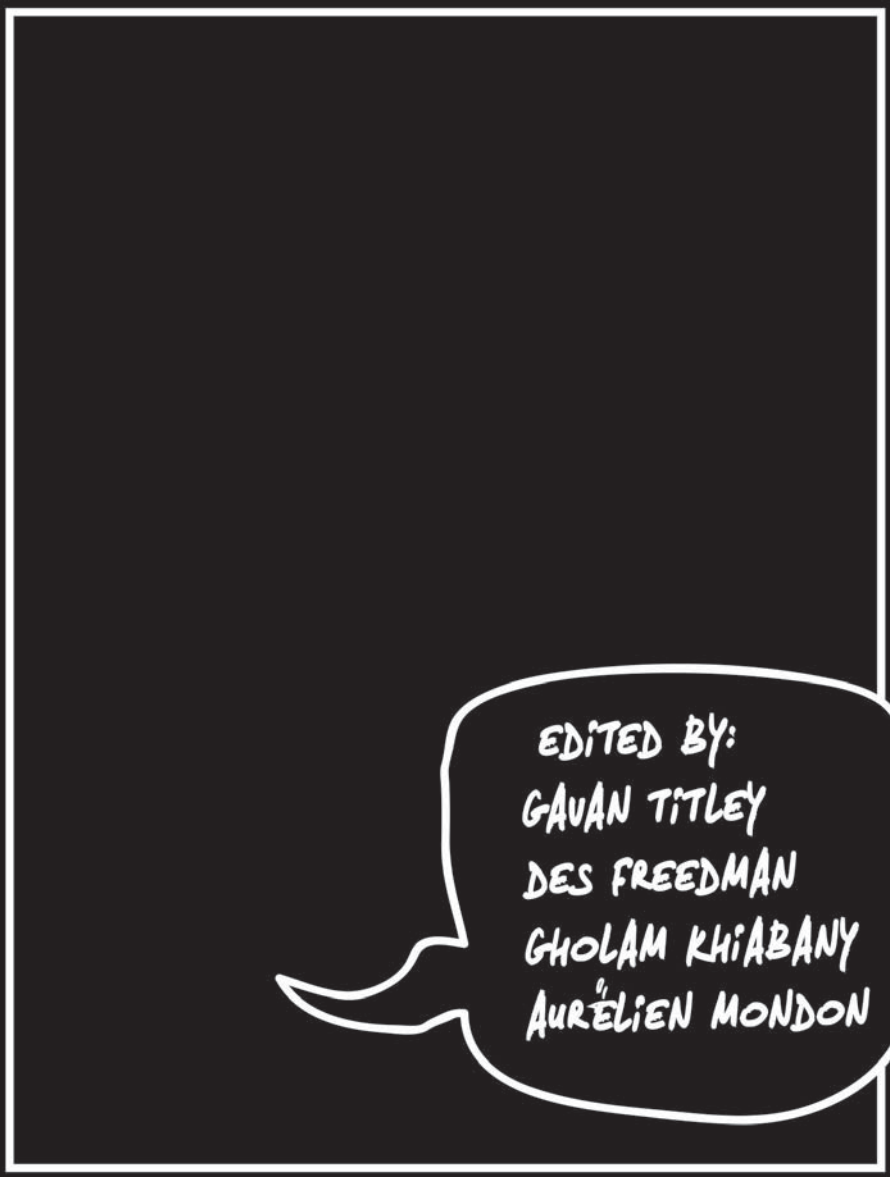
AFTER CHARLIE HEBDO

Terror, Racism and Free Speech



AFTER CHARLIE HEBDO

TERROR, RACISM AND FREE SPEECH

Edited by Gavan Titley, Des Freedman,
Gholam Khiabany and Aurélien Mondon

ZED

After Charlie Hebdo: Terror, Racism and Free Speech was first published in 2017 by Zed Books Ltd, The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR, UK.

www.zedbooks.net

Typeset in Plantin and Kievit by Swales & Willis Ltd, Exeter, Devon
Cover design by Andrew Brash

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-78360-939-0 hb
ISBN 978-1-78360-938-3 pb
ISBN 978-1-78360-940-6 pdf
ISBN 978-1-78360-941-3 epub
ISBN 978-1-78360-942-0 mobi

CONTENTS

PART III: MEDIA EVENTS AND MEDIA DYNAMICS

PART IV: THE POLITICS OF FREE SPEECH

PART V: RACISM AND ANTI-RACISM IN POST-RACIAL TIMES

5 | THE WHITENESS OF INNOCENCE: *CHARLIE HEBDO* AND THE METAPHYSICS OF ANTI-TERRORISM IN EUROPE

Nicholas De Genova

> Here shines still the whiteness of innocence. (Drinnon 1997 [1980]: viii)

A boy named Charlie Brown

In *A Boy Named Charlie Brown* (1969), the first feature film based on the 'Peanuts' comic strip and television specials, Charlie Brown is deeply troubled about being a loser, wracked with self-doubt and an inferiority complex. Eventually, he discovers the one thing that he's good at – spelling – and then does so well in the school spelling bee that he's sent to a national competition in New York City, which will be televised. In the end, he loses and has to return home in disgrace. In an attempt to console him, Charlie Brown's friend Linus tells him, "But did you notice something, Charlie Brown? The world didn't come to an end." When Charlie Brown goes outside, he sees life going on as normal. Then, when he sees Lucy playing with a football, he sneaks up behind her to kick it, but as she always does, Lucy snatches it away at the last second and he falls flat. The film ends with Charlie Brown lying on the ground, humiliated, as Lucy leans over and says, "Welcome home, Charlie Brown."

