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Violence, Transcendence and Spectacle in the Age of Social Media:

#JeSuisCharlie Demonstrations and Hollande's Speech

After the 2015 Terrorist Attacks

Barbara Osorio DeSoto

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Kerry Soper

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## ABSTRACT

Violence, Transcendence and Spectacle in the Age of Social Media:  
#JeSuisCharlie Demonstrations and Hollande's Speech  
After the 2015 Terrorist Attacks

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This study examines the reactions — both in real life and on social media — to two terrorist attacks in Paris: satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 and the Bataclan shooting in November 2015. Using Richard Sennett's *Fall of Public Man* and Antonin Artaud's *Le théâtre et son double* to explore these reactions as theater, this approach reveals the religious nature of supposedly secular reactions to religious extremism.

Keywords: theater, satire, terrorism, violence, social media, Charlie Hebdo, Bataclan, Richard Sennett, Antonin Artaud, Emmanuel Todd, France, Paris

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## I. Introduction

The 2014 terrorist attacks on French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* became a social media sensation almost immediately, much like the later attacks on Paris that same year. All over social media, profile pictures were changed to the tricolor and hashtag solidarity fomented a seemingly united Western front against terrorism. Much of the apparent unequivocal support for freedom of speech, however, can be analyzed as a sort of spectacle after each of these terrible events, a message communicated by the state and the elites that usually control it: the #JeSuisCharlie marches in January, and President Hollande's speech after the November attacks. Complete with a *mise en scène*, costumes, music, props, and spectators in France and around the world, conveying a message that re-contextualizes the simple facts of the events, the spectacles themselves constitute a massive secular ritual that was encouraged and exploited by the state and its elite allies who heavily influence traditional media. However, in spite of the spoken message of the performances, the French state appears not to foment, but to syphon and even extinguish expression in order to channel the narrative power of the terrorist acts into political, and ultimately, economic power. Participation on social media added breadth to the *mise en scène*, expanding the spectacle's potential audience and legitimizing its message – that blasphemy against Islam represents the essence of Republican values. The ensuing debates after the attacks concerning free speech and censorship are nothing new; social media, on the other hand, represents new territory for public expression, namely, of interaction. But these new platforms – ultimately neoliberal in nature – actually serve to facilitate state control, supporting the spectacle with yet another illusion, that of democratization of expression and communal interaction, and forcing expression into a binary good-evil narrative prone to symbolic simplification. We will examine, through the two spectacle events and their extension into the sphere of social media,

how this symbolization occurs, who appears to mold the narrative, and the potential dangers concerning what it ultimately could be used to accomplish.

This study will explore spectacle in this interactive layer of social media, in the context of which we will analyze Sennett’s “social geography” and the expressive acts surrounding it. We will approach two “spectacles” – the January 2015 #JeSuisCharlie demonstrations, and the speech of French President François Hollande following the terrorist attacks later that year – and analyze them using two spectacle-expression theories: Richard Sennett’s *Fall of Public Man*, and Antonin Artaud’s *Le Théâtre et son double*, paying special attention to religiously coded language, ritualistic forms of expression, and the obfuscation of Western violence. Finally, we will discuss problematic illusions of social media, contrasting 2009’s #iranelection with the *Charlie and Invalides* “spectacles.”

It is from a political and media ambiance in which the discussion of the horrific and unconscionable terrorist attacks and their victims was not only dominant, but necessary. Though it is undeniable that moral judgments can and should be made concerning the facts of these events, my goal here is not to emphasize or explore them as an end itself, but to search beyond and beneath them, to the underlying historical and rhetorical forces that move upon our very affective involvement with the victims and their story. Indeed, as we will establish, the violence itself is heavily implicated in my analysis of the commemorative events as theater. Therefore, my mention, if any, of the terrorist violence and the moral outrage that naturally followed from this point will be accompanied by deeper analysis, though this is not intended to negate or obscure the attacks’ tragic violence.

## II. *Charlie Hebdo* and the failing old media

The terrorist attacks on the Paris offices of satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7, 2015, made an immediate global impression, undoubtedly due to the reach of instant Internet news and social networks. Two masked men armed with assault rifles forcibly entered the office building that housed the magazine's editorial operations and killed 12 of its staff, including 5 of the publication's cartoonists. The attackers also targeted a Kosher grocery store. As the world watched France's reaction – including marches of solidarity with the victims throughout the country – pundits, journalists, academics, and politicians began a debate that has examined *Charlie Hebdo* and the violence perpetrated against it from every angle, usually treating the validity of the magazine's satire and caricature, and often declaring that satire as freedom of expression is essential and inviolate. But *Charlie Hebdo*, itself a little-read niche publication with falling<sup>1</sup> circulation – around 60,000 before the attacks (“Post-attack *Charlie Hebdo* weekly circulation tops 7 million”) – created in the long-accepted tradition of gross political caricature, is much less revolutionary than pundits hope, and in the end, less important than the outsized reaction on new media to its demise would indicate. Months later, in November 2015 and along the route of the #JeSuisCharlie march in Paris, gunmen opened fire on a crowd at the Bataclan theater on Boulevard Voltaire, killing 90 people and injuring, even torturing, many others. Coordinated attacks in locations throughout the capital were carried out simultaneously, notably at the Stade de France. The terrorist acts, more brutal and deadly than the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, awoke France anew to the threat of terrorism, and a solemn ceremony to commemorate the

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<sup>1</sup> By comparison, leftist newspaper *Libération* “At its peak, in 2001, ... enjoyed a circulation over 170,000, though this has fallen to around 105,000 as of 2013.” (France24)



victims was held weeks later at *Les Invalides*, featuring President Hollande, a choir singing “*La Marseillaise*” and a performance of Jacques Brel’s classic pop song “*Quand on n’a que l’amour.*”

Though *Charlie Hebdo* was known for its crass, outspoken satire, and perhaps more for threats against it prior to the January 7 attacks, it was in reality a niche publication appealing to a very small group; for example, when compared to left-wing journal *Libération*’s 170,000 circulation, at its height (“Iconic French newspaper *Libération* in crisis as editor-in-chief steps down”), *Charlie Hebdo* was a small player in French media. Luz, the publication’s lone surviving cartoonist said « Les médias ont fait une montagne de nos dessins alors qu’au regard du monde on est ... un petit fanzine de lycéen » (Les InRocks). And, as Emmanuel Todd points out, it was re-launched after the attacks with the financial support of the French government (Todd, 13) after the magazine failed to gain enough public support to save it from closure. As has happened everywhere, print-first publications that limit their reach to the distribution of physical copies have struggled to survive since the rise of social networks and Internet news, with effectively-adapted business models proving elusive. As social media took hold, *Charlie Hebdo*’s reach remained bound to hard copies, with the public favoring publications that played the social network game, allowing free and immediate access. Why then was this floundering, marginally popular publication internationally mourned as a martyr for freedom of expression? Examining the theatrical nature of France’s reactions to these terrorist attacks informs the answer.

### III. Spectacle and its interpretations: the #JeSuisCharlie marches and Hollande's speech at the memorial ceremony

Artaud's *Le théâtre et son double* provides a critical lens for spectacle, and therefore of these specific ritual scenes of citizens reacting to the attacks. His theory of violence as a visceral, irresistible act supports the categorization of terrorism as expression, placing it in the category of spectacle, but outside Western limits of acceptable behavior and of rationality. « J'écris pour agir » as Voltaire said, summarizes the modern moral distinction between hurting with words and hurting with physical brutality — an earlier, continental version of “the pen is mightier than the sword,” highlighting the supremacy and power of rational argumentation. This is exactly the conflict Artaud effectively highlights: modern man is numb to reality inasmuch as he is incapable of seeing what is real – the brutality of life, its cruelty, « le langage physique » (54) – on display in the wordless space of the theater. If the terrorist act is really “Act I” of the play, the violence jolts us awake to consider this reality. In France and throughout the world, that awakening primed the masses for action (how effective an action will be addressed in Chapter IV). In Act II, the #JeSuisCharlie demonstrations, the crowds and their hashtag comrades on social media responded in Western fashion, and with what Artaud would likely see as causing the psychic struggle of modern times: language, and rather more problematic, its falsehood. Sennett defines the shift from *emotional presentation* to *emotional representation* – the result of which Artaud detests – as reacting to a change in belief about human expressivity in an age of obscured social codes (42): “When a culture shifts from believing in presentation of emotion to representation of it, so that individual experiences reported accurately come to seem expressive, then the public man loses a function, and so an identity. As he loses a meaningful identity, expression itself becomes less and less social.” (Sennett, 102). Absent the structuring social

codes of a world of feudal unequals, the supposedly equal people of the modern world are left without the bearings that would have otherwise anchored and contextualized the meaning of their expression without the need to remove that feeling from the self. In modern political discourse, that meaning is neither evident nor objective. The subjectivity of expression and of its interpretation alters interaction, and creates room for interference and manipulation. In the case of *Charlie* and the Bataclan memorial, that manipulation may be interpreted as being imbued with religious language and even constituting a totalitarian impulse, as I will explain later in this chapter. Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies*, emphasizes that mythology itself being a system of language, “It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writing or of representations” (110).

The language of the *Charlie* crowds and the media covering them, while pointing specifically and emphatically to Voltaire, and extolling secularism, is in reality full of religious undertones and meaning. I will demonstrate later in this chapter how this contradiction plays out in spectacle. And while the marchers and the media condemned the terrorists’ violence, they used violence as propulsion for their own argument – an “incantation” of the cult of rationality by the *metteur en scène* who functions as « une sorte d'ordonnateur magique, un maître de cérémonies sacrées » (Artaud, 90). This #JeSuisCharlie « communion » (Fourest) honoring freedom of expression – a clearly modern value – fits Sennett’s definition of secular charisma: “a rational way to think about politics in a culture ruled by belief in the immediate, the immanent, the empirical, and rejecting as hypothetical, mystical, or ‘pre-modern’ belief in that which cannot be directly experienced” (Sennett, 276). Here, the pre-modern coincides with the pre-Revolutionary period of emotional presentation that Sennett describes. But for #JeSuisCharlie, secular charisma is paradoxical because while those involved in or reporting on the Republican

march made certain allusions to the Enlightenment which demonstrate that participants explicitly reject the mystical, they subtly and simultaneously use a distinctly religious lexicon to extol Enlightenment (Republican) values, thus bestowing on them the characteristics and reverence of religious devotion. The focus on individual experience among the marchers — particularly the emotional draw of being part of something bigger, connected to something higher like Revolutionary values — is a mystical impulse antithetical to a protest for *laïcité*. In the spectacle of #JeSuisCharlie, the wordlessness was sufficient only for so long before the litany began; indeed, the words or “masks” that Artaud eschews and that Sennett sees as necessary (35), cover up the ritual impulses beneath. Todd elucidates: « Les médias communiaient dans la dénonciation du terrorisme, dans la célébration du caractère admirable du peuple français, dans la sacralisation de la liberté et de la République. *Charlie Hebdo* et ses caricatures de Mahomet étaient sanctuarisés. ... Les chaînes de télévision et la presse nous répétaient en boucle que nous vivions un moment « historique » de communion » (Todd, 11-12). Communion, a gathering and sharing of intimate spiritual feelings, here underlines the mystical overtones of the media’s characterization of these public gatherings. Though the media – in reality, a group of many people from many organizations – may not have been empowered to truly influence the feelings of individual participants, it at least heavily promoted a singular idea of their motivation in its coverage and frequently and liberally used religious language like this to describe it. This is certainly not the first time in French history that the media’s power has surfaced to train a news story into a divisive narrative affecting national identity: Zola’s polemic *J’Accuse !* comes to mind from the days of the Dreyfus affair.

