

# Ep 51: Laïcité and free speech in France

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/podcast/2021/06/ep-51>

0:00:04.783,0:00:13.040

[Caroline Fourest] That's the heart of the problem.

Can we continue our philosophical and satirical newspaper

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in Western secular democracy, or can we not? I mean, if we cannot continue to inform

0:00:20.480,0:00:31.094

and sometimes to laugh about what scares us, then we are lost.

0:00:31.094,0:00:37.280

[Emma Park] You're listening to episode 51 of the National

Secular Society podcast, produced by Emma Park.

0:00:37.280,0:00:42.960

On the 7th January 2015 two masked men with

kalashnikovs burst into the Paris offices of

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the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and opened fire on the people working there.

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The brothers, Said and Cherif Kouachi, French citizens who had pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda,

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murdered 12 people, including four of the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists.

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The murders were supposedly in revenge for Charlie

Hebdo's republication of pictures of Muhammad,

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first published in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in 2005. In 2011 and 12 Charlie Hebdo had

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also published its own satirical cartoons on this topic. These included, among others, deliberately

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controversial depictions of Muhammad naked and on all fours. As i'll be hearing later, the context

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behind these cartoons was far from being a simple attack on Islam, but extremists do not make subtle

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distinctions. In 2011 the magazine's headquarters were firebombed, probably also by Islamists.

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With hindsight, the Charlie Hebdo massacre was one episode in a long string of attempts by

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Islamic fundamentalists to silence journalists and writers in the west, who they considered had

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insulted their religion. Other episodes include, for

example, the fatwa against Salman Rushdie in 1989,

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the murder in 2004 of the dutch director,  
Theo van  
Gogh, for a film that criticized the treatment  
of

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women in Islam, and the beheading last year  
of Samuel Paty, the French school teacher

0:01:54.000,0:01:58.960  
who showed Charlie Hebdo cartoons in a class  
on  
free speech. To this can now be added the  
recent

0:01:58.960,0:02:02.960  
death threats against the former RE teacher  
at  
Batley Grammar School, who also showed  
cartoons of

0:02:02.960,0:02:08.160  
Muhammad, probably from Charlie Hebdo, in  
a class  
on blasphemy earlier this year. But in the UK

0:02:08.160,0:02:12.320  
the Batley teacher's case was met with a  
muted  
response by large sections of the political  
and

0:02:12.320,0:02:17.280  
media establishment, especially on the left.  
An observer might be forgiven for thinking

0:02:17.280,0:02:21.600  
that commentators were more concerned to  
avoid  
offending fundamentalists who threatened  
violence

0:02:21.600,0:02:27.165  
than to protect free speech and open debate.  
But why does free speech matter in a  
democracy?

0:02:27.165,0:02:32.320  
How does it relate to secularism? And what  
lessons can  
we in the UK learn from the ideas and practice  
of

0:02:32.320,0:02:37.200  
laïcité, the French version of secularism?  
To answer these questions, I am now joined  
by

0:02:37.200,0:02:42.080  
Caroline Fourest, a columnist at the French  
magazine  
Marianne, and former journalist at Charlie  
Hebdo.

0:02:42.080,0:02:46.480  
Caroline is also a filmmaker, radio presenter  
and feminist campaigner, as well as a tireless

0:02:46.480,0:02:52.080  
opponent of extremism in France, both  
religious and  
political. In 2015 she published a book  
entitled

0:02:52.080,0:02:59.715  
'In praise of Blasphemy', which defended  
Charlie  
Hebdo against allegations of Islamophobia.

0:03:00.454,0:03:06.347  
Caroline Fourest, welcome to the podcast.  
[Caroline Fourest] Thank you for having me.

0:03:06.347,0:03:14.702  
[EP] Let's start with a general question:  
Where does  
laïcité fit into French culture historically?