This vignette seems to supply a fitting analogy for the European experience of decolonisation – and for present purposes, the French experience in particular. The crucial difference, of course, is that France has generally suffered from the opposite malady. It has been vexed by a superiority complex. France congratulates itself with the notion that many of the essential categories of what is taken to be our global political 'modernity' – concepts of citizenship, individualism, the idea of the subject, the rule of law, equality before the law, justice, liberty, human rights, democracy, popular sovereignty, the distinction between the state and civil society, public and private, secularism,

scientific rationality, humanism, Enlightenment – all can somehow be credited as having their origins, to some significant degree, in France. In the colonial context, this heritage purportedly bequeathed to humanity by Europe, and by France in particular, was called 'civilisation' (Chakrabarty 2000: 7). Therefore, upon returning from its colonialist adventure in the great big world in the aftermath of decolonisation, humiliated and disgraced, France desperately needed to resuscitate its narcissistic delusions of grandeur.

Now, however, in a classic act of postcolonial historical amnesia, France's universalist ambitions would have to be nurtured with the revised sort of self-aggrandisement that could be derived strictly from 'national' insularity. As Achille Mbembe argues, in the wake of its postcolonial demise, France withdrew into the narrow epistemic confines of its presumptive 'national' borders, "which became its filter for narrating itself and the world" (2011: 90). As for all the other European colonial powers, France would have to grapple with the fact that, with the loss of its global power and prestige, 'the world didn't come to an end'. Furthermore, as with Lucy's surprise humiliation of tricking Charlie Brown with the football, reconfirming that he is really a loser after all, France's desire to retreat into a sanitised narrative of national greatness, miraculously cleansed of the filth of its colonial legacy, has been met with the postcolonial boomerang effect that presents itself in the form of mass migration, above all from the countries formerly subjugated by France. "Welcome home, Charlie Brown."

A boy named Charlie Hebdo

On 7 January 2015, the evening of the shootings that left twelve people dead at the offices of the magazine *Charlie Hebdo* as well as five more dead at a Jewish grocery, approximately 35,000 people gathered in Paris holding 'Je Suis Charlie' signs. In addition, smaller but significant gatherings were reported in Bordeaux, Grenoble, Lyon, Marseille, Nantes, Nice, Rennes, and Toulouse. In total, more than 100,000 people gathered across France to take part in these virtually instantaneous rallies on the evening of the events. Similar demonstrations and candlelight vigils also spread to cities outside France, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, Ljubljana, London and Washington DC.[1] The next day, the headline of the national daily newspaper *Le Monde* proclaimed the events to be "The French 9/11" (Fassin 2015: 3). Indeed, in a manner reminiscent of

the headline in *Le Monde* the day after the events of 11 September 2001 in New York City, proclaiming to its French readership, "We are all Americans. We are all New Yorkers,"[2] the 'Je Suis Charlie' affirmation went viral and became the obligatory international expression of identification and sympathy. In this context, President François Hollande proclaimed Paris to be the "capital of the world" (Fassin 2015: 3). Hollande described the shooting as a "terrorist attack of the most extreme barbarity", called the slain cartoonists and journalists "heroes", and declared a day of national mourning on 8 January.[3]

With widespread endorsement of the call for demonstrations of 'national unity' from across the political spectrum, there emerged the official slogan: "Against barbarity, let us defend the values of the Republic!" (Fassin 2015: 3). On Sunday 11 January, approximately 2 million people (demonstrably led by more than forty heads of state) rallied for national unity in Paris, and over the weekend of the 10th and 11th, an estimated total of 3.7 million people joined demonstrations across France. These 'Republican marches', as they quickly came to be known, were the biggest in French history, and, notably, also the largest public rallies in France since 1944, when Paris was liberated from Nazi occupation. Following the National Unity rally, the front page of the national centre-left daily newspaper *Libération* was dominated by an image of thousands of people gathered under a banner that declared 'Je Suis Charlie'. The newspaper announced: "We are one people" (Fassin 2015: 3). Indeed, the nation appeared to now have only one name – Charlie.

Although the sheer scale of violent calamity was in no sense comparable to the events of 11 September 2001 in the United States, which had served so efficiently to usher in the bombastic proclamation of the Global War on Terror, this so-called French '9/11' – much like the Australian and Canadian ones that had transpired just a short while earlier, as well as the Danish one that would soon follow – served to institute a traumatic rupture in time that severed the events from any prior history and ensnared the nation as unwitting witnesses in a spectacular present (cf. De Genova 2013). Moreover, the French spectacle of the attacks, the manhunt and the final showdown enshrouded the very invocation of *Charlie Hebdo* in a halo of sanctity. Exactly like the quasi-hieroglyphic ideogram '9/11'(Heller 2005: 3; cf. Simpson 2006), the name '*Charlie Hebdo*' now crystallised and

encapsulated a whole ideological script, such that the mere mention of the name became virtually self-evident and sufficient to signal the new hegemonic consensus.[4]

