhammed. Free speech was more important than any other value including the hurt feelings of Muslims. The magazine did not care if they were making Muslim life hard to live or if these cartoons were so offensive that it made some Muslims vulnerable to violence. Although the complaints of Muslims could be legitimate, when a small group of Muslims reacted with violence, all Muslims suffered guilt by association.

The history of French imperialism, colonization and immigration has discriminated against the Muslim immigrants from North Africa. The fact that the French developed a hierarchy of “racial and evolutionary developments” that was based on their assumed ability to be “civilized” showed that the French did not look upon all their colonists and immigrants favorably. Remnants of these colonial racist ideas and stereotypes remained and shaped the

⁵⁵Verbal descriptions (hilya) of the Prophet Muhammed are found in Istanbul,1130 (1718) They attempt to thoroughly describe the Prophet Muhammad’s physical traits and personal characteristics-both of which are encompassed under the literary rubric of *shama’I* (features or character) that form the main way of envisaging the Prophet (Gruber ,2009).

⁵⁶ Some depictions of a white facial veiled Prophet contain inscriptions either above or below the illustration (Gruber, 2009).

⁵⁷ Muhammed’s inclusion caused in the marble frieze caused a controversy in 1997, six decades after the panel was carved, when Muslim groups called for the likeness to be sanded down, arguing the portrayal was sacrilegious and defined their faith as one of violence. In response, a top Islamic law scholar instead declared the sculpture an honor bestowed by non-Muslims.

⁵⁸ Supplemental teachings which include a body of traditions and teachings about Muhammad and his followers which is used as a basis for Islamic law (Khan, 2010).

modern view of former colonists who have now immigrated to France to make it their new home. It was during the colonial times that the French developed the values at the heart of laïcité. However, now the descendants of these colonists who had immigrated to France, had become French citizens, and demanded equal dignity. Possessing a sense of humor or the ability to laugh at oneself is not a requirement to be considered “civilized.”

Immigration has been of great concern throughout Europe, including France, which has received many Muslims from its colonies especially in the past three decades. The French Muslim population has grown rapidly to become the second largest religion practiced in France, second only to historical Christianity. Immigration has changed the religious and historical demographics of France, a real concern for the white European French citizen.

North African youth and Muslim women have had the most difficulty assimilating into French culture. The North Africans had poor paying jobs if they were lucky enough to be employed and lived in poor communities on the outskirts of the cities. The male unemployed youth often came in contact with the law which compounded their problems and how Muslims were regarded in French society. Their plight in French society was not a priority issue for government or the media. The way some Muslim women wished to practice their religion put them in conflict with French secular laws involving dress code and religious symbols. This placed an extra burden on Muslims, to remain within the law. It was questioned if Muslims could ever truly assimilate and become genuine French citizens of the Republic, in fact they were a threat to French identity.

Charlie Hebdo, the champion of free speech and satire, instead of attacking the powerful and privileged, targeted a small, marginalized group of Muslims. They framed Islam as racially and culturally distinct from French society and Muslims as distinct from French culture. The

magazine maintained the Muslim “other” category and kept the stereotypical Orientalist image and Islamophobic attitude alive. For these reasons, the words, “Je suis Ahmed” could never be a genuine “Je suis Charlie” cry as Muslims were, according to *Charlie Hebdo*, too culturally distinct to genuinely be part of France (Beaman, 2021, pp. 270-271).