0:03:15.040,0:03:21.840  
[CF] It comes from a long, long story  
of battles, philosophical battles

0:03:21.840,0:03:29.200  
and sometimes physical ones, against the

domination of the Catholic Church, obviously,

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going to the first monarchy process.  
So it was connected with oppression.

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But the turning point, where what really unified almost all the left to pass the Separation Law, was

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just after the Dreyfus Affair, when this Jewish captain had been accused of being unfaithful

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and a traitor to the nation, by the very radical anti-semitic league of the time

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and the far right of the time. So this is maybe something that people don't perceive often,

0:04:08.480,0:04:15.360  
the story of the battle for laïcité in France is deeply connected with the fight for equality

0:04:15.360,0:04:22.400  
and against racism, in this case against anti-semitism. Because it is after the

0:04:22.400,0:04:29.040  
the Dreyfus case that, again, all the left, led by Jean Jaurès, one of the biggest

0:04:29.040,0:04:36.480  
leftist heroes we have in our history, unified themselves to proclaim the Separation Law.

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[EP] That was in the late 19th century, the Dreyfus affair ?  
[CF] Yes, and the separation was in 1905.

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At that time the block of the

left had just won the election.

0:04:49.760,0:04:56.160  
They started to first nationalize the schools. It's also important because this story is both

0:04:56.160,0:05:03.200  
connected with a certain vision of empiricism and also with a certain vision of the public schools,

0:05:03.200,0:05:10.720  
because at that time the private Catholic schools were deeply infiltrated by the catholic far-right

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and there were a lot of satirical newspapers at the time, very anti-religious ones,

0:05:18.480,0:05:24.720  
more than Charlie Hebdo had ever been, criticizing the domination of the Catholic church

0:05:25.920,0:05:30.720  
on the minds, the fact that they are poisoning the minds of the children against the

0:05:30.720,0:05:39.920  
young republic, to obviously try to reverse it, to go back to the monarchy. So it was really a fight

0:05:39.920,0:05:48.000  
for the public schools against domination, oppression and racism to sanctify the

0:05:48.000,0:05:56.960  
republic and its principle of equality.  
[EP] How important is the concept of laïcité in France today?

0:05:56.960,0:06:02.382  
[CF] I think it's definitely the keystone

of the republic. It's the stone where  
0:06:02.382,0:06:10.640  
everything is built on. Again equality and  
freedom and fraternity, it's a common value.  
0:06:10.640,0:06:17.360  
Again, as I told you, it comes from the left.  
For decades the right wing tried to  
0:06:17.360,0:06:25.920  
undermine the separation because they were  
more  
attached to a very Christian way of being  
French.  
0:06:25.920,0:06:33.600  
But, with time, even the republican right at  
least, finally accepted that the separation  
was  
0:06:33.600,0:06:39.680  
protecting everyone - those who believe and  
those  
who don't believe - which is part of the core  
0:06:39.680,0:06:45.680  
of the law. Today I would say it's a very  
shared  
value, more than 80% of French are very,  
0:06:45.680,0:06:53.600  
very attached to the concept of laïcité.  
[EP] What are the main threats to laïcité in  
France at the moment?  
0:06:53.600,0:07:02.480  
[CF] Division and toxic propaganda. The  
terrorism  
is just the the top of the iceberg.  
0:07:02.480,0:07:09.040  
What really is the source of  
the danger is the intellectual confusion,  
0:07:09.040,0:07:16.080  
the fact that there is today some radical  
groups