Following this massive spectacle of French nationalist exuberance and international solidarity, Prime Minister Manuel Valls solemnly asserted that France is indeed "at war with terrorism" (Fassin 2015: 3). Predictably, during the week after the shootings, fifty-four anti-Muslim incidents were reported in France. These included twenty-one reports of shootings or grenade throwing at mosques and other Islamic centres, and thirty-three cases of threats of violence or verbal abuse.[5] Furthermore, in the town of Beaucet, near Avignon, Mohammed El Makouli, a Moroccan, was murdered after being stabbed seventeen times by a neighbour who invaded his home, shouting anti-Muslim slogans. (His wife was also slashed with the assailant's knife before fleeing the scene with their young child.) In addition, despite the celebration of *Charlie Hebdo*'s notorious racist/anti-Muslim cartoons (see Cyran 2013) as an icon of the freedom of expression, a reanimated political climate commanding conformity with the sacralisation of the *Charlie Hebdo* victims and the sanctity of the official values of the Republic culminated in the widespread suppression of free speech and reprisals against those who were perceived to show disaffection for the new consensus. Some lost their jobs and others were reported to the police for refusing to honour the official moment of silence promulgated to commemorate the victims.

Because of at least 200 reported incidents of defiance or irreverence with regard to the moment of silence by schoolchildren, mainly from 'immigrant' (non-white) communities, the government announced new plans to invest €71 million to more assiduously propagate and reinforce secularist values in classrooms, including the singing of the national anthem. Notably, the Minister of Education, Moroccan-born Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, suggested that measures must also be taken to enforce respect for the authority of teachers (de la Baume 2015). As many as 100 people, including controversial comedian Dieudonné M'bala M'bala, came under police investigation for making or posting comments online that purportedly justified or glorified terrorism, and several were quickly convicted and sentenced to prison terms of as long as four years.[6] When police in Nice subjected an eight-year-old boy to questioning concerning allegations of 'justifying terrorism', it seemed indisputable that the official intolerance towards any disaffection for

the fetishisation of *Charlie Hebdo* as an icon of Republican virtue had reached the point of hysteria (de la Baume and Bilefski 2015).

Houria Bouteldja and Malik Tahar Chaouch of the Parti des Indigènes de la République (PIR) have astutely depicted this as "a political climate of institutional violence" and repression intended to subordinate "the people on the receiving end of structural racism" in France to the mandates of a "national unity" that "serves to exclude them and to demand their submission" and thereby reinforces the very same "social order that engendered the spiral of violence".[7] Thus, they argue incisively, "'freedom of expression' becomes a pretext for silencing those who have the least access to it … and is being used instead to impose a reign of intimidation and fear", while "national unity serves … above all to consolidate the white consensus" (Bouteldja and Chaouch 2015; see also PIR 2015). Directly indicting the pretence that *Charlie Hebdo*'s anti-Muslim cartoons could somehow be upheld as a pure manifestation of the freedom of speech or subversive anti-clerical satire, Bouteldja (2015) has called this into question: "I blame them for having stripped satire of its meaning, for directing it against the oppressed (which is a form of sadism) instead of against power and the powerful (which is a form of resistance)." Meanwhile, Jeannette Bougrab – daughter of a Berber Muslim Algerian 'Harki' (a loyalist volunteer soldier who served as an auxiliary in the French colonial army fighting to defeat Algeria's national liberation struggle), attorney and law professor, right-wing (UMP) politician, former junior minister under President Nicolas Sarkozy, and also the self-proclaimed romantic companion and virtual widow of *Charlie Hebdo* editor-in-chief Stéphane ('Charb') Charbonnier, but publicly repudiated by his family – went on the attack against the anti-racist left, particularly the PIR, as 'guilty' and 'responsible' for the shootings by having previously accused *Charlie Hebdo* of Islamophobia.[8] She declared: "those who denounce Islamophobia have armed the assassins".[9]

Notably, that same week, the new far-right anti-Muslim movement in Germany, Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West), dedicated its weekly Monday evening march in Dresden to the commemoration of the *Charlie Hebdo* victims, and rallied a record-high turnout of 25,000 supporters for its cause on 12 January. Alongside such lurid crypto-fascist millenarian nationalist mantras as "Germany is awakening. For our fatherland, for Germany, it is our country, the country of our ancestors, descendants and children!",[10]

however, Pegida's explicit assertion of what we may instructively call 'patriotic Europeanism' – in this instance, in solidarity with French 'national unity', against the putative menace of 'Islamisation' – authorised themselves not only as the authentic and organic expression of 'the German nation' but also as the voice of 'the people' of Europe. Notably, the rise of Pegida in Germany was in fact assisted by the German branch of a far-right anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim movement that actually began in France, the Bloc Identitaire, and its youth wing Génération Identitaire, which, like Pegida, is committed to an explicitly and emphatically Europeanist project (De Genova 2015; cf. De Genova 2016).

