

# CHARLIE HEBDO

## and the liberals of the world

AHMAD IBRAHIM

FOR a long time I have taken issue with the average Western-style liberal that can be found not only all over the West itself but also spread throughout other parts of the world (thanks, in no part, to the caustic machine of Western imperialism). Your average liberals can be described as well-intentioned human beings determined to end all the injus-

tics in the world by simply the power of their minds. A post-racist society can be imagined into being if you think the thought 'if I treat everyone equally then there will be no racism left' for long enough; a post-patriarchal society can come about by the same method. The problem with the 'everything is equal, everyone is equal' liberals is that they take no account of the historical context within which they place their thoughts, they take no account of the institutions that be and their overtly racist slant and pretend to view everything as neutrally placed and that by simply adopting a non-racist, non-patriarchal mindset, all the foundationally corrupt systems can be washed away. The liberal would be the first person to correct the hashtag Black Lives Matter into All Lives Matter, and would also be first in line to argue that Charlie Hebdo poked fun at Prophet and Pope alike.

What is swept under the rug at this crucial moment of analysis is basically all the historical context that has gone

behind a particular incident. Mass gatherings in Germany are protesting the rise of fundamentalists in Islam and in particular the Islamic State which has gathered pace with such brutal speed that it is a terrifying notion to comprehend. The French 'secular' government has long since been a constant perpetrator of the xenophobic culture that alienates the Muslim minority of that region. The ban on wearing any religious signs or garbs being a prime example of that. Now the liberal of the world would no doubt seize the opportunity to yell out: Well, they've banned every form of religious display, why is this in particular a problem?

The answer to that, surprisingly, isn't very difficult, should the liberal decide to step out of their zone of positive neutrality. The Christo-centric Western world may have undergone a separation of church and state, religion and culture a long time ago, but that doesn't mean the rest of the world has as well. And by treating everyone through that imperialist lens of religious departure you are, in effect, hacking away at one of the funda-

mental pillars of their group. Cultures are not the same and taking on a homogenous stance and expecting people of all cultures to respond to it similarly is analogous to setting up a hundred meter dash between a fish and a cheetah and being upset at the fish for not moving an inch.

Yes, Islamic fundamentalism is a dangerous enemy that needs to be combated and condemned with full vigour. The murder of the journalists of that satirist newspaper was a deplorable act and my heart goes out to the family of the dead. But there should be a clear distinction between mourning and condemning a horrific crime and championing Charlie Hebdo as a bastion of free speech. They ridiculed a fundamental fabric of Muslim culture and it cannot be viewed as anything other than xenophobic cultural incitement, a form of thoughtless media extremism that has been naturalised as free speech under all of our liberal-imperialist lenses.

The fallout from the Charlie Hebdo shooting has been huge. People have

come together in solidarity and stood up for what they believe to be freedom of speech. A word of the wise to these people, many of whom are liberals, is that they may need to readdress their own imperialist worldview and the methods with which they approach Islam the religion and the culture of Muslims. A homogenous method at dealing with all the religions of the world will get them nowhere other than polarising those who would otherwise have not been polarised. It's time for the do-gooding liberals to actually take notice of whether they have really been causing more damage than good with their rhetoric of equality and equal treatment for all. It's time for the colour-blind, gender-blind, culture-blind liberals such as institutions like Charlie Hebdo to factor in the historical and the social into their work. Millions of people all over the world have used the hashtag Je Suis Charlie (I am Charlie). The question is, do we really want to be?

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## Terrorism: What's Islam got to do with it?

ZAHID B. ZAMIR

TERRORISM aims to spread fear in society by killing innocent people, and threatens peace and security in an individual's life, societies, as well as countries around the globe.

In 1794, Robespierre, who carried out the French revolution, first used terrorism by sending thousands of people to guillotines. From 1870, the racist Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the United States ruthlessly used terrorism to oppress African Americans and other religious, social or ethnic groups. Racist terrorism came to Nazi Germany in the 1930s. The Nazis implemented a bloody policy of terror against all those who they thought was opposed to their ideology, beginning with Jews. Some new organisations were formed that encouraged terrorism and justified it to draw strength for their political mission.

Some deviated individuals and groups have adopted the method of destruction just to achieve political motives by using the name of the great religion of Islam, thereby blackening Islam in the eyes of many people. They might have Muslim identity, but this dreadful act cannot be labeled as Islamic terrorism just as it cannot be called Jewish terrorism if the perpetrators are Jewish or Christian terrorism if the perpetrators are Christian. That is because murdering innocent people in the name of religion is absolutely unacceptable. Religion preaches love, peace and mercy while terrorism is cruel and merciless, and brings bloodshed as well as misery.

