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A Fetid Wind of Racism Hovers Over Europe

Je Suis Charlie Chaplin

by SHLOMO SAND

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“To read the Koran is a revolting experience. After Islam is born, it distinguishes itself by its will to subjugate the world. Its nature – it is subjugation.”

— Michel Houellebecq, reported 31 August 2001.

Nothing justifies an assassination, all the more a mass murder committed in cold blood. What has happened in Paris, the beginning of January, constitutes an absolutely inexcusable crime.

To say that involves nothing original: millions of people think and feel likewise on this account. However, in the light of this appalling tragedy, one of the first questions that occurs to me is the following: in spite of the profound disgust experienced by the murders, is it obligatory to identify oneself with the victims' actions? Must I be *Charlie* because the victims were the supreme incarnation of the 'liberty of expression', as the President of the Republic has declared? Am I *Charlie*, not only because I am a secular atheist, but also because of my fundamental antipathy towards the oppressive roots of the three principal Western monotheistic religions?

Certain caricatures published in *Charlie Hebdo*, that I've seen ages ago, appeared to me to be in bad taste; only a minority amongst them made me laugh. But isn't the problem to be found there!

In the majority of the caricatures on Islam published by the weekly, in the course of the last decade, I have discerned a manipulative aggro intended to further seduce the readership, obviously non-Muslim.

The reproduction by *Charlie* of the caricatures published in the Danish magazine seemed to me appalling. Already, in 2006, I had perceived as pure provocation the drawing of Mohammed decked in a turban in the form of a bomb. This is not so much a caricature against Islamists as a stupid conflation of Islam with Terror; it's on a par with identifying Judaism with money!

It has been affirmed that *Charlie*, impartially, lays into all religions, but this is a lie. Certainly, it mocks Christians, and, sometimes, Jews. However, neither the Danish magazine, nor Charlie would permit themselves (fortunately) to publish a caricature presenting the prophet Moses, with kippah and ritual fringes, in the guise of a wily money-lender, hovering on a street corner. It is good that in the society these days called 'Judeo-Christian' (sic), it should no longer be possible to publically disseminate anti-Jewish hatred, as was the case in the not-too-distant past. I am for the liberty of expression while being at the same time opposed to racist incitement.

I admit to, gladly, tolerating the restrictions imposed on Dieudonné from expressing too far and wide his 'criticism' and his 'jokes' against Jews. On the other hand, I am positively opposed to attempts to restrain him physically. And if, by chance, some idiot attacks him, I will not be very shocked ... albeit I will not go so far as to brandish a placard with the inscription: 'je suis Dieudonné'.

In 1886, there was published in Paris *La France juive* of Edouard Drumont. And in 2014, the day of the assassinations committed by the three idiot criminals, there appears, under the title: *Soumission* [Submission], effectively Muslim France, of Michel Houellebecq. The pamphlet *La France juive* was a genuine bestseller by the end of the 19th Century. Even before its appearance in the bookstores, *Soumission* was already a bestseller!

These two books, each in its own time, have benefited from sizeable and heated media coverage. There are, certainly, differences between them. Amongst other things, Houellebecq knows that, at the beginning of the 21st Century, it is no longer acceptable to generate fear-mongering of a Jewish threat, but that it remains readily acceptable to sell books implying a Muslim threat. Alain Soral, less adept, has not understood the 'rules' and, for this fact, he is marginalized in the media – and so much the better! Houellebecq, on the other hand, has been invited, with much fanfare, to appear on the coveted 8 o'clock program (*journal de 20 heures*) of French public television, while his book is simultaneously responsible for the dissemination of the fear of Islam.

A bad wind, a fetid wind of dangerous racism, hovers over Europe: there exists a fundamental difference between challenging a religion or a dominant belief in a society, and that of attacking or inciting against the religion of a dominated minority. If, in the breast of 'Judeo-Muslim' [no less ridiculous than the Judeo-Christian label] society – in Saudi Arabia, in the Gulf Emirates – there is a groundswell of protests and warnings against the dominant religion that oppresses workers in their thousands, and millions of women, we have the responsibility to support the persecuted protestors. Now, as one well knows, Western leaders, far from encouraging the

would-be disciples of Voltaire and Rousseau in the Middle East, maintain their total support to the religious regimes the most repressive.

On the other hand, in France or in Denmark, in Germany or in Spain populated by millions of Muslim workers, more often forced into the worst jobs, at the bottom of the social scale, it is necessary to show the greatest prudence before criticizing Islam, and above all to not crudely ridicule it.

At the moment, and particularly after this terrible massacre, my sympathy goes to the Muslims who reside in ghettos adjacent to the metropolises, who are at considerable risk of becoming the second victims of the murders perpetrated at *Charlie Hebdo* and at the *Hyper Cacher* supermarket. I continue to take as a reference point the 'original Charlie': the great Charlie Chaplin who never mocked the poor and the little-educated.

Moreover, and knowing that one's writings always occur in context, how to not raise the fact that, for more than a year, so many French troops are present in Africa to 'combat the jihadists', when no serious debate has taken place in France on the usefulness or the damage of these military interventions? The colonial gendarme of yesteryear, who carries an incontestable responsibility in the chaotic heritage of [arbitrary] borders and regimes, is today 'recalled' to reinstall 'law and order' by means of its latterday neo-colonial gendarmerie.

France joins the military coalition in Iraq, beside the US military, firefighting pyromaniac, responsible for the chaos created in the region, and notably in the rise to power of the frightful 'Daesh'. Allied with the 'enlightened' Saudi leadership, and other ardent partisans of the 'liberty of expression' in the Middle East, [France] shores up the illogical border carve-up that it had imposed a century ago according to its imperialist interests. It is summoned to bombard those who threaten the precious oil reserves whose product it consumes, without understanding that, in doing so, it invites the risk of terror attacks in the heart of the metropolis.

But, in fact, it is possible that this process is well understood. The enlightened West can't possibly be the naive and innocent victim as it loves to present itself. Of course, for an assassin to kill in cold blood innocent and unarmed people it is necessary to be cruel and perverse. But it is necessary to be hypocritical or stupid to close one's eyes on the particulars that have provided the foundations of this tragedy.

This is also proof of a blindness that we had better understand: this conflict will further escalate if we don't all work together, atheists and believers, to open true ways of living together without hating each other.