

AN OPINION
SATIRE AND BIGOTRY OF THE WEST: A QUESTION OF DOUBLE
STANDARDS: JE SUIS CHARLIE (I AM CHARLIE) OR IS IT ALSO JE
NE SUIS CHARLIE (I AM NOT CHARLIE): A DIFFERENT AND
OPPOSING VIEW

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The French phrase Je Sui Charlie (Hebdo) has caught the imagination of the Western World (January, 2015). It is a phrase that was coined after the killing of more than eleven people, in Paris, France, mainly those associated with the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo (Loosely translated it means – I am also Charlie). The magazine ridiculed the Prophet of Islam – Muhammad (PBUH) with satire that was and is unacceptable to the Muslim World and to the religion of Islam. This took place not too long ago and was orchestrated by two French Algerian brothers accused of Terrorism, together with other accomplices. The killings cannot be condoned and must be condemned by all Muslims, by Islam and, the free world. Throughout the world, freedom of expression must be guaranteed within reason. This freedom of expression cannot be defined in terms of Western interpretation alone and the issue of Charlie Hebdo brings home this reality.

In response to these brutal killings more than one million people mostly Parisians gathered in Paris and other cities of France, at short notice to march, demonstrate and demonize the actions of the killers and in many ways vilify most Muslims and their religion. More than 40 to 50 world leaders also joined the march. It was astounding to see Benjamin Netanyahu the Israeli Prime Minister using the march to score points, in a solemn occasion, who was seen waving to the crowds of Jews that gathered and, he jumped the seating arrangements provided by the French Government to be in the front of the line to score points. The same Netanyahu who is supported by the West and especially the United States government and its people, including Middle East tyrants that sing from the same hymn book as their Western masters, remain silent at the atrocities committed by Israel in Gaza and Palestine by the Israeli government and the Israeli armed forces. Thousands of Palestinian, men, women and children have been killed, butchered and massacred continuously, while the West, the United States and European nations stand by as passive onlookers and yet have the audacity and temerity to condone the actions of Israel and what is happening in the Middle East, with impunity. Why did President Mahmoud Abbas attend the march in Paris alongside Western political hypocrites and Netanyahu? In short he is a stooge and puppet of the West, easily manipulated. This is an affront to the Palestinian people and their just struggle against the bigotry of the West and the dilution of the Palestinian question and its liberation from Israeli apartheid colonialism. This is condoned by the Western governments. The serious problems that the Middle East and also, in Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Syria and other destinations, is the result of Western hegemony and, its thirst to get hold of the oil wealth of the Middle East, create wars and provide archaic weaponry to feed its capitalist greed and proliferate their arms industry. They are supported by Middle East puppet regimes, which drain the resources

of many of these countries. It is capitalist greed clouded in its double standards, perpetuated by its hegemony and capitalist agenda and the implementation of its neoliberal policies, in terms of manipulating the geopolitics of the world. On the other hand, it is a stage in which the West can test its arms and weapons and through its capitalist agenda sell arms to the warring factions that it has created. The issue is simple, why George Bush, Ronald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Tony Blair and others have not been prosecuted by the International Court of Justice in The Hague for crimes against humanity and crimes particularly against innocent Muslim men, women, and children? This is the double standards coupled with the bigotry of the West and their false notions of freedom, the freedom of expression and of human rights must also be condemned because it is veiled as a camouflage, as acceptable satire by the West.