There is no room for terrorism in Islam as it is stated in the Holy Quran (3:140) "God does not love wrong doers." In

another verse, those who resort to terrorism are referred to in this way (13:25) "As for those who cause corruption in the earth the curse will be upon them. They will have evil abode." God commands all the Muslims to bring peace, harmony and brotherhood to the world. The word Islam came from the same Arabic root as the word peace. The fundamentals characteristics of Islamic morality are virtues such as love, compassion, sacrifice, tolerance, forgiveness and justice. In the Quran God orders Muslims to treat all people well and fairly. In Verse (41; 34), God tells Muslims to respond to evil with goodness.

In Islam, life is considered to be very sacred. The first and the foremost basic right of a human being is the right to live. It has been stated in the Holy Qur'an (Ch5, V.32) that if someone kills an innocent person, it would be as if he had killed the whole of mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole of mankind. The Holy Qur'an prohibits murder in clear terms. Even in a state of war, Islam enjoins that one deal kindly with the enemy on the battlefield. Islam has drawn a clear line of distinction between the combatants and the non-combatants of the enemy country. As far as the non-combatant population is concerned, such as women, children, the old and infirm, the instructions of the Prophet (pbuh) are as follows: "Do not kill any old person, any child or any woman. Do not kill the monks in monasteries. Do not kill the people who are sitting in places of worship." Thus, in Islam non-combatants are guaranteed security of life even when their state is at war.

Terrorism in the name of Islam is not

only unislamic and unholy, it is also foolish and unwise. It is foolish because those people who are committing terrorism in the name of religion to draw strength for their political purposes have turned out to be counterproductive. Every time some so-called Muslim individuals or groups commit terrorism, they not only fail to achieve any political gain but also put the lives of millions of innocent Muslims in danger and tarnish the very good image of the great religion of Islam.

So there is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism by targeting civilians' lives and property. The condemnation of violence is deeply rooted in true Islamic values based on the Qur'anic instructions and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Regardless of how legitimate the cause may be, the Qur'an never condones killing of innocent people. Terrorising defenseless civilians, and the bombing and maiming of innocent men, women, and children are all detestable acts according to Islam. The misinterpretation of Islamic teachings has taken toll on the Muslims and has strengthened a misplaced perception that Islam is symbol of obscurantism, a religion of intolerance. Islamic Scholar Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyya said: "Islam is a mercy. If you see it's opposite, cruelty, then know that is not Islam. Islam is wisdom. If you see it going to foolishness and stupidity, then know that is not Islam. Islam is justice. If you see it going to oppression, then know that is not Islam." So, a true follower of Islam must therefore stand up against all sorts of terrorism and violence; and instead propagate peace, mercy and forgiveness.

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## Sirisena's victory signals hope for democracy in Bangladesh

*Like Rajapaksa's non-interference with the voting process and quiet surrender of power this time around, our political leaders' willingness to relinquish control if necessary is much needed.*

NAHELA NOWSHIN

SRI Lanka's long-time leader Mahinda Rajapaksa conceded a shocking defeat, losing Thursday's presidential election to his former health minister Maithripala Sirisena. Thursday's election is historical because it was the first presidential poll since term limits on the presidency were removed by Rajapaksa via a constitutional amendment in 2010. Defections on a large-scale from the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance party, including that of Sirisena, removed a two-thirds majority in parliament. Rajapaksa, in office since 2005, has been heavily criticised for his authoritarian rule marked with war crimes against Tamil civilians during the civil war. He has also been accused of corruption and nepotism for appointing family members into key positions in his administration. However, his supporters credit him for the island nation's considerable eco-

nomical growth and for ending the 25-year long civil war.

Sirisena managed to secure much of the Muslim and Tamil population's support as well as a good chunk of the Sinhalese vote. Rajapaksa's ex-ally, Sirisena, left the ruling party to join forces with the opposition in November. Sirisena's victory is astounding as his surprise candidacy was not expected to challenge, let alone end the rule of South Asia's longest serving leader. The absence of violence and vote rigging came as a pleasant surprise as many believe Sirisena's triumph to be a big win for democracy in the country. Rajapaksa's concession to hand over power peacefully was met with approval by the international community.