The general political climate in France leading to the events of 7 January 2015 was already one of escalating postcolonial racial tension. In October 2014, the AGRIF (General Alliance against Racism and for the Respect of French and Christian Identity), a far-right group, brought a legal complaint against leftist sociologist Saïd Bouamama and rapper Saïd Zouggagh, aka Saïdou, of the hip-hop group Z.E.P. (Zone d'expression populaire), for their anti-racist and anti-colonialist song '*Nique la France*' ('Fuck France') and their eponymous book-length manifesto, both published in 2010, celebrating the "duty of insolence" and unreservedly denouncing French nationalism and its equation with white racial identity.[11] The complaint was lodged in the wake of the public debate initiated by prominent right-wing (UMP) politician Jean-François Copé's book *Manifeste pour une droite décomplexée* ('Manifesto for a right-wing without inhibitions', 2012), popularising the contention of 'anti-white racism', a notion that had previously been explicit only within the far right. Indeed, in September 2012, when Copé began to 'break taboos' by making his case against 'anti-white racism'[12] as a presidential candidate aspiring to become the successor to Nicolas Sarkozy, National Front leader Marine Le Pen accused him and his party of invading the ideological territory of the National Front in a cynical tactical manoeuvre to capitalise on their unprecedented electoral success during the spring of that year, when they garnered more than 6.5 million votes. (In May of that same year, the National Front had already called for a law to explicitly prohibit 'anti-white' prejudice.) These moves by Copé notably followed Sarkozy's declarations, during the desperate electoral campaign of 2012, that there were "too many foreigners" on French territory, and that "all civilisations are not equal in worth", as well as his Interior

and Immigration Minister Claude Guéant's pronouncement that it is natural for the French to "want France to remain France" (Mondon 2012a). Notably, Copé – publicist of the insidious notion of 'anti-white racism' – is himself the son of a father of Romanian Jewish origin and a mother of Algerian Jewish origin.

Thus, over the period of several months before and after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, the far-right campaign to legally punish the anti-racist, anti-colonial audacity of Saïd Bouamama and Saïdou, for their song and manifesto 'Fuck France' ('*Nique la France*') marked an important tactical improvisation within the wider field of French racial/cultural politics. Here is a sample from the text of the book:

> We encounter massive racial discrimination – systemic, structural, institutional – that touches every sphere of life (school, vocational training, employment, housing, relationships with the police, etc.). It turns us into a stigmatised social group, deprived of rights and assigned to the most precarious, most degraded and most unequal positions in French society.
>
> We are the target of regular ideological campaigns branding us as 'barbarian', 'homophobic', 'anti-Semitic', 'intolerant of secularism', 'terrorist' and so on. Islamophobia is steadily gaining ground, making us 'the enemy within' to be monitored, hunted, punished …
>
> This systematic humiliation of a whole social group is ongoing and getting worse. The organisation of the French social structure confines us within frontiers [borders] that are no less real for being invisible …
>
> From the counter of the immigration and nationalisation office to the police identity check, from educational selection to employment discrimination, our everyday life is a constant reminder of these frontiers [borders]. We are constantly required to show our allegiance, our submission, our deservingness, our politeness, our worthiness, our unobtrusiveness, our invisibility. And this when our human dignity can be safeguarded only by rebellion, by struggle, by visibility, by impoliteness, by irreverence, by insubordination, by egalitarian impatience. We are called on to love the system that oppresses us. We are accused of 'communitarianism' when we seek to organise autonomously. In the context of our oppression, however, this demonised 'communitarianism' is a defence against depersonalisation, decomposition, self-hatred.
>
> Why the hell should we be ashamed to be Arab, Black, Muslim …? To be non-White? We are accused of 'victimology' when we do no more than denounce the massive racial discrimination we suffer and

insist on being treated as equals. We are, objectively, the victims of a racist system that finds expression in massive, systemic discrimination.

Who is this 'We', then? This we is both the legacy of colonisation and the ongoing product of today's French social system … This we is made up of the Blacks, Arabs and Muslims of France, whatever their status, whatever their nationality … To abandon all illusions in the face of the false promises, the sympathy and the good intentions, and the myths of the Republic – equal opportunity, fraternity, Enlightenment and all – that are recited to us to make us go to sleep …

Given [debates on the burqa and on national identity, with the expulsion of undocumented immigrants amid general indifference, with the multiplication of racist crimes, with discrimination as a system, all evidence of the failure of the quest for inclusion], there is only one conclusion to be drawn: the need to break radically and unambiguously with all the mystifying discourses produced and circulated in order to legitimate and to maintain the inequalities and injustices of this society, of this France never decolonised …

That is why we say, calmly, imperturbably: Fuck France! [*Nique la France*!] Fuck colonial, racist, unequal France! If the phrase emerged spontaneously on the lips of the young people of the *quartiers populaires*, and then appeared in the titles and lyrics of songs, it was not because of a taste for vulgarity … For a long time now, the phrase has simply meant a refusal to tolerate the intolerable, to stay where you're told, to be the object of speech rather than a speaking subject. All the laws and sanctions of the world can do nothing against this refusal of the life of a slave, of a [colonised] native …

'Fuck France' doesn't say 'I am X or Y' but rather 'I refuse to be X!', 'I will not be Y!', 'I refuse the place I have been allotted in life!'

'Fuck France' is the refusal to be invisible, to be discreet; it is the assertion of our right to be who we are, and not to have to hide it.

'Fuck France' is the refusal to defer and to be polite in the face of a social system that oppresses us, exploits us, stigmatises us, and marginalises us.