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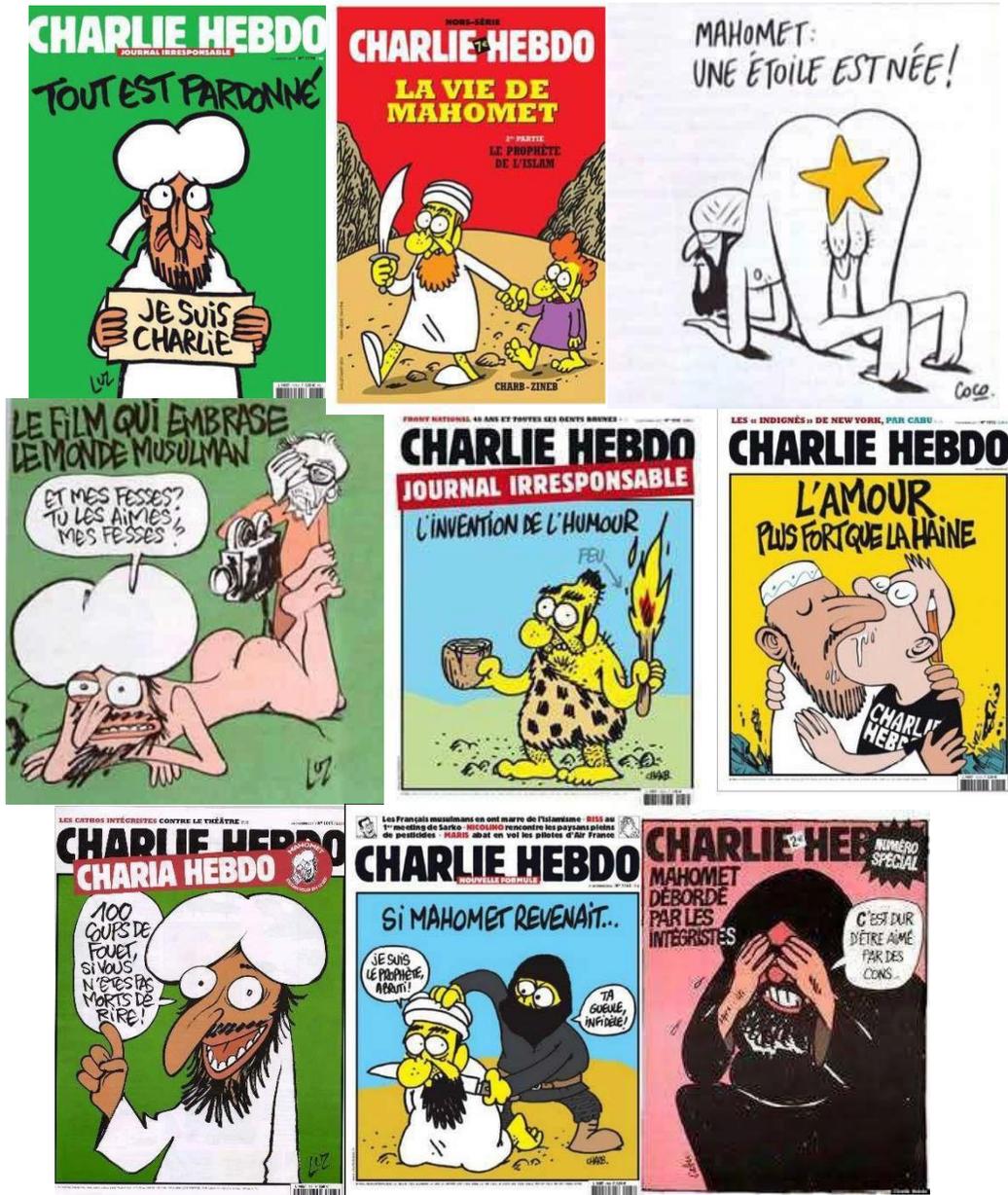
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“Appendix A”

Charlie Hebdo’s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammed.



References (Sherwood, 2016)

(Stimmler, 2020)

(Taub, 2015)

“Appendix A (Con’t)”

Charlie Hebdo’s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons depicting their Relationship with Immigration.