As Sri Lanka relishes what can be called a watershed moment for the nation's democracy, its neighbour Bangladesh faces overwhelming domestic political challenges that suspend the very ethos of democratic ideals. A year after the 2014 general elections, BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia's calls for free

and fair elections have once again resulted in widespread political turmoil in the country. Tensions have been running high since January 5, the anniversary of last year's parliamentary elections, as BNP and its allies' calls for mass protests were banned by the police. The ruling Awami League came to power last year with almost all opposition parties boycotting the voter-less elections. Sheikh Hasina's assumption of power is deemed by many as being undeserved, and concerns were raised by some about her transforming into an authoritarian. As Khaleda Zia enters her eighth day in confinement in her Gulshan office, a nationwide blockade since January 5 has gripped the lives of citizens with fear and uncertainty. Unrestricted violence such as murder and arson attacks caused by miscreants and activists has only served to deepen the political chaos facing the nation of 160 million.

Amidst all this political pandemonium lie still the hopes and dreams of ordinary citizens to witness the tri-

umph of democracy of a nation caught in the middle of two bickering political dynasties. Khaleda Zia's confinement without reason by the AL deprives the leader of her basic rights to free speech and free movement. Spraying of tear gas and firing of rubber bullets at unarmed protesters by the police deny citizens their universal right to free assembly. Absence of the rule of law and flagrant denial of civil liberties of the people by the law enforcement agencies have now become the rule rather than the exception. However, there are many that still cling onto hope that real democracy will one day replace the pseudo democracy that is now in place.

Just as we witnessed democracy make history in Sri Lanka ending Rajapaksa's decade long authoritarian rule thanks to what is believed to have been a free and fair election, it would not be naive of us to hope for a taste of true democracy in Bangladesh. AL's silencing of the calls for a fair election by using brute force are unacceptable and go against the ideals of democracy.

After having experienced decades of political standoffs, relentless domestic strikes and blockades, rampant corruption, vote rigging, never-ending violence, police brutality and violations of the rule of law, Bangladeshis yearn for a transparent electoral platform powered by and for the people. Like Rajapaksa's non-interference with the voting process and quiet surrender of power this time around, our political leaders' willingness to relinquish control if necessary is much needed. Open suspension of civil liberties of the people by those in the seats of power will continue this vicious cycle of anarchy and political foul play endured by the 43-year-old nation for far too long. If hopes of free and transparent elections materialise into reality with the help and coordination of bipartisan middle-of-the-road politics, victory of authentic democracy in Bangladesh may finally be realised.

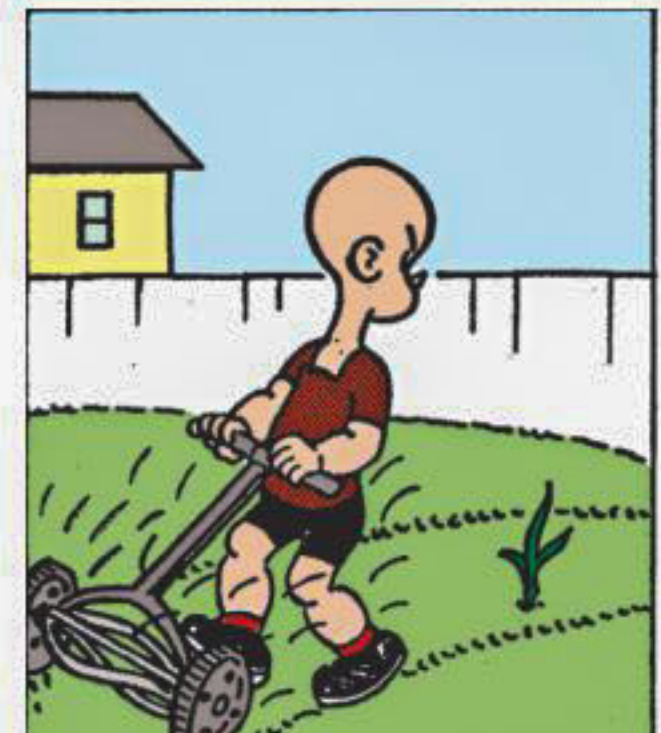
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**QUOTABLE Quote** We should be taught not to wait for inspiration to start a thing. Action always generates inspiration. Inspiration seldom generates action. Frank Tibolt

### BEETLE BAILEY



### HENRY



**AXYDLBAAXR IS LONGFELLOW** One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.