'Fuck France' is the assertion that we alone are responsible for our own emancipation, rejecting the 'integration', the 'assimilation', the 'civilisation' that others have defined for us as if we were mere modelling clay, to be shaped at will.

'Fuck France' will be with us as long as there is inequality. It will not disappear, so long as there is oppression and discrimination. It is continuously produced by our conditions of existence, by the physical, social and symbolic violence that characterises them …

> We no longer want to be on the defensive, we no longer want to justify ourselves, for these attitudes spring from internalised oppression. We will not complain, or negotiate, but simply insist on equality now.[13]

Bouamama and Zouggagh, aka Saïdou, were indicted in Lille on 20 January 2015 for 'public insult' and 'incitement to discrimination, hate, or violence'. (They were finally judged to be not guilty of the spurious charges on 19 March 2015.) Concurrently, just three weeks before the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings, prominent right-wing television and radio commentator and columnist Éric Zemmour, son of Algerian Jewish parents who migrated to France in the 1950s and author of the anti-immigration bestsellers *Mélancolie française* (*French Melancholy*, 2010) and *Le Suicide Français* (*The French Suicide*, 2014), had to be fired by the twenty-four-hour news channel i-Télé after a scandal over revelations of an interview, published in Italy, in which he endorsed the idea that all Muslims, including second- and third-generation French citizens, should be deported from France in the interests of avoiding 'chaos and civil war'.[14] In this regard, refusing to acknowledge the French nationality of the country's 'Muslim' (non-white) citizens, Zemmour was merely recapitulating the folksy racist common sense of National Front founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, who has never tired of insisting that 'a goat born in a stable is not a horse', and thus 'immigrants' (particularly Muslims) are often "of a race, religion, and mores very different from that of true French [*Français de souche*]" (Mondon 2012b). Earlier in 2014, Zemmour had remarked that the barbarian pillage of Europe after the fall of Rome was being re-enacted by "thieving violent gangs of Chechens, Romas, Kosovars, North Africans, and Africans" (Lichfield 2014). Hence, the discourse broadly affiliating Muslims – and migrants, more generally – with 'barbarity', so pronounced in the wake of the shootings, has been part of an extended controversy over the qualifications of France's migrant (non-white) 'minorities', especially Muslims, for proper inclusion within French 'civilisation'.

It is important here to note nonetheless that, contrary to the widespread notion that what we are witnessing is the re-entrenchment of a 'clash of civilisations' thesis as the dominant ideological grammar of an era of intensified and aggravated 'Islamophobia', what is really operative fairly consistently is the mobilisation of diverse manifestations of anti-Muslim racism that serve to coercively sort and rank Muslims as

'good' ones (those who are docile, obedient, assimilationist) versus 'bad' ones whose 'barbaric' proclivities disqualify them from 'Civilisation' altogether. This latter outlook corresponds in fact to the thesis, associated with Francis Fukuyama, of 'the End of History', for which there is finally one and only one possible pathway of Civilisation and 'progress'. The difference is a significant one. The 'clash of civilisations' argument posits a plurality of essentially incompatible and fundamentally inimical 'cultures' or 'civilisations' in a conflict for planetary dominance, embroiled inextricably in a constitutive antagonism that, by implication, is inherently a struggle to the death. Roughly speaking, the perspective of someone like Zemmour does indeed articulate this view, whereby Muslims in Europe are universally and automatically presumed to be the foot soldiers of an enemy camp, and mass expulsion is the only plausible solution to an intractable and irreconcilable conflict. However, the dominant theme is actually a mandate for (secular, Republican) 'assimilation'. Rather than positing a pluralist scenario of rival 'cultures' or 'civilisations', it understands there to be only one Civilisation, and commands (and expects) the subordination and submission of all cultural or religious differences within a hegemonic framework of secularist and multiculturalist 'integration'.

This perspective actually compels the repeated performative collusion of Muslims who aspire to verify their deservingness, credibility and civility through obligatory pronouncements of disapproval and disavowal of 'terrorism' and all manner of 'fundamentalist' excesses. It also helps to explain the high visibility and strategic importance of so many persons of proverbial 'immigrant background' who have been prominent and vociferous defenders of the imperatives of the French political establishment. Indeed, every iteration of the 'clash of civilisations' argument in this manner invites its own repudiation, summoning 'good' Muslims to refute the bald allegations against 'Islam' in general and thereby uphold the multiculturalist dogma whereby Muslims can also be loyal and dutiful liberal subjects of the secular Republic. The alleged tendency among Muslims toward 'communitarianism' may be persistently held as worthy of suspicion and constantly subjected to vigilance, but this kind of superintendence is precisely *disciplinary*: it is dedicated to training those whose 'civility' is deemed to be incomplete or defective for fuller 'integration'; it is, in short, a 'civilising mission'. This is why, for example, a violation of France's 2010 ban on wearing the burqa or niqab in public is penalised

not only with a fine but also the mandate to attend citizenship classes. It is also why the then presiding Interior Minister Guéant instructed police that women arrested for wearing full facial coverings should be tactfully informed of the law's motivations in a spirit of education.[15] Of course, these gestures of police 'sensitivity' were frequently accompanied by vilification, abuse, and sporadic violence on the part of anti-Muslim racists who were re-energised in their self-righteous confidence to perpetrate attacks against veiled Muslim women following the enactment of the ban.