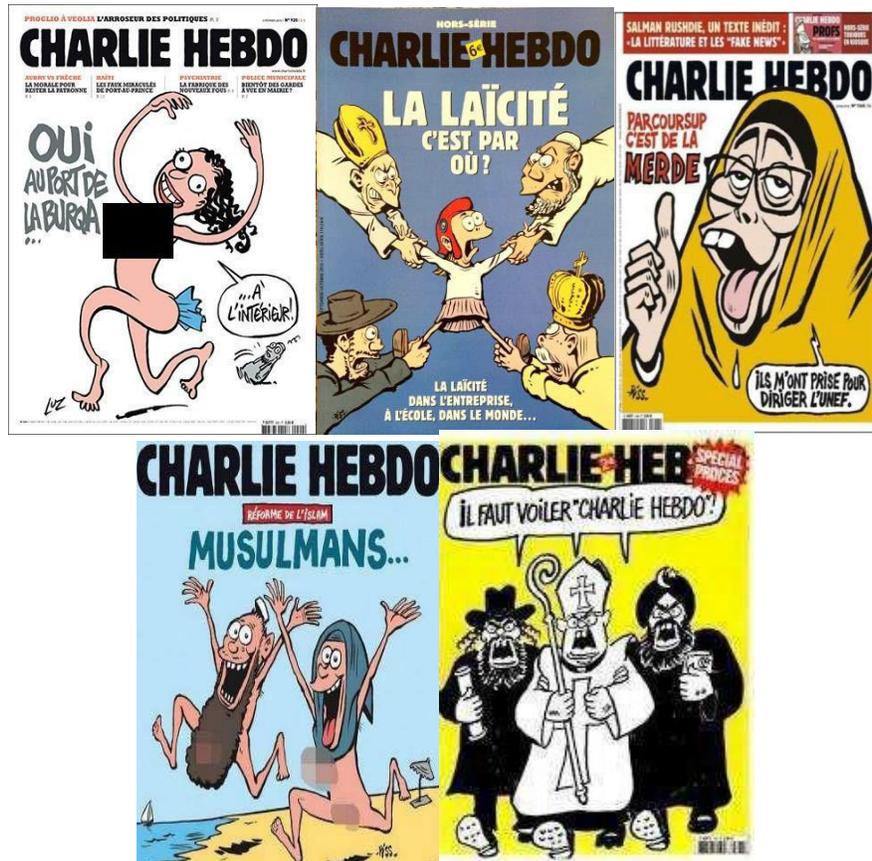
References (Sherwood, 2016)

(Stimmler, 2020)

(Taub, 2015)

“Appendix A (Con’t)”

Charlie Hebdo’s Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons depicting their Relationship with Laïcité.



References (Sherwood, 2016)

(Stimmler, 2020)

(Taub, 2015)

"Appendix A (Con't)"

Charlie Hebdo's Portrayal of Muslims through its Cartoons depicting the 9/11 Attack on Twin Towers