trying to convince the youth that laïcité is  
0:07:16.080,0:07:24.960  
against them, is Islamophobic. And this is  
actually  
what the Catholic fundamentalists tried to  
do  
0:07:24.960,0:07:29.520  
in the 19th century. They described  
the public school as school against  
0:07:29.520,0:07:37.840  
God. They describe laïcité as a kind of  
Christianophobia. But of course when  
Catholics  
0:07:37.840,0:07:45.600  
did that nobody listened to them. Everybody  
is laughing, everybody sees that it is a trick,  
0:07:45.600,0:07:52.320  
something made by the fundamentalists to  
destroy this separation. When it comes from  
0:07:52.320,0:07:58.880  
the Muslim fundamentalist it's actually more  
dangerous and difficult to see, because they  
0:07:58.880,0:08:06.880  
are using a reality which is the existence of  
racism against muslims, to protect this  
accusation  
0:08:06.880,0:08:14.560  
of Islamophobia, which is in reality an  
accusation  
of blasphemy against feminists, against  
secularists,  
0:08:14.560,0:08:22.222  
against the separation itself.  
[EP] You worked as a journalist for Charlie  
Hebdo from 2004 to 2009.  
0:08:22.400,0:08:30.320  
What is the purpose of Charlie Hebdo as a  
magazine?

[CF] Charlie Hebdo is a monument for journalists

0:08:30.320,0:08:38.320  
and also for leftist activists, because it's probably one of the most leftist newspapers,

0:08:38.320,0:08:45.120  
the more funny one, the more free. It is typically the kind of newspaper walking into

0:08:45.120,0:08:51.680  
the shoes of the previous newspaper I told you about in the 19th century,

0:08:51.680,0:08:58.160  
that was criticizing the Catholic church and defending equality and the republic. So Charlie

0:08:58.160,0:09:06.880  
Hebdo is known in France to be the worst enemy to the Catholic fundamentalist. For years many,

0:09:06.880,0:09:15.840  
many radicals from that side took Charlie Hebdo to court, accused Charlie Hebdo of being Christianophobic.

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It's again very clear in the mind of the French, except those who have been poisoned by

0:09:22.480,0:09:29.680  
the Islamist propaganda, that Charlie Hebdo is on the side of the Muslims, but is definitely a major

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opponent to any kind of fundamentalism and fanaticism. Actually, it is also Charlie Hebdo who

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was part as a newspaper of the fight against

0:09:42.400,0:09:50.800  
racism during the 80s. Many of the cartoonists who have been killed on 7th January 2015

0:09:50.800,0:09:58.560  
were major figures of the cartoonist support against the anti-Arab racism.

0:09:58.560,0:10:05.040  
[EP] When did the journalists at Charlie Hebdo start to be threatened with violence by Islamist extremists?

0:10:05.040,0:10:10.996  
[CF] After the cartoon affair that started in Denmark . I was at Charlie Hebdo at that time.

0:10:10.996,0:10:19.840  
[EP] And that was 2005 2006.  
[CF] Exactly. It started worldwide 2006, but it started first in that market in 2005.

0:10:19.840,0:10:26.800  
And I was very aware of the situation because I was friends with a Danish citizen of Iranian

0:10:26.800,0:10:34.240  
origin. He showed me the cartoons, far before the polemic started worldwide. And he

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asked me to show them to Charlie Hebdo to see if the team would be willing to publish them.

0:10:43.120,0:10:50.960  
At that time it was just a Danish affair - a sort of misunderstanding between one Danish

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newspaper and one radical Imam, leading some protests against them. When it turned to

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become a worldwide polemic, that some embassies were burning, for example, I remember in Iran, in Syria to

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crowds, manipulated crowds obviously, were burning flags of Denmark, and also other European countries,

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then it became an issue for us, because we were again a satirical newspaper

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very concerned about the actuality [news], and especially when it is an actuality connected

0:11:31.360,0:11:37.520

to fundamentalism. So the discussion between us was quite simple because the question was 'Do we

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show the cartoons that were in the middle of the debate or not?' Well, the cartoonists around the table

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didn't find all of them very well done or very funny, but it was actually not their

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meaning, because those drawings had been done to fight against censorship and auto censorship

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not to make love.

[EP] So the cartoons originally published in Jyllands-Posten

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in Denmark, they were just done to say 'We are going to publish the face of Muhammad

0:12:08.080,0:12:14.880

as a protest against censorship'.

