

Ep 51: Laïcité and free speech in France

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Satire is "the oxygen of a democracy," according to [Caroline Fourest](#), a French writer, filmmaker, feminist, anti-extremist and former [Charlie Hebdo](#) journalist. Free speech, including satire, is a vital part of *laïcité* or secularism.

Secularist principles are deeply enshrined in French law and culture. In this episode, [Emma Park](#) speaks to Fourest about the place of these principles in France today, and the threat currently posed to them by Islamist extremism.

Fourest considers the role of *Charlie Hebdo* as a descendant of 19th-century satirical newspapers that were critical of Catholicism. She then discusses her personal experience of working at *Charlie* in the 2000s, and about the magazine's decision to republish the "[blasphemous](#)" [cartoons of Mohammed](#) originally printed in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*.

Fourest argues that, for all satirical cartoons, the context must be considered – but that subversive humour has a vital place in a free society. She reveals the difficulties of getting a fair hearing in the British media, which often shrink from anything perceived as offensive. Her message is clear: we must be able to discuss "blasphemous" issues openly without fear of reprisals, and public figures must lead the way. If we are silent, the extremists have won.

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[Satire is "the oxygen of a democracy," according to @CarolineFourest, writer, anti-extremist and former Charlie Hebdo journalist. She speaks to @DrEmmaPark in the latest episode of the NSS podcast.](#)

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