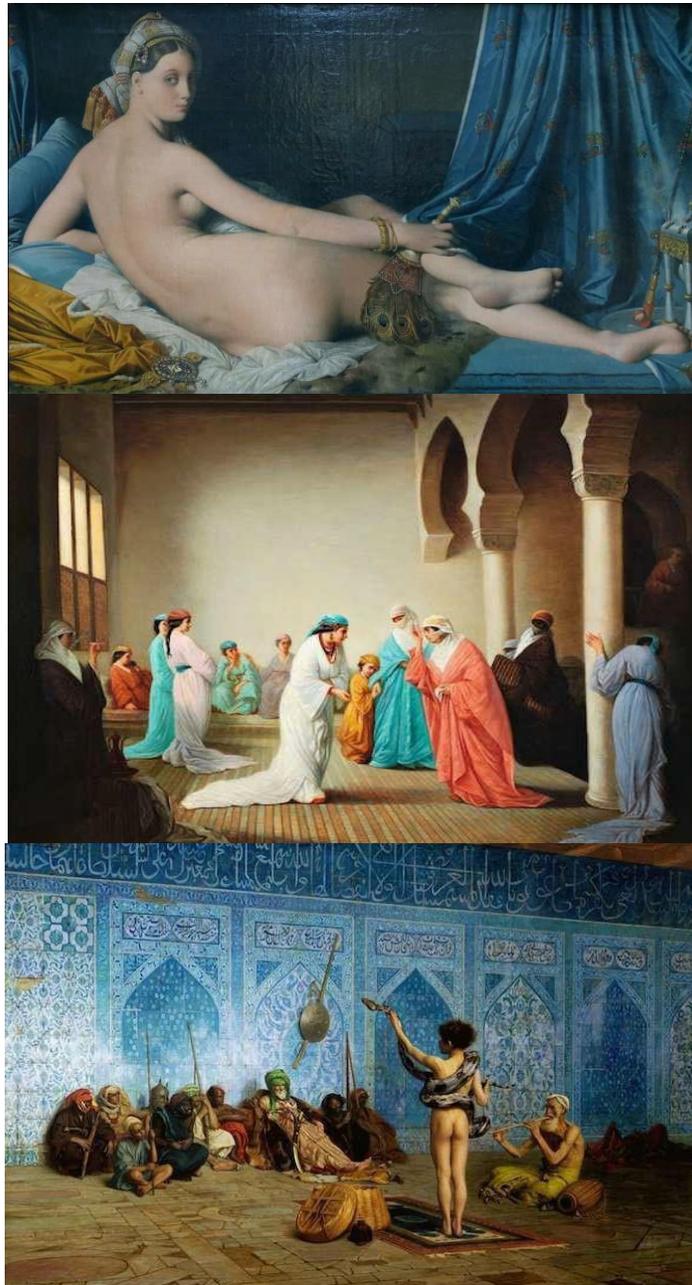
References (Sherwood, 2016)

(Stimmler, 2020)

(Taub, 2015)

“Appendix B”

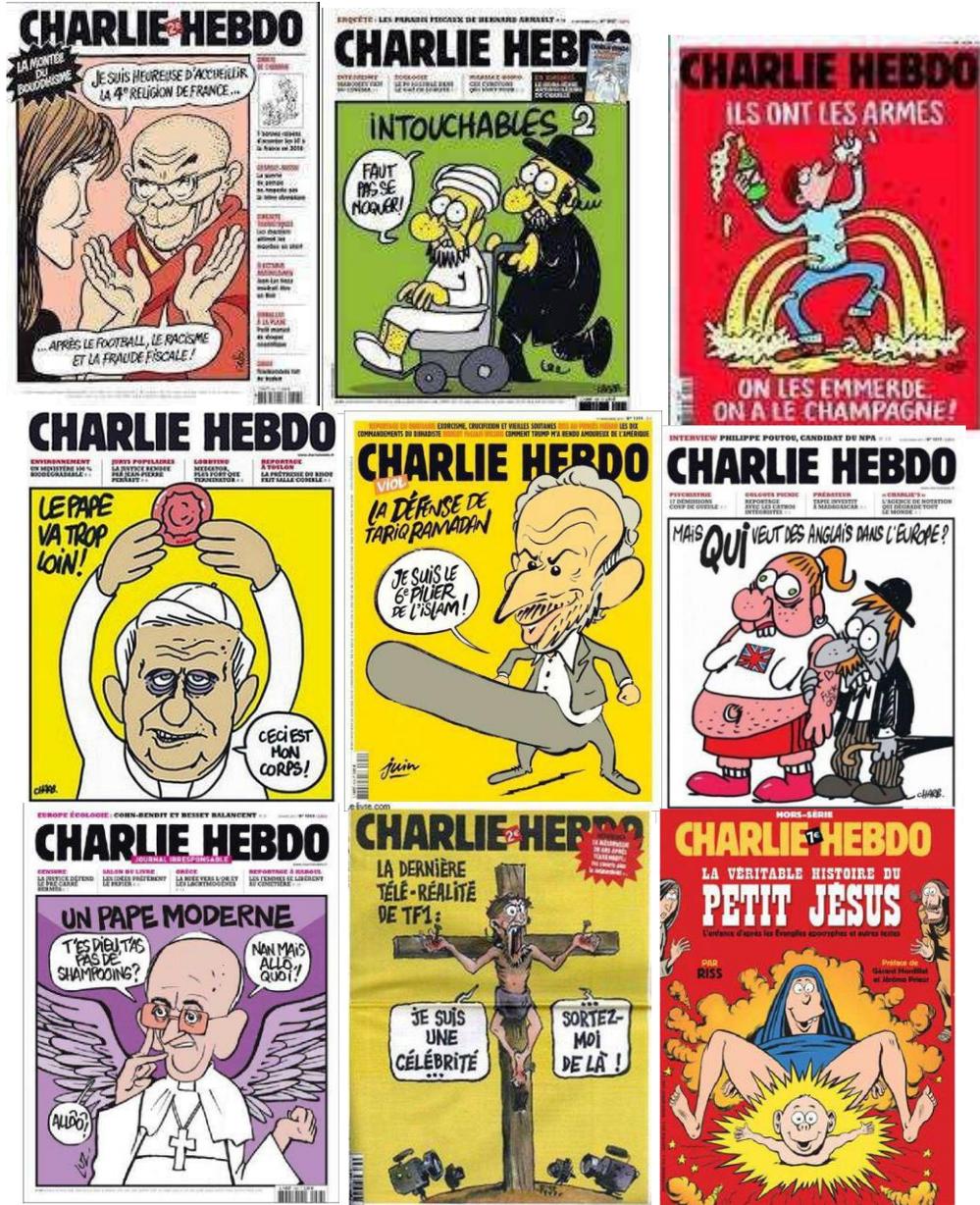
Oil Paintings of the late 19th century depicting Orientalism.