[CF] Yes . And it's super important to remind us of this context

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every time, because it changed everything. Jyllands-Posten didn't awake one day with this

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idea "let's mock Islam or let's mock Mohammed". It's absolutely not the case. Flemming Rose, the guy that

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was in charge of the cultural department in the newspaper, has been for a long time a correspondent

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in the ex-soviet world where he experimented the censorship. And when he learned that

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a Danish publisher wanted to do a very actually positive book about the

0:12:51.600,0:13:00.560

life of Mohammed, but was incapable of finding a cartoonist to illustrate, to draw in that

0:13:00.560,0:13:07.760

book, because they were all in a panic and afraid

of being killed, like Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam

0:13:07.760,0:13:14.560  
just a few months before. Then he thought: okay, there is intimidation here, something

0:13:14.560,0:13:20.960  
that changed our conversation, so let's break this fear by asking to some cartoonists to

0:13:20.960,0:13:27.760  
be free to represent Muhammad, because obviously this taboo is only for the fundamentalists, it does not

0:13:27.760,0:13:36.000  
apply to the journalists. He didn't ask for any negative drawings, actually many people don't know

0:13:36.000,0:13:43.040  
that because they didn't see those 12 drawings, but many of them are very positive and very sweet.

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There are two of them, of the 12, that are talking about the question of terrorism,

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which, you must recognize not so much regarding the situation and the context of today,

0:13:57.120,0:14:03.120  
and of that time already. So there is one drawing in particular that has been, of course, the center

0:14:03.120,0:14:09.520  
of the polemic, this Mohammed with a bomb in his head. It's a cartoon that has been made

0:14:09.520,0:14:17.440  
by a Danish cartoonist for Jyllands-Posten, in that context, but what many people don't

0:14:17.440,0:14:21.680  
know is that that drawing had been already published

0:14:21.680,0:14:29.440  
in the 80s during the civil war in Algeria, when fundamentalists were slaughtering

0:14:29.440,0:14:37.920  
other Algerians. This old anarchist cartoonist did this drawing to denounce it. I met him

0:14:37.920,0:14:45.840  
when I tried to write my paper for Charlie Hebdo. I met him to understand why he decided

0:14:45.840,0:14:55.120  
to depict this, why decided to illustrate that craziness this way. He told me "You know, Caroline,

0:14:55.120,0:15:02.382  
in Denmark we have a proverb that says if you have an orange in your heart it will give you luck,

0:15:02.560,0:15:09.200  
so I wanted to put that bomb in the heart of Muhammad to see if you put a bomb in your head

0:15:09.200,0:15:16.240  
it will give you bad luck. It's bad for Islam." That's the spirit of this drawing. Obviously

0:15:16.240,0:15:20.560  
nobody wanted to hear about it. When we published those drawings everything changed.

0:15:20.560,0:15:28.000

Everything changed in terms of threats, personal security, some of my friends started to be

0:15:28.000,0:15:34.196  
under police protection.

[EP] Did you ever experience violence yourself, or threats of violence?

0:15:34.196,0:15:39.920  
[CF] Oh yes. First I received many death threats because I signed a manifesto, with Taslima Nasreen

0:15:39.920,0:15:48.240  
and Salman Rushdie, against Islamism. But also because when I sometimes try to

0:15:48.240,0:15:54.560  
give lectures in university, which are the most dangerous places for intellectuals these days,

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especially in Belgium for example, but it is the case in UK sometimes also, you are physically attacked

0:16:01.520,0:16:08.560  
now by fundamentalist students helped by leftist students, which is more sad. Many of my friends

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have obviously experienced far worse than that. For 10 years we thought the worst was behind us,

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except that the magazine of al-qaeda put the picture of Charb [Stéphane Charbonnier], who was the editorial chief of

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Charlie Hebdo before the attack, as one of his main targets and the worst that we definitely

0:16:31.200,0:16:38.960  
were aware could happen. [EP] In 2011 and 2012 in particular, Charlie Hebdo published

0:16:38.960,0:16:45.360  
more cartoons depicting Muhammad and other muslim figures in compromising or ridiculous positions.