As we look at that overpowering influence the media had, contextualizing the terrorist acts and defining the meaning of collective feeling, the question of the identity of the *metteur en*

*scène* is of utmost importance. Here, Artaud's theory helps us understand how the wordlessness of the Republican communion easily lent itself to interpretation. Referring to the Balinese theater, or what he considers « le théâtre pur », Artaud insists on « la prépondérance absolue du metteur en scène dont le pouvoir de création élimine les mots. ... le foisonnement compliqué de tous les artifices scéniques qui imposent à notre esprit comme l'idée d'une métaphysique l'idée d'une utilisation nouvelle du geste et de la voix » (Artaud, 80). Theater according to Artaud shares with the #JeSuisCharlie gatherings both a yearning for transcendence and an underlying violence. Sociologist Emmanuel Todd links these characteristics with those whom he considers the creators of both scenes – the Republican march, and Hollande's solemn assembly: according to him participants are “zombie Catholics,” erstwhile anti-Revolutionary Catholic zealots who, having recently left Catholicism, are prone to displays of religiously-charged, inegalitarian secularism (Todd, 64) and desperately in need of an ideological foil (65). Using maps of sociological and economic data of the last century, Todd identifies the most enthusiastic *Charlie* supporters (outside of Paris) with those who are also in favor of neoliberal projects like the Maastricht treaty's introduction of the Euro – in other words, France's elite classes and those who similarly benefit from liberalization. As if providing proof of the state's explicit sanction of the march/spectacle, several heads of state appeared in newspapers like *Le Monde* marching, apparently (but not really, as explained on page 9), at the head of the emotive crowd. As Sennett argues, the spontaneity of expression became the hallmark of what moderns yearn for – to feel something, even vicariously, even in politics. His example of this redemptive expression as a scandal-ridden Richard Nixon crying over his dog Checkers on a radio broadcast shows the public's willingness to worship the “artist” or the politician's expressive act, rather than look at his political acts. This is perhaps the nut of modern politics' most vexing problems, Sennett says:

politicians need not be authentic; they must only appear so (Sennett, 281). Political expression is divorced from political action as the audience is convinced not by real-world action, but by the emotion conveyed and felt by the subjective individual. This is how, for *Charlie* marchers and the world that watched along, the tableau of Angela Merkel et al linking arms, against a backdrop of a Parisian boulevard that stretches to the horizon, was framed to declare a universalism that their position and political priorities directly contradicted. Yet this seems not to matter to those involved in this ritual worship of secularism. As Todd further points out, the police – traditionally seen as protectors of the status quo – were there, too, revealing « les objectifs concrets de la manifestation pour atteindre ses valeurs latentes ». While the march nominally communicated an opposition to violence and a call to peaceful demonstration in the face of that violence, it included a show of force, presented in a way more palatable to those who might suspect the motives of the police were impure. Some on Twitter even expressed that on that day, they *liked* the police; the implication, of course, is that on other days *on se méfie d'eux*. Todd continues : « Il s'agissait avant tout d'affirmer un pouvoir, une domination, objectif atteint en défilant en masse, derrière *son* gouvernement et sous le contrôle de *sa* police » (Todd, 87, original emphasis). The very character of the *metteur en scène* is in conflict with the message of its spectacle: elites under police protection and with sanction of the government march in apparent solidarity, identifying themselves with the victims despite the enormous power they wield in the society. Only months later the same police sought to put down protests against neoliberal-oriented changes to French labor law (see Chrisafis, “Riot police crack down on Paris protests against labor reform”).

In addition to photos framed to portray heads of state as more in solidarity with crowds than they actually were, digitally altered photos of the march appeared in newspapers around the

world and on social media, each including or excluding certain leaders or groups. Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy allegedly elbowed his way into the front row of world leaders who were pictured linking arms (“Sarkozy: comment il a réussi à être sur la photo des chefs d'Etat”). This, unlike the instance of an Israeli newspaper using digital editing to delete women leaders in order to appease conservative groups in Israel (“Israeli newspaper edits out Angela Merkel from front page on Paris march.”), was not merely a concession to strict social mores. The intent of those in power to be included in the published depiction of the *communion* and the deliberate image-making it constitutes is yet another area in which those in the media exert enormous power over interpretation of the spectacle. Sennett’s theory on theater explains how this kind of falsification can be convincing, or at least remain unquestioned. Sennett sees the inversion of the theater and the city as a degradation of expression in modern times and, certainly, the inversion causes confusion at the very least; more dangerously, it is prone to deceptions like the doctored or staged photos of marching presidents. This confusion is perhaps how the spectacle of the *marche Républicaine* can encapsulate both the irresistible violence of pre-modern theater and the wordy, dialogue-driven façade of modern European spectacle: Sennett acknowledges our modern anxiety about what constitutes the *real self* — the inner self versus the individual represented and interpreted then from the outside — while Artaud identifies this conflict as the perversion “pure theater” (92) rightly excludes; he seems to want to access a time when this anxiety didn’t exist, and the key to it is the ineffable cruelty of violence. The march used both of these theatrical methods: the violence of the terrorist attacks wakes up the spectators without words, while the media’s interpretation of it depends on an established vocabulary and cultural shorthand to communicate its message. This, according to Barthes is mythology itself: the linguistic sign becomes the signified of a second semiotic layer embedded within the first (111). There would

perhaps be no glorious call to arms, no seductive, purpose-affirming violence to write about and to draw in spectators *without* the atrocities of the terrorist attacks, so the *metteur en scène* must appropriate it. One need not justify the violence that destroyed *Charlie Hebdo* or terrorized Parisians at the Bataclan, which the media appropriated, to admit these acts were not isolated violence, presented in the spectacle: the *metteurs en scène* have kept other violence – for example, colonial violence and modern state-waged violence – hidden behind the curtain. When this “offstage” violence is mentioned, certain media/elites are there to make sure the audience’s focus is redirected to the stage, to what is currently being depicted, to the recent violence enacted by terrorists. The message is clear: Islamist violence is the *real* problem. The emotional performances and theatrical devices – like the cameras focusing on Hollande’s emotional response and the singing of *La Marseillaise* following his speech at the solemn memorial after the Bataclan attacks – are meant to pull spectators into the communal, emotional fervor.

The writings of secular *guerrière* and journalist Caroline Fourest are useful as a stand-in viewpoint encompassing many arguments presented in the press and on social media after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, and they appear together in her book, published a year after the attacks. She has taken it upon herself to speak for what she considers the “real left” of French society – those who share her particular unequivocal views. Fourest celebrates the #JeSuisCharlie demonstrations as a triumph of Republican fervor, attacking its doubters and unconsciously affirming its religious nature. In her emotional missive, or religious sermon, *L’Éloge du Blasphème*, she brooks no mention of colonialism – again, it must remain behind the curtain for the illusion to work on spectators. Her melodramatic description of « les deux gauches » even goes so far as to impugn anyone who doesn’t confess the faith of *Charlie Hebdo*, like the “good” leftists do, as heretics to the Enlightenment: « La gauche communautariste, elle, se méfie des



lumières et de son idéal d'émancipation, qu'elle perçoit comme la poursuite d'une « mission civilisatrice ». Elle s'est bâtie dans le rejet du colonialisme et de l'imaginaire postcolonial, qu'elle croit voir à l'oeuvre dans tout discours critique ou simplement laïque sur l'islam. Peu importe si ces discours ne visent que son instrumentalisation haineuse et totalitaire, l'islam reste à ses yeux la religion du pauvre, du colonisé, du « damné de la terre » » (Fourest, 57). Notice her attack begins with the accusation that these *communitaristes* don't worship *Les Lumières*. Her denial of the Revolution's undeniably deliberate « mission civilisatrice » with its particularly violent manifestation is not simply myopic, but strategic. The goal is to redirect the spectator to the immersive power of the stage. She accuses her adversaries of generalizing the way she does. In the same vein, Olivier Roy, in a book of essays *Qui es Daesh ?*, Briefly mentions social conditions as contributors to radicalization, but quickly pivots to reassign the source of violence singularly to Islam: « Bref, il faut se méfier d'une explication, populaire à « gauche », selon laquelle l'exclusion sociale et le conflit Israélo-Palestinien radicaliseraient les jeunes » (Morin, 14). From this, it seems the conditions for Muslims in France can have no real bearing on their disposition to violence, but they are as Muslims inherently violent. Roy uses quotes around the word « gauche », meaning, not the *real* left, a view that coincides with Fourest's. It is perhaps no coincidence that Emmanuel Todd's *Qui est Charlie ?* is titled similarly and that in it, Todd *emphasizes* the unfavorable social conditions to which immigrants are relegated by the elite quest for « une idole monétaire ». He further argues that the march itself is a kind of violence acted out by the elites against the poor: « Dans le contexte du chômage de masse, d'une discrimination à l'embauche des jeunes d'origine maghrébine, d'une diabolisation incessante de l'Islam par des idéologues installés au sommet de la société française, à la télévision comme à l'Académie, on ne saurait souligner assez la violence rentrée dans la manifestation du 11

janvier » (Todd, 87). He turns the the tables on the leftists of Fourest's ilk and attributes the problems of terrorist violence to factors emanating from the politics, especially the monetary and trade policy, of the elite. The same police marching in solidarity with *Charlie* and celebrating freedom of expression in 2015 turned on its citizens who came out in protest against neoliberal labor reform in 2016 (Chrisafis, "Riot police..."). The economic priorities of the police and the government from which it takes its directives are thus made clear.

The leftist media reaction against Todd's claims rather openly betrays that the march represented a religious instinct rather than, as claimed, an enlightened rationality, and that Todd's observations of their underlying economic motivation struck a nerve. *Libération's* May 4, 2015 cover proclaimed his book constituted « Blasphème contre le 11 janvier ». One can only blaspheme that which is sacred, so *Libération's* outrage explicitly attributes qualities of inviolate sacredness to the 11 January Republican march, to the Republican values it claimed to extol, and shows the left was enraged at Todd's assertion. We will address later why the reaction is so pronounced. Fourest's « droit absolu au blasphème » it appears, is only for those who blaspheme religion of others, not the sacred secularism of the state. According to Todd, France's elites orchestrated the day's ritual, and the ordinary French, accepted and repeated the symbols unconsciously. Here it is worth noting that perhaps Todd goes too far in portraying the elites as a monolithic entity. Much like the media, the term is a collective one encompassing many people from varying backgrounds. Logically, it would be not only unfair but more importantly untrue to say that France's elites are colluding in some grand scheme. Moreover, to claim the same sheep-like blind faith is simply what moved ordinary French people is condescending at best. While Barthes' discussion of mythology is again useful in understanding the response of marchers: when symbolic (semiotic) systems such as myth is offered for interpretation, "as meaning, the

signifier already postulates a reading” (117), Gramsci reaffirms the « the difficulty at any given time, statically (like fact is at an instantaneous photographic image) the structure » (191), in this case, the structure that affords elites the potential for crafting a message. However, Todd’s claims are certainly worth considering for his demonstration of a strong statistical and cultural connection between Catholics of the past and the marchers of today – a group who do seem to have replaced zealous Catholicism with zealous Republicanism. Again, the spectacle’s message contradicts its reality in its yearning for a "revolutionary utopia" (McKenna).

The disconnect can be explained : we may look to René Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* to interpret what Todd observed in the grand spectacle of the march: “As we have seen, the sacrificial process requires a certain degree of *misunderstanding*... The celebrants do not and must not comprehend the true role of the sacrificial act” (Girard, 7, emphasis added). Again, this is not to say that the French who participated had no idea what was going on, but points to the obfuscation that occurs when concrete facts are rendered symbolic. Fourest makes the important point that the satirists perpetrated no *physical* violence on the Muslim population in its abuse of the prophet’s image (Fourest, 39), and the distinction, as noted above, is meant to strengthen the moral and cultural position of *Charlie* by alluding to Voltaire (Todd, 88; Voltaire, 13). Drawn by the emotional power of the march’s proffered *communion*, the crowd believes in the representation and the reason given for its existence: to defend freedom of expression. Fourest then, with more religious language, underlines her incredulity at anyone harboring a grudge against *Charlie* for its expression, its unrelenting depictions of Mahomet even after the attacks:

« « Offensant »? Un Mahomet qui pleure en disant « Je suis Charlie » . Un dessinateur qui écrit au-dessus du personnage « Tout est *pardonné* ». Que voulait-il de plus après un tel massacre? Que Charlie s'excuse de s'être fait tirer dessus ? Qu'ils dessinent à *genoux en train d'implorer* Mahomet? Avec cette couverture,

*Charlie a tendu l'autre joue et prône le pardon. De façon presque, chrétienne* » (39, emphasis added).