(Demerdash, 2022)

“Appendix C”

Charlie Hebdo’s Cartoons on Various Themes



References (Sherwood, 2016)

(Stimmler, 2020)

(Taub, 2015)

“Appendix C” (Con’t)



References (Sherwood, 2016)

(Stimmler, 2020)

(Taub, 2015)

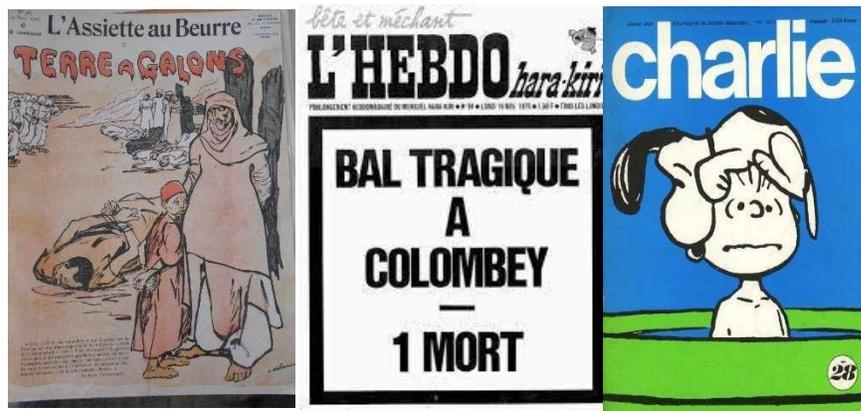
“Appendix D”

Magazine Covers

L’Assiette au Beurre was a French satirical magazine published between 1901 and 1912.

In 1970 Hara-Kiri, was banned by the French Interior Ministry for mocking the death of former French President Charles De Gaulle.