The proliferation of diverse manifestations of anti-Muslim derision and discrimination in France is plainly a systemic postcolonial racism that seeks to subjugate Muslim/migrant/non-white 'difference' within a racial socio-political order of white supremacy and nationalist prerogative, but its dominant logic is one of (hierarchical) assimilation and domestication. Rather than a pluralist metaphysics of absolute incompatibility and incommensurability, with its segregationist logic, as would be implied by the 'clash of civilisations' thesis, this anti-Muslim racism ought instead to be understood to epitomise a dynamic of subordinate inclusion, or what I have elsewhere depicted as "inclusion through exclusion" (De Genova 2010b). Thus, it is ultimately only the incorrigible remainder of Muslims, the truly 'radical(ised)' fringe, who get castigated as atavistic and irredeemably 'barbaric'. For these, who are effectively disqualified from any possible inclusion within the one and only (global, neoliberal) Civilisation, there remains no other recourse than expulsion, or, indeed, extermination. (For a fuller discussion, see De Genova 2010a; cf. De Genova 2010b.)

Here we recognise the metaphysics of anti-terrorism, famously promulgated by George W. Bush in his ultimatum to the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2001, which was simultaneously an ultimatum to the whole world: "You are with us, or you are with the terrorists." (For a fuller discussion, see De Genova 2007, 2011, 2013.) It is within this emphatically and explicitly globalist metaphysics of Civilisation, in its millenarian showdown with barbarism, that forthright critiques of *Charlie Hebdo*'s grotesque and extravagant hostility to Muslims or refusals to embrace the 'Je Suis Charlie' mantra become tantamount to complicity with, justification of, or apology for the abominable 'terrorist' enemy.

It is crucial, here, to distinguish between the more psychologistic notion of Islamophobia and what is truly an anti-Muslim racism. The

productivity of racism in this instance derives precisely from its capacity to racialise a category that ostensibly refers to religious difference or 'culture'. In other words, anti-Muslim racism is a premier example of the kind of culturalist, differentialist racism (Balibar 1991a) that overtly dissimulates race and appears to be about something else (e.g. religion). It becomes clear that this is not strictly or primarily about Islam (as a religion) so much as it is about Muslims as a group, as a racialised category, who may be conveniently associated with some of the more visible and identifiable accoutrements or paraphernalia of Islamic practices, but need not be committed in any substantive doctrinal or practical sense to Islam as such. Notably, this was always true of the category 'Muslim' in the French colonial context:

> the designation as Muslim did not strictly correspond to a religious affiliation. Even the few thousand of those who converted to Catholicism remained 'Muslims' under the French law, since according to a 1903 decision of the Court of Appeal of Algiers, the term 'does not have a purely denominational meaning, but designates all individuals of Muslim origin, without necessity to distinguish whether they belong to the Islamic religion'. (Fassin 2015: 6)

Thus, historically and still today, the category "'Muslim' has long been the generic term to name the colonial subjects of North Africa" (Fassin 2015: 6). Hence, Houria Bouteldja, spokesperson for the PIR, has unpacked the contemporary Muslim question in ways that fundamentally exceed and destabilise any narrow fetishisation of religious difference as such. She explains:

> I would even say that 'Muslim' also denotes 'resident of a poor neighborhood.' It is sometimes a euphemism for '*banlieue*.' Its meaning is pejorative … In France, Islam is above all a religion of the poor and of immigrants and therefore of a part of the population that has no political, economic or media power … The white European identity that dominated the world for 500 years is in decline. The voices – often hysterical – raised in the media against Islam fundamentally express a fear of this decline … Whites are losing their historical centrality … and they see all these non-whites, wrongly identified with Islam, as a threat to their identity. (Bouteldja 2012)

In short, 'Muslim' operates as a category that condenses both racial and class derision, encompassing non-white 'foreigners' who

are not necessarily foreign-born or migrants, and may not even be Muslims. The Muslim question in France (and much of the rest of Europe) today is therefore not reducible to Islamophobia or even to any specific antagonism directed exclusively toward Muslims as such. Rather, the Muslim question is merely a refraction of what may be best apprehended, in fact, to be a question about 'Europe' and 'European'-ness as a racial problem of postcolonial whiteness: what I call the 'European' question (De Genova 2016).

In extravagant juxtaposition with France, 'Europe' or 'the West' – rather than Christianity, for example – this aversion to Muslims and this heightening intolerance towards Islam can only really be apprehensible as a matter of religion to the extent that nationalism itself may be understood to be a religion, the veritable theology of the (nation-)state. There is, after all, considerable basis for theorising nationalism as a kind of religion. Notably, in his classic study of nationalism, Benedict Anderson astutely notes the national project's cult of death and nationalism's need to reanimate itself by means of sacralised corpses, such as the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. Anderson suggests, furthermore, that nationalist concerns with death and immortality are indicative of "a strong affinity with religious imaginings" (1991: 10), which transform "fatality into continuity" (ibid.: 11). Anderson elaborates:

> The century of Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. With the ebbing of religious belief, the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear. Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary. What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning. As we shall see, few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation. If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny. (ibid.: 11–12)