Once again, her language is driven by religious notions that bolster *Charlie's* moral high ground in the fight against religion, supposedly in general, but really Islam in particular. If *Charlie* is, as Todd posits, the symbol for the broader French society in crisis, then Fourest's insistence on *Charlie's* own pious, "presque chrétienne" attitude and lack of physical violence, and her acknowledgement of the severe divides within French society's political landscape set a scene that fits Todd's description of the "religious crisis" itself. It also aligns with what Girard describes as the impetus for sacrificial violence: "When unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim... chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand" (Girard, 2), "exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants. Their status as foreigners or enemies, their servile condition, or simply their age prevents these future victims from fully integrating themselves into the community" (12). He clarifies that the victim's guilt or innocence are less important than the sacrifice's purpose: for society "to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a 'sacrificable' victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect" (4).

While Fourest's attacks appear exaggerated, the most troubling aspect of her argument is her contradictory implications: that 1) Revolutionary values are not racist in themselves and that 2) her faction of France's left represents the *true* form of *laïcité*. This presents a contradiction, first because, as Abbé Grégoire's writings explicitly state, cultural assimilation was always the condition for integration into France's ideal society of equals (see *De la littérature des Nègres*); second, *laïcité* in France did not operate even in 1905 as it does now (see "Loi de 1905: Yann Moix vs. Nathalie Kosciusko Morizet"), so those who claim to be purists for *laïcité* would also need to accept the original intent of the *Loi de 1905*. This poses a problem for leftists on

Fourest's side, because the Revolution's demand for cultural assimilation remains in force: those who we might call "true disciples" of the Revolution such as Fourest, and possibly the marchers implicitly accept the imposition of those conditions on all who desire to be part of the Republic, or else, remain unequal to the rest of society. If true, then Fourest at best minimizes the subjection of Muslims who have not met the imagined requirements of cultural assimilation (which for them is intrinsically linked to religion), allowing them to fall outside the guarantees of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, all in the name of affirming Republican values.

Fourest writes 184 pages in order to protect members of her group from such accusations – the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists in particular, and the left – *her left* – more broadly. Her particular use of Christian motifs, mixed with vague allusions to Enlightenment ideologies, suggests an audience who responds to both. Her language echoes that of the first Republican zealot, Robespierre who, unlike Fourest, admits to the need for religion in the Republic, though he *consciously* and unabashedly replaced Christianity with "Enlightenment values." In his discourse « Sur le rapport des idées religieuses et morales avec les principes républicains et sur les fêtes nationales, » he does not wholly eschew religion, but transforms Christian ideas to fit the framework of the Republic for the support of moral behavior, and to appeal to the authority that binds the people under that of the state; he does not disavow violence, but expects it and even encourages martyrdom as glorious on behalf of the Republic:

« L'idée de l'Être-Suprême et de l'immortalité de l'âme est un rappel continuel à la justice; elle est donc sociale et républicaine... Le chef-d'oeuvre de la société serait de créer en lui pour les choses morales un instinct rapide qui, sans le secours tardif du raisonnement, le portât à faire le bien et à éviter le mal ; car la raison particulière de chaque homme égaré par ses passions n'est souvent qu'un sophiste qui plaide leur cause, et l'autorité de l'homme peut toujours être attaquée par l'amour-propre de l'homme. Or, ce qui produit ou remplace cet instinct précieux, ce qui supplée à l'insuffisance de l'autorité humaine, c'est le

sentiment religieux qu'imprime dans les âmes l'idée de la sanction donnée aux préceptes de la morale par une puissance supérieure à l'homme » .

He does not insist upon *reason* as a motivator to do right, and in fact warns against legislated atheism. Unlike the post-1905 equivalency of Republican values with atheism, Robespierre recognized the tendency toward belief among the once-Catholic French, using the language of Catholicism to convert them to the doctrines of secularism. Alexis de Tocqueville later explained that contrary to what the French believed about themselves — and I add, especially what they still believe — their « sortie » from religion didn't leave them empty of transcendent feeling, but redirected their faith to « ces sentiments et ces passions [qui] étaient devenus pour eux comme une religion nouvelle » (Tocqueville, 251). That religion is *laïcité*, but enough time has passed since Robespierre's era that it is no longer new, and it has given birth to its own dogmas. Roger Chartier explains that the Catholic Reformation regulated and universalized the basic identity of French Catholics — who until then were all over the map in terms of practice — with “repetition of the same gestures [that] implanted in everyone a direct awareness of belonging and furnished vital reference point that lent meaning to the world and existence” (Chartier, 95); similarly the law of 1905 with its official break from Catholicism and introduction of state-run schools reformed the French mentality and the gestures of worship in the secular state. Robespierre could not have done better himself. From this comes the reaction of « la foule », the “zombie Catholics” of Todd's definition, who likewise tend to gestures of secular religious fervor, and whose hostility to and fixation on their intended victim's religious attachments paradoxically blinds them to their own religious tendencies.

Fourest, in repeating the victimhood of *Charlie's* cartoonists as « des journalistes morts à cause de leur courage » (Fourest, 35, original emphasis), also taps the power of Artaud's concept

of *théâtre de la cruauté* to underline not only *Charlie*'s victimhood but its *martyrdom* for the cause of blasphemy; she calls to those who will hear the news of it as a call to arms. If Girard is correct that sacrificial violence must play out, so is Todd, who points out the possible motives – interestingly, economic – for which French society may need a « bouc émissaire » : he says the same group (les classes moyennes supérieures) who receives the most from the welfare state presents itself « désormais, systématiquement, comme victimes d'impôt. Mais cette représentation en victimes n'exprime en France que le pouvoir idéologique de ces couches privilégiées » (Todd, 94). The spectacle, once again, reassigns victimhood to divert the spectator's attention from the reality of economic circumstances to which the elite class has exposed France, including those in the *banlieues*.

The reversed economic victimhood echoes itself socially and explains how the *Charlie* crowds can march with total support of the Western world *and* in company of the country's most powerful and still consider themselves the victims. But to a society indoctrinated – by years of imbibing its own historiography – to glorify a martyr's death in the name of Republican values, and yet to which perpetrating explicit violence is forbidden, the more appropriate and more complex way to sacrifice its victim is to draw upon itself the insupportable violence. It's a sort of trap for the outsider whose conscious values are dissimilar, who may even proudly martyr himself in the process. In reality, secularism functions in France as a religion like Islam — a belief system aimed at the progress of humanity — but this is not evident in the spectacle's recounting of the story. The roles are set, and each character's performance is staged in a way that ensures that the *other*'s (as in, he who does not belong) behavior will be interpreted by the spectator as the *metteur en scène* desires. The sacrifice here is split into two parts : victim of violence (insider scapegoat), and bearer of blame (outsider scapegoat). Guilt is transferred as the

marginalised other – in this case a radicalized Muslim youth – becomes the sacrificer and the perpetrator of atrocities on a victim. Hidden from view and perpetrating the illusion that his violent outburst is not what Girard describes as an unhinged cycle of violence, is the violence perpetrated against Muslims in France and abroad by Western forces. These forces need not necessarily be military, as Todd points out (87): they often manifest within Europe as economic and societal rejection, oppression and isolation. Once again, the maneuvers of Fourest's left to diminish these facts of life for a Muslim in France operate to present Muslim violence as expected, though condemnable. When an outsider scapegoat commits violence, perhaps drawn to a similar transcendent purpose as the Republican marchers unknowingly were, the sacrifice can be completed, and the powerful of the group can remain untouched by the violence it publicly loathes and from which it privately might gain so much. Guilt is expunged, someone else has perpetrated the violence of the blood sacrifice and is therefore to blame for its execution, and a unified society rallies to decry the depravity of violence and hail and reaffirm its own superior values. The outsider scapegoat who ceded to the temptation of violence remains beneath the sacrificer-*metteur en scène* culturally, and may rightly be considered a threat — a perfect foil for *une prise de pouvoir*. Thus, the powerful need not stain their own hands with blood, but are able to use the insider victim as a symbol to engage the wrath of the wider society toward the outsider scapegoat while exerting apparently heroic force upon him. According to Girard, unsanctioned violence will not satisfy the need for a transcendental sacrifice, but will lead to an unending cycle of violence (24). Unfortunately, it is a cycle that renders real rhetorical and political capital to elites, who are therefore unlikely to end it. (Elites again are mentioned here in general terms. Just like the marchers, it would be unwise and unfair to paint them as a unified, colluding group with no dissenters and no interior conflict on the part of some. Nor is such a monolith necessary



for the scapegoating to function as described here : a cultural habit, or mythology, combined with self interest is enough to push upon the society to produce the result.) Once again the elites control the message by controlling the visibility of previous violence for which the terrorist attacks might be retributive<sup>2</sup>. The upper middle classes, in this case, are able to enact their designs not only on the cartoonists of a marginal, not very popular magazine, but also on the lower classes of immigrants who then must apologize — or perhaps repent — for the unhinged violence of one of their own and renounce their beliefs and even convert to prove their penitence. *Al Jazeera* reported that shortly after the attacks, the police began unprecedented punitive raids on Muslim neighborhoods, while people, even drunk people, were given prison time for expressing favor for the terrorists (“French dissenters jailed after crackdown on speech that glorifies terrorism”). To the French, it might merely appear to be a paternalistic *gifle* on the cheek of the Muslim community as the state tries to show the rest of its citizens it is dealing with the « troublemakers » (see Carroll). Or, it shows Todd’s claim to be true — that underneath the fanatic Republicanism that Fourest espouses lie vestiges of Vichy: the state and its police appear eager to act out violence on marginalized groups, eager to control or suppress rather than celebrate or even allow free expression, suggesting a totalitarian impulse. Now, the apparatus is different from Vichy France. It has become more complex and less direct, but a critical evaluation will reveal that unfortunately it functions to the same end. This power grab is the endnote in the sacrificial process and is possible because of the imitative ritual-spectacle surrounding it, cloaking the intention of the *metteur en scène*.

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<sup>2</sup> An article in socialist magazine *Jacobin* points to U.S. atrocities abroad as incitement for terrorist violence. Similar situations can be extrapolated to the violence other Western countries like France enact or support beyond its borders (Marcetic).

The coordinated terrorist attacks in November continued the spectacle. Initiated once again by visceral acts of violence, this time of a greater scale; the terrorists remained in the *mise en scène* of *Charlie*'s choosing and of symbolic importance therefore to both groups : along the route of the *Marche Républicaine* down the Boulevard Voltaire, and targeting the Bataclan theater (supposedly for the reason that the then-owners were Jewish Israel-supporters<sup>3</sup>) and Comptoir Voltaire. Given the ritual, incantatory nature of the 11 January march, the new stages may be characterized sacred spaces — one, a site of ritual and communion for the marchers, the other named after a saint of secular France whose name was repeated throughout the march. Fourest again provides an insight to the mentality of those who are really *Charlie*, and why we should consider the location a sacred symbol as she describes the scene of the *Marche Républicaine* on the street where the later violence was focused. She describes the candlelit gathering with a subtle image of a Pietà : « Il y a des millions d'êtres prêts à prendre mes camarades *dans leur bras* », she says, referring to the murdered cartoonists. She continues, calling the march « une communion nationale » where marchers were « réchauffés par cette fraternité » and where some appeared as if in a Delacroix painting. « Aux pieds des monuments, d'autres bougies brûlent d'une lumière tranquille. ...On chante la fraternité. ...La tête de du cortège glisse lentement sur le boulevard Voltaire » (Fourest, 12, emphasis added). Here, the stage of the spectacle is transformed into a cathedral with candles, hymns, and the light of a transcendent connection shone on the believers who had come to say « *Merci Charlie* » (Fourest,

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<sup>3</sup> The Times of Israel reported the Bataclan had been owned by pro-Jewish activists for 40 years and was sold just two months before the attacks. (“Jewish owners recently sold Paris’s Bataclan theater, where IS killed dozens”)

13) in recognition of his sacrifice so that all might have freedom expression. Those who understand Christian ritual will immediately see the parallels in Fourest's description of this place — a place the Bataclan attackers chose in advance. I propose this as evidence that the Bataclan violence, too, was to the terrorists retribution rather than mysteriously motivated Islamic violence. And it was targeted to defile what to the French secularist so obviously became a sacred site.