Some of the cartoonist from *Charlie Mensuel* transferred to *Charlie Hebdo*



References

(L'assiette au beurre, 1908)

(Bête et Méchant, 1970)

(Desicommments, n.d)

“Appendix E”

The Development and Application of French Secular Laws

The history of how France became a secular country under the law begins with the wish to abolish the power of the Catholic Church in France. The Catholic Church has had a long legacy in France with the majority of its citizens, in theory, belonging to that faith. France officially became a secular country just over a hundred years ago, probably, in part to stop the stranglehold the Roman Catholic Church had on the public and private lives of French citizens.⁵⁹ In 1905 the French Law on the Separation of the Church and State was created and represents the basis for the current secular laws of France (Ford, 2005). Then in 1937, teachers were instructed officially by the Minister of Education to keep religious signs out of schools (Astier, 2004). No religion was to be seen as favored or under control of government. However, the principle of *laïcité* continues to be debated even today over concerns of women’s rights, civil liberties, freedom of speech and other issues, especially at times of national elections.

⁵⁹ Although the magazine’s primary focus has always been French politics, the Catholic Church and its belief system is also one of the favorite targets of *Charlie Hebdo*’s magazine often by lampooning religious figures. In 2010 the cover depicted Pope Benedict XVI raising a condom above his head saying, “This is my body,” a reference to holy communion. The caption reads “the Pope goes too far!” This was mocking the Pope’s reversal on birth control. Another cartoon shows Christ on the cross saying “I am a celebrity, get me down” This is also in reference to celebrity television shows. A Christmas cartoon shows Mary, legs “spread eagle” delivering Jesus. The magazine took on the sex scandals in the Catholic Church in a cartoon where Pope Benedict XVI warns a bishop to “Go into movies, like Polanski,” referencing the free pass of film director, Roman Polanski, who has long been accused of the rape of a 13 -year-old American girl. There are cartoons of nuns masturbating and a “threesome” consisting of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, criticizing the Catholic Church’s stance on gay unions. See Appendix “C.”

In 2003, President Jacques Chirac appointed a commission, known as the Stasi Commission of France, to investigate religious symbols in public French schools.^{60, 61} This led to *Law 2004-228* which banned all conspicuous religious symbols in public French schools.⁶² However, this was rejected by the commission as they wanted secularism to apply to the State and not to the appearance of persons (Laborde, 2008). However, it was not only the headscarf that created controversy, but also long skirts worn by Muslim women. In April 2015, a 15-year-old Muslim girl named Sarah from Charleville-Mezieres, was expelled twice from school as the principle said her skirt broke a ban on religious signs (BBC News, 2015).

In 2010, the French Senate passed a law on face coverings in public places including public parks, streets, shops, museums, theaters and public transit, except under certain circumstances such as driving in a private car or in specified areas which include mosques or private spaces only (Selby, 2011).⁶³ The ban was upheld by the European Court of Human Rights in 2014. Although many who break this law are merely given warning, fines for disobeying this law can be up to 150 Euros and/or compulsory attendance at citizenship classes.

⁶⁰ The commission was named after the ombudsman, Bernard Stasi, the French mediator from 1988-2004. There were 20 members on the commission to investigate which included school representatives, headmasters, teachers, human rights organizations, and religious leaders. Many of the members of the committee and those who were interviewed were well known in France including Régis Debray (Academic and journalist), and interviews were conducted with Cardinal Lustiger and Fadela Amara co-founder of organization Ni Putes Ni Soumises, (Fernando, 2009). The commission was appointed by President Jacques Chirac in December 2003, proposing banning students attending public school from wearing religious symbols or apparel victimizes the 5 million Muslims in the country (Fernando, 2009). This recommendation became part of the Law of 15 March 15, 2004, on the "principle of *laïcité*," within the French Constitution. The law targeted the wearing of the headscarf by young Muslims, which was permitted in French schools since late 1989 (Baubérot, 2008, p. 7).

⁶¹ A law was passed banning parents who wear "conspicuous religious symbols" from attending or chaperoning class trips with their children (Crowley, 2019).

