

Je ne suis pas Charlie

(I am not Charlie)

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

January 12, 2015

To begin with, let me make it clear from the outset that I consider the attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* to be an atrocity and that I do not believe that it is justifiable under any circumstances to make a military target of a journalist, no matter what our opinion on the quality of his journalism may be. The same is valid in France, as it is in Colombia or in Palestine. Also, nor do I identify with any fundamentalism, whether it be Christian, Jewish or Muslim, nor indeed with Frenchified mock-secularism either, which makes a goddess of the “*République*”.

I present these necessary explanations since no matter how much the high priests of politics insist that we live under an “exemplary democracy” with “great liberties”, we all know that Big Brother is watching us and that any speech outside the script is severely punished. But I believe that to condemn the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* is not the same as celebrating a magazine that is, fundamentally, a monument to intolerance, racism and colonial arrogance.

Thousands, understandably affected by this attack, have circulated messages saying “*Je suis Charlie*” (I am Charlie), as if this message were the ultimate expression in defence of freedom. Well, then, I am not *Charlie*. I do not identify with the degrading and caricaturing representation of the Islamic world, taking place in the middle of the “War against terrorism” era, with all the racist and colonialist baggage this entails.

I cannot view with equanimity the constant symbolic aggression that has as its counterpart a physical and real aggression, which is the bombing and military occupation of countries belonging to this cultural horizon. Nor can I happily see these cartoons and their offensive texts with a light heart, when Arabs are one of the most marginalized, impoverished and exploited sectors of French society which has historically been brutally treated. I do not forget that in the early 1960s, in the Paris Metro, the police massacred 200 Algerians by clubbing, just because the latter were demanding an end to the French occupation of their country, which had already led to a total of a million dead “uncivilized” Arabs.

This is not about innocent cartoons drawn by free thinkers but rather about messages produced by mass media (yes, though in an alternative posture, *Charlie Hebdo* is part of the mass media), loaded with hatred and stereotypes reinforcing a discourse that considers the Arabs as barbarians to be contained, uprooted, controlled, repressed, oppressed and exterminated. These are messages the implicit purpose of which is to justify the invasions of Middle Eastern countries as well as the many interventions and bombings orchestrated in the West in defence of the new

imperial map. The Spanish film actor Willy Toledo controversially commented, no more than was obvious, that “*The West kills every day. Silently.*” And that is what Charlie and his black humour hides under the cover of satire.

I do not forget the front cover of *Charlie Hebdo* issue N°1099, in which it trivialized the massacre of more than a thousand Egyptians by a brutal military dictatorship which has the approval of the USA and of France, carrying a cartoon with a text declaring “*Slaughter in Egypt. The Koran is shit: it doesn't stop bullets.*” The cartoon showed a Muslim man riddled with bullets that had passed through a copy of the Koran, with which he had been trying to protect himself. Perhaps some find this funny. In their time too, the English colonists in Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, thought it funny to have photographs of themselves taken, with wide smiles and rifle in hand, a foot on the corpses of the still-warm and bleeding bodies of the native people they had hunted.

Rather than funny, that cartoon to me seems violent and colonialist, an abuse of the fictitious and manipulated western freedom of the press. How would people react if I were to design a magazine cover bearing the following text: “*Slaughter in Paris. Charlie Hebdo is shit: it doesn't stop bullets*” and made a cartoon of the deceased and gunned-down Jean Cabut holding a copy of the magazine in his hands? Clearly that would be outrageous: the life of a Frenchman is sacred. The life of an Egyptian (or Palestinian, Iraqi, a Syrian, etc.) is “humoristic” material. For that reason I am not Charlie, because for me, the life of each one of those Egyptians massacred is as sacred as is any of those caricaturists assassinated today.

We already know what to expect now: there will be speeches defending press freedom from countries which in 1999 gave their blessing to the NATO bombing of the Serbian public TV station in Belgrade, calling it “the Ministry of Lies”; countries that remained silent while Israel bombed the *Al-Manar* TV station in Beirut in 2006; those that respond with silence to the murders of Colombian and Palestinian critical journalists.

After the beautiful pro-freedom rhetoric will come the liberticide action: more McCarthyism, disguised colonial “anti-terrorism”, more colonial interventions, more restrictions of those “democratic guarantees” threatened with extinction and, of course, more racism. Europe is consumed in a spiral of xenophobic hatred, islamophobia, anti-semitism (in fact, the Palestinians are Semitic) and this atmosphere has reached unbearable levels. The Muslims are already the Jews of 21st Century Europe and neo-Nazi parties are becoming respectable again, 80 years later, thanks to this detestable feeling.

Because of all this, in spite of the feelings of repulsion engendered in me by the Paris attack, *Je ne suis pas Charlie.*

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Retrieved on 22nd December 2021 from www.anarkismo.net
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