Similarly, Hannah Arendt refers specifically to the 'sentimental' role of nationalism in symbolising the 'essential community' of citizens otherwise atomised by the ascendancy of bourgeois individualism and

the cleavages of class conflict, encompassing state sovereignty with the "pseudomystical aura … [of] a 'national soul'" (1968 [1951]: 230–1). Nationalism thereby became, in Arendt's account, "the precious cement for binding together a centralized state and an atomized society" and substantiated a precisely "pseudomystical" (quasi-religious) but vital connection between individuals in and through the state, which would now be taken to embody the putative will of 'the nation' (ibid.: 231). In this manner, nationalism aspires to verify the elusive promise of what Anderson memorably depicts as a "deep horizontal comradeship" (1991: 7), or, in other words, what Étienne Balibar discerns to be a circumscribed egalitarianism that is "first and foremost, an equality in respect of nationality" (1991b: 50). In spite of the fact that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them", Anderson contends, "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991: 6) – the "community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations" (ibid.: 36).

Here, it is useful to note the resonance of these features of modern nationalism with Émile Durkheim's classic discussion of religion in the example of totemism among so-called 'primitive' Australian aboriginal peoples organised on a clan basis:

> It even seems as though the clan could not exist, in the form it has taken in a great number of Australian societies, without the totem. For the members of a single clan are not united to each other by a common habitat or by common blood, as they are not necessarily consanguineous and are frequently scattered over different parts of the tribal territory. Their unity comes solely from their having the same name and the same emblem, their believing that they have the same relations with the same categories of things, their practicing the same rites, or, in a word, from their participating in the same totemic cult. (Durkheim 1965 [1912/1915]: 194)

The example of "a plurality of individual consciousnesses [that] enter into a communion and are fused into a common consciousness" verifies the non-utilitarian and 'sentimental' (non-rational) form of association that Durkheim deems to be the essence of religion (quoted in Alexander 1982: 242). For our purposes, therefore, the beleaguered project of postcolonial French nationhood today may be seen to have been newly rejuvenated through the totemic cult of *Charlie Hebdo*. The

events of 7 January have bestowed a sentimental communion upon a (white) 'nation', emphatically disarticulated from the phantasmatic figure of 'Muslim' 'terrorism', by endowing the whole atomised aggregate of alienated ('modern', 'secular') individuals with the same name and the same emblem: *Je suis Charlie*.

"Welcome home, Charlie Brown."

Notes

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie_Hebdo_shooting#cite_ref-Pech_84-0.

2 The headline is attributed to Jean-Marie Colombani, editor-in-chief of *Le Monde*. The headline was published on 12 September 2001, but its official dateline was 13 September 2001.

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie_Hebdo_shooting#cite_ref-Pech_84-0.

4 The intensity of this new consensus is evidenced in the subsequent meltdown within the National Front, where the movement's founder Jean-Marie Le Pen's knee-jerk anti-Semitism and belittling of the Holocaust have been deemed utterly anathema to the political necessity to be aligned with the victims of the attacks, including, of course, those targeted at the Jewish supermarket. "Jean-Marie Le Pen seems to have descended into a strategy somewhere between scorched earth and political suicide," said his daughter and current National Front leader, Marine Le Pen. "His status as honorary president [of the party] does not give him the right to hijack the National Front with vulgar provocations" (Daley 2015).

5 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie_Hebdo_shooting#cite_ref-Pech_84-0.

6 The new anti-terrorism law was passed on 4 November 2014, and includes provisions for fast-track convictions.

7 For a more general account of racist policing disproportionately directed at 'minorities' in France, see Human Rights Watch (2012).

8 www.lepoint.fr/societe/charlie-hebdo-le-temoignage-de-jeannette-bougrab-compagne-de-charb-08-01-2015-1895054_23.php.

9 http://oumma.com/219542/jeannette-bougrab-sujet-de-charlie-hebdo-indigenes-de.

10 Spiegel Online International, 4 November 2014.

11 http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2015/zep130115.html.

12 www.lefigaro.fr/politique/2012/09/26/01002-20120926ARTFIG00428-cope-denonce-l-existence-d-un-racisme-anti-blanc.php.

13 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racism_in_France#Racism_against_white_French.

14 www.english.rfi.fr/france/20120927-right-wing-leader-claims-anti-white-racism-growing-france.

15 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_ban_on_face_covering.

References

Alexander, J. C. (1982) *Theoretical Logic in Sociology. Volume Two: The Antinomies of Classical Thought: Marx and Durkheim*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. New York: Verso.

Arendt, H. (1968 [1951]) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harvest/Harcourt.

Balibar, É. (1991a) 'Is There a "Neo-Racism"?' in É. Balibar and I. Wallerstein (eds) *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. New York: Verso, pp. 17–28.

Balibar, É. (1991b) 'Racism and Nationalism' in É. Balibar and I. Wallerstein (eds) *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. New York: Verso, pp. 36–67.

Bouteldja, H. (2012) 'Islamophobia: When the Whites Lose Their Triple A Rating', Decolonial Translation Group, 26 November. Available in English translation at: www.decolonialtranslation.com/english/islamophobia-when-the-whites-lose-their-triple-a-rating.html.