⁶² France voted in favor of banning the hijab from all levels of sport, both recreational and high-level participation. However, nothing has been done to stop professional football players from making the sign of the cross in front of a huge audience at the beginning of the game or at crucial times in the game such as a penalty kick. There are concerns about France's hosting the 2024 Olympic Games under these circumstances (Ahmed, 2022).

⁶³ *Vogue France* has been criticized as being hypocritical in praising Julia Fox's headscarf by showing a photograph of her arriving at Paris Men's Fashion Week. She was dressed in a leather Balenciaga trench coat, black headscarf and sunglasses. The magazine was criticized for praising Fox wearing a headscarf in a country that oppresses Muslim women for doing so (Javed, 2022).

Anyone forcing another to cover her face can also be fined, with the fine doubling if the female is under the age of 18. These anti-veiling laws result in some Muslim women who wished to wear a veil being pushed into their own homes, and consequently were excluded from paid and unpaid socially productive labor, exclusion from public spaces and possible violence. Although an argument in favor of face coverings is that the ban is necessary for security reasons, an important counter-argument is one claiming personal freedom in a democracy.

There have been a number of incidents recorded relating to non-compliance of these laws. There were three distinct conflicts in France during the years 1989, 1994, and 2003 with concerns over the wearing of the hijab in public schools (Scott, 2009). In 1989, at Gabriel-Havez in Creil, France, three Muslim girls of North African descent refused to remove their headscarves despite warnings by the principal, Eugene Cheniere and were expelled (Winter, 2006). This incident known as the “headscarf affair” gained attention and caused controversy about the rights of minorities, religious expression in schools, and the integration of the immigrant population in France. In 1994 school officials refused to allow 100 Muslim girls to attend public schools. In 1999 teachers at the school in Flers, France where two Turkish girls wore a headscarf, called a strike in protest of veiling. An official mediator was appointed with the girls making a compromise by wearing knit hats. However, they were eventually expelled (Killian, 2003, pp. 567-568). The few Muslim families that can afford it have sent their children to private Catholic schools to avoid this problem. But this is hardly a satisfactory solution. These laws were even applied to non-French citizens. On October 3, 2014, a tourist from the Gulf States who was wearing a niqab, was asked to leave the performance of *La Traviata* at Opera Bastille in Paris. She and her companion had the most expensive seats in the house behind the conductor (Bilefsky, 2014).

In contrast, the lay Buddhist community does not have an obligation to wear any particular type of clothing, although some Buddhists may wear austere clothing during special occasions. However, Buddhist monks staying in monasteries are easily identified by their robes. Buddhists do not place any strong rules on the lay Buddhist community regarding clothing and instead ask them to follow the culture of the land they live in rather than following the culture of their founding teacher. It is likely that some Buddhists do not appreciate statues of Buddha being used in decorating homes of those who are not Buddhist. Likewise, prayer beads are sold and worn as jewelry by anyone.

However, the lay Buddhist is not in conflict with the French law regarding the presence of religious clothing or symbols in public places. So, one can be a devoutly practicing Buddhist without worrying about a clothing demand or being in conflict with the French law. In addition, Buddhism as constructed by the West, is influenced by a “Protestant understanding of religion with its reduction to classical texts and the avoidance of practicing monks and a rich ritual life” (Arjana, 2020, p. 30) with more emphasis on the individual. Buddhism has been transformed into a type of spirituality that can be practiced by non-Buddhists. Thus, there is less of a chance of becoming a problem under French secular laws.

Unlike Buddhism, Islam is not a religion that can be combined with a person’s original belief system. Its major beliefs are not compatible with Christianity or Judaism. Islam has a deity, Allah, as well the religion demands a commitment to follow very strict rules. Although the way Islam is practiced is not universal, in many cases it does require the observance of certain religious practices outside the home or mosque. It is this last requirement that makes Islam in conflict with France’s principle of *laïcité*, especially targeting French Muslim women who choose to wear a head covering in public spaces.

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