In light of the importance of ritual sacrifice in general and Girard's comment that the age or vulnerability of the victim plays a part, it's perhaps no surprise that President Hollande's speech at the memorial focused on the innocence of the victims of the November Bataclan attacks. He characterized the attack as targeting the younger generation's love for freedom as expressed in their nightlife habits that were obliterated by the terrorists : death metal, alcohol and smoking in cafes, dancing, sex — all forbidden in Islam. The speech directs the audience toward a notion that, similar to the chants of Americans after 9/11, *the terrorists hate us because we're free*. The motivations of the terrorists, however reprehensible they are in reality, are reduced to fanatical lunacy and worse, jealousy toward the superior way of life the French and other Westerners enjoy. But in an essay in *Qui est Daech ?*, Michel Foucher candidly notes the initiation a few weeks before of French involvement in a Western coalition in Iraq and Syria, as well as military presence in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates (77). This happened between spectacles, or perhaps during their intermission, and particularly because it went unacknowledged behind the curtain, offstage, did indeed affect the country's interpretation of the terrorist violence. Hiding Western violence is crucial to the spectacle's success as an illusion, as we've seen. The devices for misdirection in the Bataclan memorial ceremony and particularly in Hollande's *Invalides* speech, continue the repetitive ritual language of the Republican march, but

include more explicit references to the intentions of the state as concerns the security of its borders and its citizens.

A comparison of Hollande’s two speeches — his initial speech the night of the shootings and his longer speech at the memorial at *Invalides* (“Hommage national: Texte intégral du discours de François Hollande”<sup>4</sup>) — help us recognize the devices that contribute to the maintenance of the spectacle and its illusion. The first speech the night of the attacks was simple, as events had not yet resolved and police were still apprehending the terrorists — Paris was in chaos. His demeanor was calm and his message clear. After a brief mention of terrorist attacks, he moved straight into talk of security, announced perfunctorily the state of emergency and closing of the borders, then in an uptick, moved on to the need for solidarity and compassion (I paraphrase): France must be united, its authorities firm. France must be great. We are still securing Paris. Trust that we can protect the nation. Long live the *République* and long live France. It seems the goals of the government are laid bare in Hollande’s demand that the populace trust in the state to protect them.

Perhaps the more interesting aspect of Hollande’s formal speech as compared to the #JeSuisCharlie demonstrations is the displacement of the citizen as principal “actor.” In the more formal “solemn ceremony” this time, the state played a preeminent role, with President François Hollande’s speech at center stage, the cameras waiting for an emotional reaction and the violent *Marseillaise* intoned. The role of actor was now fully occupied by the state, who is once again the *metteur en scène*. It’s as if Hollande had time to hone his message, embedding the rationale for indefinite extraordinary security measures into the speech. It’s fair to restate here

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<sup>4</sup> No page or line numbers available on this online text.

that Hollande need not be painted a villain, as Sennett says: he, too is convinced of the message. Where #JeSuisCharlie was about citizen communion, Hollande's speech was his moment to profess the faith in an official setting — *Les Invalides*. It is worth noting *Les Invalides*' historic connection to Louis XIV and later to Napoleon, as a healing place for their soldiers wounded for France's sake during the defense and expansion of France. So, too, the wounded nation mourns its dead at the hands of terrorists, and seeks healing in a ritual-spectacle staged at *Les Invalides*. Sennett explains that the “politics of personality consists of the revelation of intentions unrelated to the world of action... it is of necessity an illusion in that the facts of the politician's increasing power are being obscured by his professed motives, but he practices the illusion on himself as well as on his listeners” (281). In the modern world in psychic crisis, he says, inaccessible transcendent feeling is easily replaced with any feeling at all. In France, the president of *la Republique laïque* gave a speech laced with Christian language to decry religious violence, religious war, against the nation. The speech's crescendo transfers godlike qualities of benevolence, power and authority to the state to justify undefined security measures for an indefinite period of time — neatly echoing Robespierre. In addition to the chosen *mise en scène* and the official dialogue, it is important to emphasize the effect of the props, costumes and musical accompaniment which attempt to give the spectacle visual and aural power and yet betray a mystical sensibility. The following is not the complete text of Hollande's speech, but a collection of excerpts that contain the most striking religious language. I will highlight the religiously coded words in italics and follow each paragraph or section with comments :

« Vendredi 13 novembre, ce jour que nous n'oublierons jamais, la France a été frappée lâchement, dans un acte de guerre organisé de loin et froidement exécuté. Une horde d'assassins a tué 130 des nôtres et en a blessé des centaines, *au nom d'une cause folle et d'un dieu trahi* » .

Hollande, having the principal role in the spectacle, interprets and contextualizes the actions of the terrorists vis à vis their own professed faith, referring to them with the primitive « horde », and attributing their actions to madness. The official narrative overpowers and appropriates the events themselves. Again, the reverse victimhood is emphasized with the suggestion that God was not only displeased with violence against the French, but betrayed by these members of a false religion, or at least, false members of a religion, though the idea that a person's life can be animated or driven by religion in modern France is enough to bring ridicule<sup>5</sup>. He is sure to emphasize that the terrorists were not « les nôtres », clearly falling outside the belonging and communal feeling he celebrates right now, and incidentally outside the group for which the *bouc emissaire* is expunging internal violence, according to Girard's theory.

« C'est parce qu'ils étaient la France qu'ils ont été abattus. C'est parce qu'ils étaient la liberté qu'ils ont été massacrés ». Here the victims were rendered into saints and symbols of the Republic. It's something the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists would have hated, according to one of only two of the magazine's surviving staff, Luz. He reasons that turning *Charlie* into symbols is exactly against the magazine's goals, but cynical politicians would profit and gain momentum for their causes ("Luz : 'Tout le monde nous regarde, on est devenu des symboles"). As he clarifies, « ce sont des gens qui ont été assassinés, pas la liberté d'expression ! » (emphasis added) or, in the case of Bataclan, people not France. More precisely, these people are being converted through Hollande's speech — a sort of beatification ceremony — into saints martyred

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<sup>5</sup> In an exchange with a French friend on social media, I asked her why she posted a meme protesting French supermarket chain Franprix's introduction of Hallal meat products. I pointed out that Hallal requires the animals be treated better and butchered more humanely, so what does it matter if they do it for religion? She answered that humane treatment of animals is good, but we shouldn't do it for religion. Religion, she says, shouldn't be forced onto our plates.

for the cause of the Republic. Note how he equates France itself with the very essence of *liberté* : the victims are France are liberty.

Next, Hollande portrays France and « ses forces » as a Christ figure, healing the sick and bringing peace to the wounded victims : « la France sera à vos côtés. Nous rassemblerons nos forces pour *apaiser les douleurs* et après avoir enterré les morts, *il nous reviendra de « réparer » les vivants* ». Just as Christ's resurrection brought him back to heal, so France will rebound from this to heal survivors, and more importantly, return in glory and power. Here he seems to be preparing the spectators to expect and accept a show of power on the part of the state, and to connect it in their minds to the notion it's the saving they need, even a transcendence for which they yearn.

« Beaucoup [des victimes], je le sais, *avaient tenu à manifester le 11 janvier*, comme des millions de Français. Ils avaient dit leur refus de céder face à la menace terroriste. Ils savaient que la France n'est *l'ennemie d'aucun peuple*, que ses soldats se portent là où on les appelle, pour protéger les plus faibles et *non pour assouvir une quelconque domination* ». He begins by linking the victims to what the audience undoubtedly will remember as a poignant, sacred gathering as previously discussed: the January 11 Republican March. If it was indeed a communion, then the victims were practicing *laïques* or *croyants*. Much like Abbé Grégoire's affirmation that other races need only be properly inculturated to be equal with the French and included in the Republic (“*De la littérature de nègres,*” 6, 82), or Clermont-Tonnerre's famous « Il faut tout refuser aux Juifs comme nation et accorder tout aux Juifs comme individus, » the unity comes not from denial or exclusion of one or another group as such, as much as in their denying themselves of any affection they may have for other “gods.” *They* must convert. Hollande then underlines the innocence of France, with a comment that specifically ignores

France's violent colonial past and even its government's more recent complicity with Nazi Germany. It even seems Hollande is responding directly to Todd's accusation that the Republican March was in itself a show of power meant to manifest *une domination*.

Then, channeling the power of spectacle in the modern era, Hollande makes a sort of *mise en abîme* that focuses *his* spectacle on the expressive power of musical artists and sports stars so prone to worship, its importance as a tool of solidarity and resistance, and its symbolic power to unify France: « Parmi les victimes du Bataclan, beaucoup avaient fait de *la musique* leur métier. C'est cette musique qui était insupportable aux terroristes. C'est cette harmonie qu'ils voulaient casser, briser. C'est cette joie qu'ils voulaient ensevelir dans le fracas de leurs bombes. Et bien, ils ne l'arrêteront pas. Et comme pour mieux leur répondre, *nous multiplierons les chansons, les concerts, les spectacles*; nous continuerons à aller dans les stades, et notamment au Stade si bien nommé, le Stade de France à Saint-Denis. Nous participerons aux grands rendez-vous sportifs, comme aux rencontres les plus modestes, *et nous pourrons aussi communier dans les mêmes émotions*, en faisant fi de nos différences, de nos origines, de nos couleurs, de nos convictions, de nos croyances, de nos confessions, car nous sommes *une seule et même Nation, portés par les mêmes valeurs* ». Though the comment that the music was « insupportable aux terroristes » appears absurd, it serves to place them and *their kind* outside of the cultural milieu of the French. Again, what matters is not the actual religion or any other difference between Frenchmen, but that these ideas and spectacles create in all who claim Frenchness *les mêmes émotions*. Clearly, the emotional power of these spectacles, songs, and sports, appears universal because emotion itself is universal. Rhetorically, Hollande uses the besieged “spectacles” — the rock concert at the Bataclan and the soccer game at the Stade de France, for example — as stand-ins for the emotional or mystical heights people feel viewing



them. He then transmutes that worship of sports and music stars to the worship of the Republican values that similarly elicit a conditioned emotional response. He places the attribution of sacredness to any other thing outside the very definition of a good French *laïc*. He ends on a note of unity of values, and by values he means Republican values, or more precisely, the contemporary left's understanding of those values — the only valid ideals in the Republic.

He then once again acts as interpreter of meaning of the horrific violence, which comment itself is a perfect example of the kind of explanation required, in Girard's theory of internal violence assuaged by terrorist attack that unites the group, to turn the violence to the benefit of the group: « Que veulent les terroristes? *Nous diviser, nous opposer, nous jeter les uns contre les autres*. Je vous l'assure, ils échoueront. Ils ont *le culte* de la mort, mais nous, nous, nous avons l'amour, l'amour de la vie ».

Hidden somewhat in the very middle of the speech, and surrounded with sacred secular sentiment before and after, the justification for vague, seemingly unlimited expansion of government power appears: « Nous pouvons compter sur le Parlement pour adopter *toutes les mesures qu'appelle la défense des intérêts du pays*, dans un esprit de concorde nationale, *et dans le respect des libertés fondamentales*. Et puis, et puis surtout, nous pouvons *compter sur chaque Française et sur chaque Français* pour faire preuve de vigilance, de résolution, d'humanité, de dignité ». In light of the arrests of anyone vocalizing solidarity of sentiment with the terrorists of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks months before and the severe prison sentences given even to drunk people mouthing off stream of consciousness ramblings at police (“French dissenters jailed after crackdown on speech that glorifies terrorism”), it appears a disingenuous comment. His emphasis on relying on citizens to be on the lookout for whatever might be against « les intérêts

du pays » (a vague notion) seems a gesture to ensure a feeling of solidarity and inclusion for those who believe in the Republic.

