



# Je Suis Ahmed (I am Ahmed)

NADIA KABIR BARB

2015 has not started the way one might have hoped. We had barely completed the first week of the New Year when the news of the attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo shocked the world. Three armed gunmen bearing Kalashnikovs attacked the magazine's offices in Paris leaving twelve people dead including the editor of the magazine and two national police officers. The attackers were subsequently identified as two brothers: Chérif and Said Kouachi together with Hamyd Mourad. They claimed to be part of Al Qaeda.

The magazine is known for its irreverent and quite frequently provocative articles, reports and cartoons and has over the years courted controversy with no politician, religious leader or even religion being off limits. It is thought that the killings were provoked by the numerous cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammed. Once again a few extremist lunatics have carried out an act of barbarism and done so in the name of Islam. It definitely is not in the name of the Islam I believe in. The condemnation of the attack was worldwide and so it should be.

In the current clime where Islamophobia appears to be on the rise in the West, the Charlie Hebdo incident has added fuel to the fire. This time sadly the French Muslims are to bear the consequences of the backlash. Security guard Mohammed Aklit, who is a worshipper at the mosque the two brothers were thought to have frequented, feels that the massacre would end up fuelling more hatred of Muslims. "Which is just ... wrong. Because my Islam, the Islam of so many of us, is a modern, moderate Islam. It's about communication, respect, tolerance, understanding", he said.

The few days subsequent to the shootings, there has been an increase in the number of anti-Islamic attacks including a grenade attack on one mosque, shots fired in another, a pig's head left outside one mosque with a letter stating "the next time it will be the head of one of yours" (The Telegraph), an explosion in a kebab shop and shots fired at a Muslim family in a car. How do you explain to these people that not every Muslim can be held responsible for the atrocities committed by others? In fact one of the policemen killed in the attack was a Muslim, his

name was Ahmed Merabet. His brother Malek Merabet, said, "My brother was a Muslim. He was killed by people who pretend to be Muslims." He also said in a eulogy for Ahmed that "One must not confuse extremists with Muslims. Madness has no colour nor religion".

Since the incident in Paris, "Je Suis Charlie" or "I am Charlie" has become a slogan that has taken over the social media. It has been adopted by some as a slogan for free speech and freedom of expression, to others it is a way to show their support for the victims of the Charlie Hebdo murders.

be made or something insightful then it may be justifiable. However, in my opinion there is something to be said for responsible journalism. I think it is in human nature to push boundaries and challenge authority but I also believe we should have the decency to be able to respect the ideologies, cultures or beliefs of others. There is a fine line I think between satire and being gratuitously offensive.

The Charlie Hebdo cartoons are not to my taste but I am fully aware that the magazine has the right to publish whatever materials they wish to do so. Would I find it funny if a comedian chooses to make



People take part in a Unity rally "Marche Republicaine" at the Place de la Nation (Nation square) in Paris in tribute to the 17 victims of a three-day killing spree by terrorists. The killings began on January 7 with an assault on the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine in Paris.

PHOTO: AFP

I asked myself if I was "Charlie" and after some soul searching I came to the conclusion that I was not. I without a doubt wish to show my solidarity for the victims and their families and believe in free speech and freedom of expression. But I keep asking myself whether as a writer or journalist I should choose to write an article regardless of how vitriolic, provocative or offensive it may be just because I can? Should I exercise my judgement and consider the consequences of such an article or should I exercise my right to free speech? If it has a particular point to

jokes about a rape victim or crack jokes about child abuse? Most definitely not but they would have every right to do so as it falls under free speech.

Another slogan that has been spreading on twitter is #JeSuisAhmed (I am Ahmed) and this is the one that I do subscribe to. It shows solidarity with the slain police officer Ahmed Merabet. As one user, identified as @Aboujahjah, said quite aptly: "I am not Charlie, I am Ahmed the dead cop. Charlie ridiculed my faith and culture and I died defending his right to do so." ■