Not too long ago the world saw 141 mainly women and children at a school in Peshawar, Pakistan massacred by the Taliban in brutal fashion. This was an attack upon innocent people by Muslims against Muslims. Why was there no massive march Paris style? Why were the attacks played down by the West? Why did the world political leadership not assemble in Peshawar to show the necessary solidarity and condemnation Paris style of this massacre? What happened in Paris cannot be condoned but it is a non – event when compared to Peshawar and the daily bombings upon innocent people in Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Libya, Iraq and a host of other countries including some African countries, where Islam reigns supreme. The world and modern history is replete of such examples and, yet we are bombarded with Western interpretation of the world and atrocities committed against it. What of Guantanamo, why the silence on the part of the West and the so – called free world in relationship to human rights? Why is there no action taken against the Egyptian tyrant General El Sisi, who is supported by the West and who held in prison three Aljazeera Journalists for nearly 400 days. There are many other examples that defy human rights and freedom of expression as defined by the Western nations and its Middle Eastern puppets. The UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia bailed out Egypt and supported the illegitimate government of Egypt, led by General Al Fattah Sisi by providing over \$20 billion, to deal with its debt crisis after the illegal overthrow of a duly elected government led by the Muslim brotherhood. Some years ago the same occurred in Algeria and, the world stood by and did nothing. Are these human rights as defined by the West?

On the other hand in relationship to the freedom of expression, we saw the double standards of Charlie Hebdo and the West, including the French government and its people, who stood by, watched, condoned and remained silent when press freedom and freedom of expression was and, is seriously compromised in the West and by the West. The very press freedom and the freedom of speech that it purports to uphold on the international platform and, defined in terms of its bigotry was compromised and decimated, when a satirist working for Charlie Hebdo produced satire depicting anti – Jewish cartoons with explicit drawings. He was fired for this perceived transgression. It was no transgression, yet the French; the entire West in particular, can condone such action and yet purport to uphold press freedom and freedom of expression. Why was this entire episode and transgression, not extensively reported in the Western media and in France? It is no secret that the magazine Charlie Hebdo was facing bankruptcy and after the “terrorist” attack in Paris, it produced cartoons on the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) again, and 6 million copies of the magazine were sold, which led to the monetary revival of the magazine. The magazine did not find it expedient, not to publish new cartoons on the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and, Western governments did not also find it expedient and necessary to discuss the issue with Charlie Hebdo, and condemn its actions, knowing fully that, it would cause further backlash by Muslims around the world and this has already happened and could lead to other similar attacks upon innocent people anywhere in the West. This is indeed explicit short sightedness by Charlie Hebdo and Western

governments. This can hardly produce a lasting solution for peace and nor can it win the hearts and minds of Muslims throughout the world.

In South Africa we saw satire being abused and used against the President of the country. It emasculated his manhood and attacked African culture and values. Satire has to be vetted when it threatens the character of people, when it attacks culture and insults religion, any religion for that matter and, must not be allowed to masquerade as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and in its efforts, hamper nation building and world peace. We now have a polarized world, a world that sits on a powder keg ready to erupt again and cause much devastation to innocent people. Press freedom cannot be defined on the basis of the Eurocentric and Western interpretation of what is right and what is wrong. There are other world views also that must be taken into consideration. There can be no excuse for this whatsoever.

Returning to the title of this input, many, throughout the world, the West and France included state JeNeSuisPasCharlie (I am not Charlie) because, despite disagreeing with the violence, I also view the original phrase as encompassing the idea that those at the top of the food chain can do what they want and, we are defending their right to do it. That is why leaders who do not even have freedom of speech in their own countries joined the Parisian march. Where was and is the Je Suis Charlie for their own citizens? Quite simply, their ideas are the powerful ones that mattered enough to rally what is termed the “us and them” climate. The right and the good have been automatically equated with the work done by the valiant Western White men in their pursuit of a so – called better world for all. If you do not agree, you are a hater of freedom.