Bouteldja, H. (2015) 'Charlie Hebdo: The Sacred of the "Wretched of the Earth" and its Desecration', Decolonial Translation Group, 26 January. www.decolonialtranslation.com/english/harlie-hebdo-the-sacred-of-the-wretched-of-the-earth-and%20its-desecration.html.

Bouteldja, H. and M. T. Chaouch (2015) 'The Unity Trap', *Jacobin Magazine*, 4 February. www.jacobinmag.com/2015/02/charlie-hebdo-racism-movement; http://indigenes-republique.fr/the-unity-trap.

Chakrabarty, D. (2000) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Copé, J.-F. (2012) *Manifeste pour une droite décomplexée*. Paris: Fayard.

Cyran, O. (2013) '"*Charlie Hebdo*", Not Racist? If You Say So …' Translated by Daphne Lawless. Originally published in *Article 11*, 5 December. http://posthypnotic.randomstatic.net/charliehebdo/Charlie_Hebdo_article%2011.htm; www.leninology.co.uk/2015/01/charlie-hebdo-not-racist-if-you-say-so.html.

Daley, S. (2015) 'Marine Le Pen, Leader of France's National Front Party, Splits With Her Father, Its Founder', *New York Times*, 8 April. www.nytimes.com/2015/04/09/world/europe/marine-le-pen-leader-of-frances-national-front-party-splits-with-her-father-its-founder.html?emc=edit_th_20150409&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=44765954.

De Genova, N. (2007) 'The Production of Culprits: From Deportability to Detainability in the Aftermath of "Homeland Security"', *Citizenship Studies* 11 (5): 421–48.

De Genova, N. (2010a) 'Antiterrorism, Race, and the New Frontier: American Exceptionalism, Imperial Multiculturalism, and the Global Security State', *Identities* 17 (6): 613–40.

De Genova, N. (2010b) 'Migration and Race in Europe: The Trans-Atlantic Metastases of a Post-Colonial Cancer', *European Journal of Social Theory* 13 (3): 405–19.

De Genova, N. (2011) 'Spectacle of Security, Spectacle of Terror' in S. Feldman, C. Geisler and G. Menon (eds) *Accumulating Insecurity: Violence and Dispossession in the Making of Everyday Life*. Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, pp. 141–65.

De Genova, N. (2013) 'The Securitarian Society of the Spectacle' in Z. Gambetti and M. Godoy-Anativia (eds) *Rhetorics of Insecurity: Belonging and Violence in the Neoliberal Era*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 213–42.

De Genova, N. (2015) 'In the Land of the Setting Sun: Reflections on "Islamization" and "Patriotic Europeanism"', *Movements: Journal für kritische Migrations- und*

Grenzregimeforschung (*Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Research*) 1 (2). http://movements-journal.org/issues/02.kaempfe/15.de-genova--pegida-islamization-patriotic-europeanism.html.

De Genova, N. (2016) 'The European Question: Migration, Race, and Postcoloniality in Europe', *Social Text* 34 (3) [Issue #128]: 75–102.

de la Baume, M. (2015) 'Paris Announces Plan to Promote Secular Values', *New York Times*, 22 January. www.nytimes.com/2015/01/23/world/europe/charlie-hebdo-attack-leads-to-changes-in-french-schools.html.

de la Baume, M. and D. Bilefsky (2015) 'French Police Question Boy, 8, After Remarks on Paris Attacks', *New York Times*, 29 January. www.nytimes.com/2015/01/30/world/europe/french-police-questions-schoolboy-said-to-defend-charlie-hebdo-attack.html?_r=0.

Drinnon, R. (1997 [1980]) *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-hating and Empire-building*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Durkheim, É. (1965 [1912/1915]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain. New York: The Free Press/Macmillan.

Fassin, D. (2015) 'In the Name of the Republic: Untimely Meditations on the Aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* Attack', *Anthropology Today* 31 (2): 3–7.

Heller, D. (2005) 'Introduction: Consuming 9/11' in D. Heller (ed.) *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy Became a Commodity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–26.

Human Rights Watch (2012) *The Root of Humiliation: Abusive Identity Checks in France*. Human Rights Watch, 26 January. www.hrw.org/reports/2012/01/26/root-humiliation.

Lichfield, J. (2014) 'Sacking of Islamophobic Television Presenter Provokes Free-speech Row in France', *Independent*, 21 December. www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sacking-of-islamophobic-television-presenter-provokes-freespeech-row-in-france-9939085.html.

Mbembe, A. (2011) 'Provincializing France?', *Public Culture* 23 (1): 85–119.

Mondon, A. (2012a) 'France 2012: Sarkozy's Ugly Campaign', *The Conversation*, 20 April. https://theconversation.com/france-2012-sarkozys-ugly-campaign-6465.

Mondon, A. (2012b) 'Le Pen's Attacks on Islam Are No Longer Veiled', *Independent*, 27 September. www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/le-pens-attacks-on-islam-are-no-longer-veiled-8181891.html.

PIR (Parti des Indigènes de la République) (2015) 'No to the "national union" backing imperialists! Yes to an anti-racist and anti-imperialist "political union"!', PIR, 10 January. http://indigenes-republique.fr/no-to-the-national-union-backing-imperialists-yes-to-an-anti-racist-and-anti-imperialist-political-union.

Simpson, D. (2006) *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.