He then swears before the people, commending them for their *faithful practice* of *laïcité*, swearing before all that France will continue the path of martyrdom, and commending the acts of devotion to the Republic: « Je vous l'affirme ici: nous ne changerons pas; nous serons unis, unis sur l'essentiel. Et je salue, ici, devant vous, familles, ces innombrables gestes de tant de Français anonymes qui se sont pressés sur les lieux des drames pour allumer une bougie, déposer un bouquet, laisser un message, apporter un dessin. Et si l'on cherche un mot pour qualifier cet élan, ce mot existe dans la devise de la République: c'est la fraternité ». The props in this part of the spectacle are highly symbolic and religious as well. Notably, among tokens one might recognize for use in religious ceremony or as offerings on an altar, drawings are mentioned. If we take Hollande's list as a sort of inventory of now acceptable offerings in the practice of *laïcité*, the drawings that became symbolic during the #JeSuisCharlie marches finish the list and reaffirm the march as a sacred event for *laïcs* – an event of which Hollande made mention after Bataclan precisely because it reminded his spectators of the emotion they felt communing *en deuil* for *Charlie's* cartoonists. In January, the pencil and paper became like relics of the martyred cartoonists, and Hollande's speech uses their symbolic power.

« Le patriotisme que nous voyons aujourd'hui se manifester, avec ces drapeaux fièrement arborés, ces rassemblements spontanés, ces foules qui chantent la Marseillaise; tout cela n'a rien à voir avec je ne sais quel instinct de revanche ou je ne sais quel rejet de l'autre. ... la France garde intacte, malgré le drame, malgré le sang versé, ses principes d'espérance et de tolérance ». The supposed spontaneity of the crowds singing the Marsaillaise is somewhat undone by its performance following Hollande's speech, all arranged by his government with a

few weeks of planning between when the attacks occurred and when the solemn memorial took place. It bears repeating that the unity and hope that France felt occurred because of, not in spite of, « le drame » et « le sang versé ». The sacrificial cycle requires it, and Hollande, in a rather cynical falsehood, obscures it.

Slate.fr had Hollande's speech set up for users to easily tweet short quotes (“Hommage national: le texte intégral du discours de Francois Hollande”), which brings us to an important phenomenon on which this sort of cynical maneuver relies: the very nature of social media as a polarizing, symbol-forging medium prone to self-deceiving performance that creates yet another type of *mise en abime* in the spectacle. Before we tackle certain uses of social media and how it extends the illusions we've discussed, a discussion of the power structures that underlie French society, including its economic realities and its colonial past might be useful. Of particular interest to discussing expression is the position of believers in French society, and how French Muslims's double “otherness” distorts the real-world meaning for them of the Republic's grandiose promises of liberty, equality and fraternity.

#### IV. Power structures behind the curtain : economics, *laïcité*, otherness

When we discuss *Tartuffe*, we see Louis XIV and Colbert. Here too, the social context of the production affects the spectacle's meaning and therefore bears exploration, even briefly. I mean to explore specifically the interwoven existence of economic, social and religious power structures in French society that restrict expression for some, uphold the assumptions of the spectators, and make the narrative's amplification on social media both possible and profitable. These economic and social power structures are interwoven, which in turn drives how the spectacle plays on social media and with its users in the West.

Economic power

The commonality between today's self-proclaimed defenders of Enlightenment values and the bourgeois sections of French society has long existed. One of the principal critiques Todd makes of the *Charlie* demonstrators is their association with the middle and upper classes whose economic interests are at the heart of their unconscious — or one might argue, conscious and simply rational — motives. The middle and upper classes of 18th century French society were as eager to disguise their true motives of economic interest as is that sector of society today, and the ideals of the Enlightenment (and of the Revolution) to which the *Charlie* crowd claims heritage are purposely placed at center stage to obscure the reality of France's history (of which Hollande is notably proud) and its current economic stratification (see Frémeaux). Here, in this chapter, I intend to show that the habit of proclaiming and even worshipping Republican values is a *performance* to obscure the economic, historical, and political realities that directly marginalize the kinds of groups that are vulnerable to radicalization (see Chrisafis, “Charlie Hebdo attackers : born, raised and radicalised in Paris”).

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermass outlines the legal aspect of the modern state: it was formed not to proclaim and engender equality (as the Revolutionary ideology claims), but to protect the interests of bourgeois liberalism (77). Liberalization of laws in regards to relative equality among market actors, and freedom to dispose of their property, work, wages, etc., as they please was established at the Revolution with abolishment of prior controls. The modern state was formed not to interfere with the market/bourgeois interests (79), and exists essentially to protect capital. To illustrate the link to today's bourgeois, Todd correlates the *Charlie* marchers with the regions that voted in favor of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, and ten years later in 2002 the introduction of the Euro, which opened France to liberalization, diminishing the state's ability to direct its own monetary policy.

“The turnout was again around 70% but the treaty was rejected by 54.67% of French voters” (Frémeaux, 76). Where the January 11 march was most widely attended (aside from Paris) Todd points out that this overlaps with heavily Catholic areas that resisted the Revolution initially, were historically anti-Dreyfussard and later became Vichiste strongholds. Economic liberalization coincides with the Maastricht treaty of 1992, and “the decline of inequality observed during the 1980s has been canceled by an increase since the end of the 1990s. The rapid growth of capital income is the main cause of this recent increase” (Frémeaux, 8). This structure exists by design, according to Habermass, since it is by and for the bourgeois that laws affecting wealth were established after the Revolution (80), and of course these laws affect the lower classes as well.

The liberalized rules at the time of the Revolution and the general restructuring of the public sphere that Habermass shows, opened and intensified the already rich trade in colonial slave labor and goods. In *The French Atlantic Triangle* Christopher Miller points out that the slave trade provided the wealth that freed the merchant class to be “cultivated,” to read Voltaire, to “decorate their shelves with the works of the Enlightenment, and perhaps even to read them,” to forget the source of their wealth and engage with French high culture (62). Miller goes on to explore what, if they read *les Lumières*, may have posed moral questions for those in the slave trade. Voltaire and Montesquieu in particular — both of whose economic interests were entangled in the slave trade to differing degrees — with levity and irony opened the French mind to question the validity of slavery. But their criticism was not so straightforward as to simply condemn the practice. Miller points out that in *Lettres Persanes*, Montesquieu attacks the prevailing justifications for slavery, but two pages later claims that it’s natural in certain climates, such as those of the global south — effectively excluding the possibility of slavery —

metaphorical or real — being justified on or among Europeans, and leaves the door open to its justification outside of Europe (66-67); French interests were thereby ideologically protected from critique. Slavery was absent from the French view in part to shield it from interference. This invisibility of the slave trade to Europeans then provides a lens for the invisibility of the arms trade and war profiteering of today. Miller continues his analysis with Voltaire, who likewise deflects society's (or spectators') gaze away from French imperialism and toward the flawed Spanish conquest of Peru, without ever questioning the validity of imperialism itself — European Christians undoubtedly had the right to rule<sup>6</sup> (73). Fourest, in *Éloge du Blasphème* indulges in this convenient and familiar misdirection when faced with moral questions concerning the Republic's colonial past: she responds praising *Charlie's* « lutte en solidarité avec les blasphémateurs, les féministes, les athées et les homosexuels persécutés en Afghanistan, au Pakistan, au Maghreb, en Iran, en Arabie Saoudite ou en Syrie » (56): Western violence must remain cloaked. To Fourest, violence emanates only from Muslim countries, or perhaps, from Muslimness when encountered in France. The absence of any mention of violence by the French state is absolutely intentional and essential to the spectacle's message being received as intended. That spectacle — of mourning the victims at the *Marche Républicaine* and at *Les Invalides* — in addition to becoming immediately symbolic as discussed earlier, depends heavily on the power found in victimhood, particularly when violence is perpetrated on innocents, and particularly in France where violence is, like the slave trade, unacceptable within its borders but profit-yielding

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<sup>6</sup> This is a belief that has remained intact in a contemporary global capitalism rebranded, exchanging outright conquest for benevolent militarism and “nation-building,” the right to which Noam Chomsky repeatedly cites as remaining fundamentally unquestioned among Westerners, for example in the U.S. during the Viet Nam War (Chomsky, 107).

elsewhere (see Ball, “Arms sales becoming France’s new El Dorado, but at what cost?”). Europeans can in the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and other terrorist violence see themselves as victims precisely because Western violence toward non-Western people is hidden or minimized: terrorist violence is de-contextualized and rendered symbolic, portrayed as though all of Western civilization were brutally victimized while unarmed, or as were the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists, merely armed with a humble and innocuous pen and paper. The Western victims of terrorist violence, individually innocent, are also victims of Western complicity in the ongoing economic and military pursuits that enrich the West at the cost of non-Western lives. This all goes on away from the stage – largely because media acts as a filter, or reflection, of the society whose narrative it tells. Exemplifying this notion is Fourest, the « journaliste-guerrière » who insists in her defense of *Charlie Hebdo* that its dead cartoonist are and should be the focus of discussion. Clearly this victimhood is irresistible – a martyrdom by extremists. To her, colonial victimization is imaginary « dans ce climat de guerre – dû au terrorisme » (Fourest, 67, emphasis added), which makes the terrorists simply provocateurs. The war they wage, according to her, has nothing to do with the moral character or history of France as a nation and everything to do with the evils inherent in Islam.

But here, too, Todd counters this idea :

« La focalisation sur l’Islam révèle en réalité un besoin pathologique des couches moyennes et supérieures de détester quelque chose ou quelqu’un, et non pas simplement la peur d’une menace montant des bas-fonds de la société. ... Les classes moyennes et supérieures cherchent leur bouc émissaire » (17).

Sacrifice not only uses these hidden power structures; it needs them. The group in power is by definition that which needs and finds a sacrificial victim, and it is due to the group’s access to power that completion of the sacrifice, and as we’ve discussed, its obfuscation, is possible.

## Laïcité and otherness

*Charlie* may have come to symbolize *all* freedom of expression, but on closer examination, this implies that it is a model for what constitutes *valid* freedom of expression in the Republic. Laïcité, though it claims to proffer neutrality vis à vis religious expression, in effect prioritizes expression that is irreligious or anti-religious – meaning, expression *by* the irreligious or anti-religious. Since 1905, the secular dogma has only intensified. In a segment of « On n'est pas couché » debating the burkini's legal status, presenter Yann Moix reads from Article II of the 1905 law, underlining that its language places the state « dans l'incapacité de reconnaître aucun culte ». He goes on to cite the *rapporteur de la loi*, Aristide Briand, explaining the law's intent is that the state officially view religious articles of clothing as « un vêtement comme un autre » void of any symbolic power (“Loi de 1905: Yann Moix VS Nathalie Kosciusko Morizet”). This is not in reality how the state functions. If anything, its efforts to combat the use of religious clothing has led the state to affirm rather than neutralize their symbolic power, which converts the state itself into an adversarial believer in the power of religious symbols. Believers therefore come into public expression in France at a disadvantage, a fact that the spectacle both denies and exploits. Because the validity of expression depends on who is speaking, in order to examine power as it relates to *laïcité* and its definition of what is acceptable expression, we must examine otherness: exactly who is included and allowed to express freely?