At another level, we all know that the Australian government and many of its institutions are racist and permeate racist opinions. A cartoon published in the Sydney Morning Herald that linked the Jewish faith with the Israeli rocket attacks on the Gaza has breached the so – called Australian Press Council’s standards. The reaction led to sudden resignations. The Press Council ruled that the cartoon caused greater offence to readers than was justifiable in the public interest. The cartoon depicted “an elderly man with a large nose, wearing the distinctively Jewish head covering called a yarmulke, and sitting in an armchair emblazoned with the Star of David” “He was pointing a TV remote control device at an exploding cityscape, implied to be Gaza. “A linkage with Israeli nationality might have been justifiable in the public interest, despite being likely to cause offence,” “But the same cannot be said of the implied linkage with the Jewish faith that arose from inclusion of the yarmulke and the Star of David.” The argument was that it emphasised religious persuasion rather than Israeli nationality, thereby causing offence. What of depicting the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), whose photographs are forbidden by Islam, is it not an attack upon Islam? The paper published an apology. “The images from Gaza are searing, a gallery of death and horror.” “A dishevelled Palestinian man cries out in agony, his blood - soaked little brother dead in his arms. What is this for press freedom in Australia which is part of the Western camp? It is a mockery of human rights and freedom of speech. What is good for the goose must be good for the gander. There is a distinct bias in Australia and Australia and the United States including many Western governments define press freedom on their own terms and are distinctly pro – Israel and this is exemplified by the strong Jewish lobby in the US and the West in spite of its poor track record on human rights and the fact that it negates human protocols with impunity.

Muslims are fair game, in the way that Black people were during the height of colonialism and still are in some cases. One has to just look at the tradition of Black Pete in the Netherlands and, women are in certain masculine spaces such as men’s magazines. A cartoon by Maltese – America comic book artist Joe Sacco sums it up beautifully, when he asks whether he can play the free speech game too. He proceeds to draw a picture of a Black man

falling out of a tree, a Jewish man counting money in the entrails of the working class, and a believer doing “Gods work” in the desert while, about to cut off a captive’s head. Would US citizens and all of us Africans be OK and comfortable if cartoons appeared in the New York Times about Ebola – riddled Africans? Or a series depicting crazed White men beating a Black person with the caption: “White men go wild: Summer edition” as a comment on the spate of racial attacks in South Africa and recently in the United States? Sacco argues that satire is meant to cut to the bone, but questions: Whose bones and Why”?

Those who say free speech means everyone is a possible target erase the inherent power play that comes with the interaction of ideas, cultures, values, and rights. A White man in France has a much louder voice than a man in an Islamic nation seeing his beliefs bandied about for fun. In 2010 Ugandan academic Mahmood Mamdani warned about bigotry in the name of satire. He said blasphemy is the questioning of a tradition from within and bigotry is an assault on the tradition from without. The defining feature of the Danish cartoon debate over the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) he said “was that bigotry was mistaken for blasphemy.” The same can be said here. Mamdani says that “the past five centuries of Western domination have been marked by an increasing inability to live with difference whilst increasingly politicizing it.” Rather than attempting to understand the context in the light of these differences and why something like this would happen in response, we put up the middle finger and react “with fear and anxiety, marked with arrogance.”

We tell the world that free speech and other Western liberal ideas is king and that other notions can go and kick rocks. I am like so many people against the Paris killings, but JeNeSuisPas Charlie because “Charlie is at the top of the hierarchy of ideals that I, as an African, could quite quickly be at the bottom of. Who is to say that those ideals, I hold dear will not end up at the bottom of the food chain? If they were to be scorned in the name of satire what would I do? Speech is not free for everyone. It can be costly for some, erasing dignity and respect for differences. Pose this question to so – called Western democracies and governments, to the governments of the world, to dictatorships, and the media that toes the line and thus perpetuates the status quo. And yet they all have the nerve to pontificate about freedom of speech, freedom of the press and extol the virtues of human rights defined by themselves for themselves and, according to the distorted Western value system that looks down upon the values, culture and world view of those defined differently by the West. The world has changed and can no longer be viewed from the jaundiced eyes of Western nations. Western nations are a threat to themselves and the time for reflection, the time to see the viewpoints of others has arrived. Failure to take stock of their bigotry and double standards, the West cannot expect to live in peace with a highly polarized world community that, it has created. It cannot be Je Suis Charlie alone because, there is an alternative narrative that must be taken into consideration by the West and others, the narrative of Je Suis Ne Charlie. The long and short of this and other incidents of this nature and the bigotry of the West, Charlie represents a hierarchy of misguided Western ideals to which not everyone subscribes.

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