« Voltaire a souvent été évoqué par Charlie comme référence doctrinale, tout comme il l'était, avec raison, pour les révolutionnaires de 1789 ou par les partisans de la séparation de l'Église et de l'État en 1905 » (Todd, 88). Here, Todd seems to describe the progression of *laïcité* from Voltaire's insolent mockery of religion, to the Revolutionaries' violent wresting of



power (and wealth) from the Church, to the adoption of atheism as the standard of Frenchness, even a state religion, in 1905. In line with Voltaire's reasoning that the dominant religion should by no means cede priority of place to others, the dominance of *laïcité* and its interdependence with the state so closely mimics the position of the pre-Revolutionary Catholic Church, it veritably takes its place. Rather than claiming authority from God, « les laïcs » as Fourest calls her in-group, *Charlie* claims reference to Voltaire. This leaves room to qualify who is a real *laïc* and who is an "other" and is problematic for both practicing *laïcs* and religious believers, but also presents problems of consistency in applying Voltaire's ideas in practice.

Speaking of intolerance, of which both groups accuse the other, Voltaire states : « Le droit de l'intolérance est donc absurde et barbare: c'est le droit des tigres, et il est bien horrible, car les tigres ne déchirent que pour manger, et nous nous sommes exterminés pour des paragraphes » (13). Again, the disdain for violence in response to words is emphasized, to the empowerment of the *Charlie* crowd. The focus, particularly as promoted in media following *Charlie*, has been to ask if the terrorists are intolerant vis à vis Voltaire's standard. But is *Charlie* intolerant? Voltaire proclaims, « si vous disiez que c'est un crime de ne pas croire à la religion dominante, vous accuseriez donc vous-même les premiers chrétiens vos pères, et vous justifieriez ceux que vous accusez de les avoir livrés aux supplices » (21). If *laïcité* is the dominant religion, its adherents are culpable of demanding conversion to the cause of blasphemy. Todd comments:

« Les journalistes politiques ne se contentaient pas d'écouter les imams et les Français musulmans de base qui leur affirmaient, comme tout le monde, que la violence était inacceptable, que les terroristes étaient infâmes et qu'ils trahissaient leur religion. Les journalistes exigeaient d'eux, comme de nous tous, qu'ils prononcent la formule rituelle, « Je suis Charlie », désormais synonyme de « Je suis français ». Il leur fallait, pour être pleinement intégrés à la communauté nationale, admettre que le blasphème par des

caricatures de Mahomet étaient une composante de l'identité française. On *devait* blasphémer. ... être français c'était, non pas avoir le *droit*, mais le *devoir* de blasphémer. Voltaire *dixit* » (Todd, 12-13).

Todd makes the important distinction, however, that Voltaire « au contraire de Charlie, ne dénonçait pas la religion des autres. Il blasphémait la sienne, et sur celle dont il était issu ». In Todd's blasphemy on the "real" *gauche*, only one blasphemy (*Charlie's*) is acceptable.

Fourest only proves Todd's claim in her criticism of anyone unwilling to utter devotion to Charlie and the blasphemy it represents : « *Vrais dévots*, ces *faux Charlie* se sont tus une semaine, puis ont repris là où ils en étaient. Après avoir feint d'être *un peu* Charlie au lendemain du massacre, ils ne l'étaient plus du tout lorsque Luz a dessiné un Mahomet en train de pleurer et qui, lui, était *vraiment* Charlie » (39, emphasis added). Here, she establishes a sort of chatechism for *laïcité*, accusing even the French *de gauche* of being secretly « dévots ». Luz, she claims, is what a good *laïc*, a good French person, looks like. If, as Chartier claims, "unifying gestures" implant a sense of belonging, then their absence, whether from abstaining from using them or not believing in them, implies otherness. This binary is not new in France; from the Enlightenment to the Revolution to *l'Affaire Dreyfuss*, the tension over what exactly makes a person acceptably French, what degree of devotion to *laïcité* is sufficient has led even to violence. The hijab in public schools is merely a more recent example (see Scott) that resulted in a long discussion and even in official reports of what constitutes proper *practice* of *laïcité* and therefore what is expected of a true citizen of the Republic. The controversy laid bare both the weight afforded to differentiating who is performing the expressive act, and the privileging of the greater society to interpret its meaning rather than the person expressing — even of something as otherwise inconsequential as a woman's hair accessory.

In *The Politics of the Veil*, Joan Wallach Scott explains that “the law [banning the veil in public schools] insisted on the unacceptable difference (the ‘otherness’) of those whose personal/religious identity was achieved by wearing the hijab, even though these girls did not seek to impose their beliefs on their schoolmates but simply insisted that they themselves could not dress in any other way without a loss of their sense of identity” (Scott, 93). The viewpoint of the girl or woman wearing the veil is overpowered by French *laïc* anxiety about identity and belonging — perhaps a holdover from the calculated homogenization of France at the Revolution and its accompanying violence. According to Scott, the justification was supposedly the role public school plays as unifier of a previously regionalized, compartmentalized France:

“[The ban] was defined above all as a defense of ‘laïcité,’ ‘the cornerstone’ of French republicanism, the principle that clearly separated church from state. Headscarves were deemed an intrusion of religion into the sacred secular space of the schoolroom, the crucible in which French citizens are formed ...

‘Etymologically,’ began the National Assembly report (Secularism and Schools), ‘laïcité designates the laos, the people considered as an indivisible whole.’ Although the report conceded that the private rights of individual conscience must be respected and that the neutrality of the state must be maintained in relation to the diversity of religious beliefs among its population, these could not outweigh considerations of national unity. In any contest between individual rights and state sovereignty, *the interests of the state must prevail.*” (90, emphasis added).

In any conflict between a religious individual’s expressive rights and state anxiety, the state privileges *laïcité* in the name of unity. In addition to being an imitative religious desire, the yearning for communion and unity is one of convenience to the state: it handily justifies limits on freedom of expression and increased surveillance (see “Paris attacks: from solidarity to surveillance”) and even adding protective glass walls around the Eiffel Tower. (The result, however, of the state’s proclaimed motive is just the opposite: the non-European religious subset

of the population is barred from integrating fully unless it converts from one religion to another — Islam to *laïcité*. For Muslims, this rigid ideology of *laïcité* — not day-to-day life in Europe — presents an impossible problem. They are made to play the part of “the other” or convert under duress, to display a physical manifestation of devotion. The power imbalances that carry *Charlie Hebdo*’s satire beyond the traditional — what Doonesbury’s Garry Trudeau called “punching downward” (“The Abuse of Satire”) — stand out, as elements of the powerful and privileged sector of society, knowingly or not, bear down on a population that is disenfranchised and impoverished. The impossibility of belonging to the kind of overarching purpose and community the *Charlie* marchers reveled in provides fertile ground for radicalization, breeding terrorism, and producing more tension.

Luz explains that while *Charlie Hebdo*’s cartoonists had no intention of commenting on or becoming involved in geopolitical issues surrounding their Mohamet drawings, they kept the magazine offline and catered to high schoolers. That the drawings found their way to the web to inflame potentially radicalized youth is, according to Luz, not their responsibility.

If dogmatic secularism breeds violence-prone radicalized youth, why then does France engage in it, and in so ostentatious and spectacular a form? Todd explains: with the exit of zombie Catholics from belief and the fall of communism, *laïcité* is left without a counterpoint:

« Sans négliger l’existence concrète du fondamentalisme musulman ou du terrorisme, nous devons être capables d’admettre que la France incroyante a besoin, pour trouver son équilibre, un bouc émissaire pour remplacer son propre catholicisme, devenu inutilisable. ... La diabolisation de l’Islam répond au besoin intrinsèque d’une société totalement déchristianisée » (65).

The movement defines itself by its opposite imprint. Ultimately, the imagemaking of the spectacle and its reverberations on the internet serve the state and the money and power interests it protects.

V : The problems of social media expression and spectacle from Iran to *Charlie*

The problems of neoliberalism, and of expression as a yearning for transcendence are essential to the discussion of the illusions and realities of expression in the age of social media. Social media has caused a major shift in information consumption and of expression — how public discourse, civic participation and critique of ideas occurs — and to which traditional media have been forced to bow; it fosters a sense of collectivism, connectivity, and collaboration that creates the illusion of a democratic authenticity, a resistance to injustice, and a direct link between people in a world where withdrawal from public life has long been the norm (Sennett). True, ordinary individuals can find, contribute to and create news on nearly equal grounds with that of a news reporter, and the resulting devaluing of expertise (Nichols) has eroded the sense that media outlets represent an authoritative view. But this assumption is problematic and, as the *Charlie* and *Invalides* spectacles demonstrate, dangerous to the very democracy social media appears to embody and defend. As a counterpoint to the staged *Charlie* and *Invalides* spectacles, we will look at another event, and its impact on the perceived power of social media: 2009's election in Iran with its storm of social media activity that followed.

Social media in reality is an extension of traditional capitalist media and ultimately serves the same purpose as its progenitor: to profit. Newspapers as we know them today, Habermass points out, originally catered to the need for merchants to obtain information quickly to make business decisions (14), directly linking them to the needs and goals of the bourgeois. Journalism was always embedded with political interests and control (58), and newspapers developed as a

forum for debates that protected the merchant class: “The public’s critical debate of political issues had proved its mettle as a check on government, significantly at the nerve center of bourgeois interests” (69). The corporate journalism of today, as Chomsky has said, fulfills the same role, but is now embedded rather than oppositional to government:

“Take a look at the structure of the media system. The major media institutions are great corporations, some of them parts of megacorporations. Like other businesses, they sell a product to a market. The product that they sell is audiences. The market is other corporations, because they survive pretty much on advertising in the modern period. It wasn’t always like this. There are other external influences, primarily state power, which itself is very heavily under corporate control, and which has its own propaganda institutions” (Smolski).

Ad-driven revenues of print and television have dwindled in the wake of social media’s cultivation, manipulation, and sale of data, which can in some instances ultimately be employed to control political outcomes (see Cadwalladr). It is perhaps it is too cynical, even irrational, to suppose that this constitutes some grand overarching scheme of secret coordinated efforts, and perhaps Chomsky’s view to that effect goes too far. However, the effect of so many media entities with the ultimate goal of profits working to keep the governmental system in check enough to protect business interests is sufficient to feed the industry consensus. Identifying the beneficiaries of this system means untangling multi-layered media entities and subsidiaries, alliances and collaborations, and examining evidence of reality appears to prove Sennett’s assessment that “power becomes in advanced capitalism invisible; organizations protect themselves from accountability by their very administrative complexity” (278). Like the 18<sup>th</sup> century clubs Habermass describes, “mostly associations with rooms that provide the opportunity both for reading newspapers and journals and, just as importantly, discussing what had been read” (72), social media is the setting for a kind of information mania but without the sociability.

Though we'd like to believe Facebook exists for our entertainment, its true utility is as a place where consumers volunteer information about themselves. With clicks, conflict, and comments, users feed the algorithms and data silos affiliated with corporations and the governments with which they are entwined, feeding an apparatus of money and power (Malmgren).

In *#iranelection*, Negar Mottahedeh recounts the 2009 election protests and failed attempts by the state's propaganda machine to control the message concerning the events on the street. Where "old media" also failed to cover the protests — in this case TV news network CNN — protesters began to use social media to post their own accounts using the hashtag *#iranelection*. Mottahedeh portrays the *#iranelection* hashtag as oppositional to corporate media and neoliberalism, but this, too is an illusion *#iranelection* shares with the *Charlie/Invalides* spectacles. In his view, neoliberalism dissipates workers, people, and solidarity to be almost invisible and powerless: "Gone, in this environment, is the ability to recognize the appearance and significance of collective formation and extended solidarities." To him, social media provides an antidote. His evidence is the case of the *#iranelection* hashtag versus *#CNNfail*:

"CNN may have noted the Iranian crisis. But its failure was to eschew any real emphasis on the networked collective that emerged in the figure of "the people" in response. Here was an international and collective act of dissent against the injustices of the state, and CNN was focusing its energies and professional resources on corporate bids for bankruptcy in the United States." (102)

This case indeed shows social media as vehicle for resistance to corporate (CNN) and established (Iranian government) interests, but its efficacy is limited. Though Iranians put pressure on their government, in the West spectators were drawn in with the promise of witnessing Iran's liberation and the embodiment of democratic fervor. But because media companies like

Facebook collect data and sell it to further manipulate political outcomes<sup>7</sup>, the real result of such an “uprising” still serves corporate/establishment goals, potentially to the detriment of democracy.

For #iranelection the use of cell phones and Twitter was utterly necessary in the wake of government crackdowns on freedom of assembly and speech, and on the election process itself. And here is where the reality of the #JeSuisCharlie demonstrations and the romantic notions of such a revolution part ways. Where #iranelection consisted of spontaneous in-person live-tweeting as a last resort in opposition to government power, the spectacles of *Charlie* and *Invalides* were performances in real life and echoed on social media in presence of the state’s nodding approval or, in the case of *Invalides*, its central role. The *Charlie* marches were not only tolerated, but fully supported by the French government as well as many others. So eager were other countries to likewise co-opt the illusory power of the *Marche Républicaine*, that some of their newspapers used Photoshop to alter photos — for example, those mentioned earlier of world leaders supposedly “leading” the march with arms linked. The photo became a *trompe l’oeil*, with leaders, each with a solemn expression, portrayed at the head of a group that was far more sparse than it appeared. After the *Charlie* attacks, government buildings in capitals around the world were lit with the *tricolor* or with the graphic “JeSuisCharlie”’s logo projected on their exterior. The support of governments and large populations of citizens in Western countries was notable. Everyone wants a part to play in the spectacle of national mythology — the illusion is too valuable to pass up, and as Barthes explains, meaning is already present (*Mythologies*, 117).

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<sup>7</sup> Raghavendra uses data to make the argument that, contrary to Facebook’s claims of democratizing the Internet for users, the real end-goal was getting new users in India to use Facebook in order to harvest their data.



The pan-human, transcendent façade obscures more cynical forces, though Mottahedeh’s description of the illusion begins to sound rather religious:

“This world [of social media] is an indestructible, ever amorphous networked association, which bridges a partition that was opened up by the atomization of the worker and the disintegration of all collective structures in favor of a neoliberal utopia in which all solidarities and collaborative standards were torn down – ripped and dashed, in fact, in total disregard for the needs of the body, the senses of the worker, and the voices of the people. Social media extends the reach of the sensorially mediated subject that appears virally, now beyond the boundaries of the state and the multilateral practices that dictate its dealings with the people, to impact and involve others, mimetically, in the space of politics” (103).

In other words, Mottahedeh claims that social media links humans again to each other and to the higher cause of democracy – an idea with decidedly transcendent overtones, particularly because the word religion means to re-link, especially with God. Here, democracy is the stand-in for the ultimate and in this case, the author posits that humans will *transcend* the limitations of the imminent and effect change, *saving* the world from the injustices of neoliberalism. The tendency to a good/evil narrative is plain, and this idealization of social media has a direct impact on its perceived potential for furthering goals such as those embodied in Republican values. More importantly, this structure falsely portrays social media and its promise as oppositional to neoliberalism when in fact the two work together.

Though *Charlie* and *Invalides* generally diverge from the spontaneity that drove the Iran protests, they have one thing in common with the #iranelection: the overpowering transcendent feeling of connection among the crowds and with spectators around the world absorbed in a “revolutionary memory” (31):

“A real change in the ecology of global media was underway. News stations and newspapers began to rely heavily on social media for their stories during the course of the postelection crisis. ... In the midst of the

crisis [New York Times journalist Roger Cohen] wrote, "Iranians have borne witness – with cell phone video images, with photographs, through Twitter and other forms of social networking – and have thereby amassed an ineffaceable global indictment of the usurpers of June 12. Never again will Ahmadinejad speak of justice without being undone by the Neda Effect" (10-11).

Iranians marched in the same spaces or on the same stage they did during the 1979 revolution, with similar hope that a new era was beginning — an era reflected symbolically in social media's supplanting of traditional media coverage at and about the will of the people. *Charlie and Invalides* echo a similar yearning for the energy and communion of a romanticized Revolutionary past. Todd points to the evocation of Voltaire as an echo of 1789 and of 1905, each initiating a new period of progress for the Republic (Todd, 88).

Voltaire's *Traité sur la Tolérance*, was published in 1763 and gives insight to one of the principal targets of Voltaire's criticism: two dominant religions. He attacks the "Christian" violence between Catholics and Protestants, which was the reality in France at that time, because the two dominating factions polarized the nation into violent upheaval. He argued in favor of pluralism precisely because having only two groups fighting for ultimate dominance, particularly over religion, is too prone to allow either party to rationalize that God will sanction anything they do.

Similarly, expression in this century, including on social media, intensifies the zealotry of modern values into a model that neatly mimics both the religious wars of pre-Revolutionary France and a general good/evil narrative at the root of Western religious narratives. This pattern may well be seen in Fourest's fiery rhetoric that comes out in absolute, religiously secular terms against Islam. In this sense, the good/evil narrative of Christian belief that so fueled France's religious wars survives beyond the Revolution and has now placed secularism on one pole of

belief and religion in general on the other. The « intrinsèque » need (according to Todd) for a good/evil narrative is powerful and unsurprisingly, France portrays itself as the good. All mythology serves this purpose. As Barthes explains, “Myth is a system of communication... Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message : there are formal limits to myth, there are no ‘substantial’ ones” (109). Robespierre acknowledged the usefulness of mythmaking explicitly, but among zealot *laïcs*, its operation is subconscious (once again relying on Todd’s notion of the zombie catholic). The violence of the terrorist act leaves themes that are indeed « vagues, abstraits, extrêmement généraux » (Artaud, 80) – perfect fodder for symbol-making and perfect for spectacle.

Nowhere is this better displayed than in a video (shared on social media) of a French father and his young son speaking to a reporter. The child explains that he is afraid because the terrorists have guns. His father responds « Mais nous, on a des fleurs » . The child asks naively if that will protect them, and the father answers yes (Le Petit Journal). The exchange reveals a faith that the symbolic power that flowers (imbued with religious ceremonial symbolism) will protect France, if not from real bullets, at least from any damage to the cause of unity. While this video is moving on the surface, it feeds into the false image that the *Charlie* crowds were unified under a single, overarching ideal. On the contrary, one should not assume of march attendees, Todd says, the unanimity of purpose that the press portrayed. *Le Defi Charlie* offers analysis of collected data on social media reactions, including the #JeSuisCharlie/#JeNeSuisPasCharlie binary, and makes the same conclusion: the media’s story of solidarity was exaggerated (36). Though it would fit neatly into a simplified narrative to which a secretly religious population readily responds, the binary of good/evil is an oversimplification, problematic because it is

particularly prone to distortion, and then to infinite repetition on social media. This works well for the spectacle and the *metteurs en scène* who use it, even if indirectly, to propel their cause.

Social media extends all of these problems and tendencies both because re-Tweeting and sharing — in essence replicating a message — is easy, fast, requires almost no critical thought and can happen without limit in the digital sphere, and because people respond to emotionally-charged arguments. But if people react to headlines only, and if they share merely what someone else wrote, can their expression ever be authentic? Whose spectacle are they promoting?

Sennett gives insight into how we got here. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sennett argues, public and private sectors changed places, and the new egalitarian culture threatened to reveal every man's station for what it was. No more protected and freed (in a sense) by pre-constructed codes of class interaction understood among all, the new freedom of class movement meant that anyone could be anyone. Expression was truncated by self-consciousness and public interactions became stiffer as the privacy of home life became the place for spontaneity and feeling. The effect on the theater was equally changed, as spectators, unable to emote in public, left expression and its attendant authenticity of feeling to the artist to display on their behalf. All access to transcendence eschewed in modern society, expression by the artist became surrogate for feeling, and so the artist's influence rocketed to worshipful heights.

Whereas Sennett identified street and theater exchanging places in the upheaval of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the two merge.

“Electronic communication is one means by which the very idea of public life has been put to an end. The media have vastly increased the store of knowledge social groups have about each other, but have rendered actual contact unnecessary ... The needs which the electronic media are fulfilling are those cultural impulses that formed over the whole rest of the last century and a half to withdraw from social interaction in order to know and feel more as a person” (Sennett, 283).

In other words, people project or act out a particular image of their private self publicly, with little verification as to the image's authenticity – supposedly this is the “real” self, and there is no other. When all are actors and all are spectators, politics becomes a stage where actor-spectators infinitely view and react to themselves and become captivated by their own imagemaking — a *mise en abîme*. The image or selective reflection they create around themselves of the outside social world becomes more important than reality, and everything comes to revolve around a subjective point of view and personal feeling. “Narcissism is now mobilized in social relations by a culture deprived of belief in the public and ruled by intimate feeling as a measure of the meaning of reality” (Sennett, 326). Thus, social media intensifies the cultural tendency brought about in the modern era to detach from the realities of the social sphere, and its effect is to redefine rather than interact with and affect reality. This limits the real political effect citizens might otherwise have on their governments in nations where democracy is the ideal. Social media in this way handicaps rather than emboldens political action and democratic involvement.

To contrast the reality and contradictions of spectacle on social media, I will return to Iran's 2009 elections, in which the presence of citizens on social media became symbolically charged, but was a spontaneous and pragmatic solution to the lack of media coverage for real-time events. It “required of those witnessing uprising in Iran to provide the world with evidence” (Mottahedeh, 13) — a *sacred* calling. In contrast, the *Charlie* and *Invalides* spectacles benefited from social media behaving as an echo of Western media's single-minded coverage of the French gatherings, which, as previously described, were simply displaced religious ritual. The distinction between reality and the spectacle is not necessary for the purpose of the actor-spectator expressing on social media. For him, a challenge to the illusion is equivalent to an attack on the values the spectacle worships — blasphemy on blasphemy.

Sennett describes this as a feeling of “bigger than” action — problematic in the context of participation on social media because political expression is divorced from any ability to make real change; instead its importance derives from the feeling that it can:

“The only actions the community undertakes are those of emotional housekeeping, purifying the community of those who really don’t belong because they don’t feel as the others do. The community cannot take in, absorb, and enlarge itself from the outside because then it will become impure. Thus a collective personality comes to be set against the very essence of sociability – exchange – and a psychological community becomes at war with societal complexity” (Sennett 311).

This, combined with what Sennett identifies as an already withdrawn habit of electronic media widens rather than closes the space between people in the public sphere. Closeness and communion are an illusion, and with complexity lost, so is the group’s ability to make the most of politics to solve problems in real terms, rendering their power to those who will act.

The distance is made more acute as the group identities become ever more polarized – more emotional housekeeping — and simplified. Fourest’s « *vrai* » et « *faux* » Charlies are themselves caricatures of her group and the group she wishes to set as an enemy of the cause.

“Individual deviation threatens the strength of the whole; people have therefore to be watched and tested. Distrust and solidarity, seemingly so opposed, are united. The absence, misunderstanding, or indifference of the world outside the community is interpreted in the same way. Since fraternal feelings are immediate and strongly felt, how can others not understand, why don’t they respond in kind, why won’t the world bend to emotional desires? The answer to these questions can only be that the world outside the community is less real, less authentic than the life within. The consequence of that answer is not a challenge to the outside, but a dismissal of it, a turning away, into the watchful sharing with others who “understand.” This is the peculiar sectarianism of a secular society.” (Sennett, 311)

The contrast also lays bare social media’s tendency toward binary representations. If the French government and demonstrators support of “free speech,” which *Charlie Hebdo*’s

defenders claim is their cause, its detractors can only be seen therefore as being its adversary. This works on a rhetorical level to delegitimize any critique of *Charlie's* content or its allies, and to further portray French Muslims as existing in opposition — or as a threat — to the most sacred French values. Fourest even accuses those who would untwine this fatal pairing as supporting implicitly the violence of the terrorists. This interpretation of not only the violent acts themselves, but of the more nuanced critiques of *Charlie Hebdo's* content, lumps both together in a single anti-Western category. In Todd's words:

« Est-on si sûr qu'à un moment quelconque, l'idéologie révolutionnaire aurait pu exister par sa seule force, sans le soutien de sa contradiction Catholique ? La disparition ultime de l'Église laisse un vide dans la vie du laïc français. La fin du catholicisme fut aussi une crise pour la France laïque. ...Jusqu'à l'effondrement de la religion dans ses provinces périphériques ... de l'Hexagone, la laïcité n'avait jamais eu à se définir dans l'absolu dans un monde sans Dieu. Elle avait pu se contenter de jouer en contre » (64).

The *diabolisation* of Islam, then, will serve as a justification for security measures, including those limiting travel, freedom of assembly, and speech. Hollande's early prepared speech as well as his address after the November attacks use oppositional, religiously coded language interspersed with talk of such security measures — effectively conditioning the population to accept that with every attack and every hint of danger, the state will empower itself, and not just against particular violence, but toward a population associated with those who committed the terrorist acts (see Chrisafis, "Nothing's changed").

Hashtags in particular, though Mottahedeh sees them as showing solidarity, open the way for identity rather than action to become the principal expression: not what one does or what one believes, but who one is. Action is further distanced. After the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, #JeSuisCharlie was placed opposite #JeNeSuisPasCharlie, leaving apparently only two choices of symbolic identity. Though some hashtag compositions expressed more nuance, the majority fit

somewhere in the boundaries of the two (see *Le Défi Charlie*). Even those who may feel that one or the other doesn't adequately represent their views may also feel the need to belong *somewhere*, and so side with one or the other camp. But the binary, in addition to framing the discussion, produces arguments, likes, comments, and re-Tweets. Coaxing nuance out of the hashtags becomes a comment-fomenting activity and a Twitter trend bombshell. Neither hurts business, since social media platforms earn money the more they know about users' political dispositions as well as shopping habits (Malmgren). In addition, social media absorbs users, keeping them off the streets, gazing in the infinity mirror, and out of politics.

The binary also allows *metteurs en scène* like Fourest to frame the discussion. If there are only two categories and any attempt at nuance is suspect, it has a chilling effect on expression. The direction opposition and expression may go is pre-defined, and what is off limits remains off limits. Colonial violence, once again, serves as an example. This is perhaps one reason why Fourest attacks Tariq Ramadan: whether he is lying (*le double discours*) or is expressing multiple facets of the reality of life for European Muslims, the complexity he describes as inherent to their experience is unacceptable and are grounds for rejection. If Todd's claim is true — that the neoliberal elite classes and the media who promotes their narrative are truly behind the curtain of the “sham” marches — then Fourest's attack on Ramadan also makes sense because Ramadan, in his book *To Be a European Muslim*, makes a similar point, though more subtly.

Fourest quickly dispatches with Ramadan's validity, dismissing him as a terrorist sympathizer, « l'intellectuell-prédicateur » in her book's section titled “Des tartuffes intégristes” (30). However, his writings on identity of Muslims in Europe are worth perusal. The energy the French ruling class has spent discrediting Ramadan and preventing him from speaking in public forums (Saad) places him in an adversarial relationship with the elite French left that Fourest



represents. His very identity, as well as his ideas, are evidently a threat to them. In just a few sentences, he calls into question almost every assumption on which today's *laïcité* — as opposed to the language of the 1905 law (see “On n'est pas couché”) — is based. As established earlier, the state and its media were engendered with the same goal — to protect capital and the power of those who control it. Habermass is concerned with this bourgeois history; Todd continues examining it in its current manifestation, which he associates with the *Marche Républicaine*. Naturally, defenders of the march who hold it to be a sacred and inviolate moment for France reject this kind of questioning of *Charlie*'s motives. The nuance Ramadan slowly establishes in his writings on Islamic law, society, and spirituality is anathema to *Charlie*'s surrogates like Fourest because Ramadan diminishes the polarization that feeds the “zombie Catholic” good/evil narrative and the emotional housekeeping Sennett identifies as the result of public expression's decline. Ramadan promotes the realization of Muslim selfhood as a buoy in times of globalization (like the adoption of the Euro that the “zombie Catholics” were in favor of). He insists that Muslims interpret their own narrative rather than be subjects to those who would define them as outsiders, thus crushing the strategy and goal of the *Charlie* and *Invalides* spectacles wherein the French and the French government are speaking and interpreting for them. He encourages Muslims to remove themselves from the position of adversary to European culture, destroying the possibility of a continued good/evil binary to frame the Muslim question. And he likens the acceptability of Muslims as full citizens in Europe to the same struggle Jews faced — anathema to Fourest who insists Dreyfus is *not* Kouachi (Fourest, 77). Here it is appropriate to note that Fourest rightly alludes to the fact that Dreyfus was falsely accused by those suspicious of Jews and was himself a loyal Frenchman, while Kouachi was undoubtedly one of the perpetrators of the *Charlie Hebdo* bombings and attack on a kosher market. However,

Fourest's discourse, even given the distinction she makes, is not limited to affecting life for real terrorists like Kouachi, but feeds a paranoia likely to affect innocent Muslims who are more in the vein of the good Frenchman Dreyfus. In a few paragraphs, Ramadan undercuts the main thrusts of Fourest's discourse — both her explicit arguments and her unconscious methods described above.

His « double discours » irks the #JeSuisCharlie crowd (Saad) because he has another identity, outside of “Frenchness” (though he is Swiss) and he speaks it fluently. In discussing the realities and complexities of living as a Muslim believer in the modern world, he does no differently than Robespierre did, dressing secular discourse in religious language, or as Fourest does, coating religious language with secular themes. But he, as Fourest remarks of another high-profile Muslim, is « [le seul] autour de la table à devoir dire que je n'ai rien à voir avec [les terroristes] », or whatever the *laïcs* want him to say (Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 42).

Interestingly, he makes a connection between a rapidly-changing world moved by the forces of globalization and the need for Muslims to study out a concrete identity for themselves, one that links them directly with God, to whom they owe their first duty (Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 189). He goes on: “For Muslims to understand who they are and what they stand for means that they are able to determine their identity *per se*, according to their Islamic references and *no longer through the image others develop of them as if they were but objects of some alien elaboration...* It is only by acting this way that European Muslims will feel that they are subjects of their own history... To be subjects of their own history also means that they will eventually go beyond this pernicious feeling of being foreigners, of being different, of being an obvious manifestation of an insoluble problem” (189, emphasis added). In other words, he encourages Muslims to do their own myth-making, to become the *metteur en scène* of their own

spectacle. This is obviously an affront to the group that holds this power over them and whose own mythology so easily colors every interpretation of their behavior. He also makes the connection to the Jews' struggle for "acceptable" identity as Europeans (162), a notion that fittingly points to *Charlie's* past as anti-Dreyfussards and Vichistes. These are all items which might strike a nerve if Todd is correct that the elites largely share in the historical consciousness not just of France, but of a zealous group of *croyants*.

What he proposes for Muslims, were they to pursue his ideas as a group, makes their position as the *bouc emissaire* untenable, and returns power to them as *metteurs en scène* of their own story. This would indeed be deeply unsettling to French elites who depend particularly on the power they derive from their position and from the spectacle they produce to retain it.

## VI. Conclusion

Though this study may appear to attack French secularism, it is done with an eye to its preservation and ultimately with a reverence for the equality and justice that Republican values espouse. Without a more fair interpretation and application of *laïcité*, the French Republic introduces far too much hypocrisy and alienates too many potential supporters to effectively fight the seductive rhetoric of such groups as ISIS, who prey on the kind of disaffected exclusion France's current cultural and economic situation produces. And without jealously preserving freedom of speech from government interference, there is no democracy to protect. The survival of the Revolution's tenets hinge as much on Western nations living up to them as on a physical defeat of any adversary. Without an honest and critical look beyond the rhetoric and mythology at what we are really doing to other nations and individuals in economic, social, and foreign policy, we cannot correct our course. The challenges described and dissected in this study are unique to

France, but are symbolic and relevant to those the West as a cohort is facing both in real life and on social media.

So desperate are modern social media users for a bit of transcendent feeling, that they accept theatrical pronouncements of feeling as authentic instead of feeling anything themselves. Events easily become sacralized and falsified this way — a shell of expression, especially when combined with the impulse for automatic sharing and re-tweeting. As mentioned earlier, on Slate.fr, the text of Hollande’s speech is set up to be tweeted in short, convenient quotes when users mouse over it. One need not even be so involved as to type out the 135 or fewer characters of an inspiring passage; that task is automated for the user. Corporate tech and cultural dogma combine so users’ only and most important action is a click. Social media, rather than freeing the world from elite influence and from the spectacles they produce, has rather extended their power by narrowing the parameters, limiting the effectiveness, and increasing the self-satisfaction of expressive acts, all while profiting from the information divulged when users express themselves online (Malmgren).

If Habermass is correct and the state was formed to protect capital and the classes who own it, then social media serves capital and not democracy. Indeed, democracy is itself antithetical to such a useful tool of potential totalitarian control as social media. Without the adversarial binary that plays so well on social media, the spectacle’s prospects for replication online are diminished, and so is the digital “communion” that empowers and animates them. Without extremism, neither extreme security measures and their potential for limiting expression, nor the indefinite extension of the state of emergency — like the one France instituted after the November attacks — can be justified.

On this point, the magazine *Le Canard Enchaîné* comments, « L'état d'urgence sert d'abord à interdire, et la tentation est grande de s'en abuser » (3). According to the magazine, « l'ONU, se sont, eux, alarmés, 'des restrictions excessives et disproportionnées sur les libertés fondamentales'. Ils soupçonnent même la France de profiter de la lutte contre le terrorisme – en 'détournant' la 'forte mobilization des forces de sécurité' pour se débarrasser de tout un tas de problèmes sans rapport avec le terrorisme ». («Abus des tas d'urgence», 7). On November 18, « un amendement socialiste qui instaurait le contrôle de la presse pendant l'état d'urgence a failli être voté » (9). The Hollande government, days after the Bataclan, and less than two weeks before he would give a speech extolling the glorious communion in the name of freedom of expression that followed the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, proposed a law giving it power to limit the press.

This is dangerous for democratic nations in several ways. It is alarming to see the ease with which the state, if so disposed, can use the ideals of democracy to disarm democracy, and to use the worship of rationality to draw out the irrational in us. And while social media users willingly pass along the narratives that exist on social media and that were created for that purpose, satisfied to feel part of a like-minded group, they are allowing the manipulation and messaging of those in power to continue unchecked. It isn't that users are apathetic, but that their energy is expended on the wrong ideas, their arguments made about the wrong issues, or their focus trained on the wrong questions. As we have seen in the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency, possibly owed in part to the manipulation of social media data (see Cadwalladr), totalitarian impulses can take subtle form. But Trump is merely a symptom of a larger problem in the West: while extolling our virtues and imbibing our own mythology, we leave behind reality, much of which tells a story that Western interests have for half a

millennium been brutally at odds with the well-being of the rest of the world, leaving Enlightened democracy an unfulfilled shell of itself. Our willingness to indulge in spectacle like the #JeSuisCharlie march, to content ourselves with a social media post that makes us feel momentarily satisfied, is to enter a darkened theater, not come out. If rationality and Enlightenment give the West its edge, then we must behave rationally. If violence is so abhorrent and defiance of it so sacred that we march in “communion” against it, then violence at the hands of Western governments must be equally abhorrent and the peace of non-Western nations equally sacred. It does no help to the cause of democracy and the West to destroy our legitimacy by our own hypocrisy — a hypocrisy that fuels ISIS and Al Qaeda (Marcetic). Though this paper reveals that in fact the existence of violent opposition to the West serves the dominant powers within liberal nations, I propose that behaving rationally and acting in our own interest of self-preservation, today means diffusing that opposition. If the elite classes oppress minorities — unwittingly or intentionally — while claiming to extol the values of the Enlightenment, to nominally reject violence while engaging in war for profit, then the claims they make ring hollow, eroding trust in both the institutions they control and the collective ideal that animates democratic action. To regain that trust, rather than undermine corporate media with its populist equivalent, we must re-establish journalism, its dissemination and discussion in a way that allows a return to Sennett’s concept of public man — to true sociability.

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