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Why did it continue to do this? [CF] Alors, those drawings also have a certain context. First they continue to

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draw including about Islam, symbolized by Muhammad, because it's one of the major symbols of Islam, just

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because the actuality is there, just because there is fundamentalist killing in the name

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of Islam and Muhammad almost every week, so one week they don't speak about it, the second week

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they don't speak about it, but after four years when there are thousands of massacres

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in the name of Islamism, they cannot avoid it. In the case of those less understood drawings we are

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speaking about, they were not actually speaking



about Islamism. In this case they were mocking

0:17:30.160,0:17:40.720  
a stupid film made by, I would say, a racist American, against Mohammed - 'The Innocence of Muslims'.

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This film was such a stupidity that Charlie Hebdo decided to laugh about these stupid ideas of

0:17:50.720,0:17:55.200  
putting Muhammad in different ridiculous positions.  
But, if you know Charlie Hebdo, and if you have this

0:17:55.200,0:18:02.240  
culture of the satirical press, you understand that the drawing is mocking actually this kind of film.

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But that subtlety, it's completely out of the possibility of being understood by fundamentalists,

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first because they don't read satirical press and they don't have a sense of humor. And they

0:18:17.120,0:18:22.320  
don't have the philosophy we go with. And that's the heart of the problem: Can we continue to have

0:18:22.320,0:18:31.120  
philosophical and satirical newspaper in Western secular democracy or can we not just because there

0:18:31.120,0:18:37.040  
are fundamentalists who don't have a sense of humor and are so basic in terms of philosophy?

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That's the real question here for journalists for intellectuals and for democracies.

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[EP] The day of the Charlie Hebdo murders, by coincidence, was also the date of publication of Michel Houellebecq's

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controversial novel, Submission. This imagined the takeover of the French state in 2022,

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in fact, by the Muslim Brotherhood Party supported by the socialists. Where did Submission fit into

0:19:00.720,0:19:08.640  
this context of violence against Charlie Hebdo and was it prescient?  
[CF] Not prescient, because honestly

0:19:08.640,0:19:15.440  
I think Michel Houellebecq is a talented writer and I do not share his view of the world, and Charlie

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Hebdo was not also on the same page. Actually the day of the massacre they were debating about the

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book and, as usual in Charlie Hebdo, everyone is

free to express his opinion with passion.

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And one of the cartoonists who was killed grew up in a very

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poor suburb. He came from a very popular background, and he was defending the fact that this

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book was absolutely too much, and in portraying always the Muslim as the oppressor. He has been

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killed just a few minutes after that by kalashnikov and two fanatics that obviously

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don't love debate. So again the problem we have is that this subtlety, the capacity of being leftist,

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secularist, anti-racist but, at the same time, to refuse absolutely fanaticism from whatever the

0:20:15.920,0:20:22.160

origin, the religion. Just refuse the oppression, the misogyny, the homophobia, the anti-semitism

0:20:22.160,0:20:31.120

that comes with fanaticism. The fact that it is so difficult to do both today, is also because fear

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forces [us] to choose a camp, so there is more fear,

there are more killings, and more than the

0:20:37.440,0:20:45.440

killings themselves, there is more bad faith in debate, or denial in debate, about this danger.

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Like we can see so often in some newspapers, the people are starting to be more infuriated,

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yes, furious about it, and they also stop thinking, they stop understanding, they start to

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be very angry, and this is where the hate can start.

[EP] There's no outlet is there,

0:21:04.400,0:21:10.391

if the people who write the the papers are in denial about what's really going on?

0:21:10.391,0:21:18.160

[CF] Exactly. Really for me it's a journalist issue and an intellectual issue. I mean, if we cannot continue

0:21:18.160,0:21:28.489

to inform, and sometimes to laugh about what scares us, then we are lost, then the hate

0:21:28.720,0:21:35.840

and probably the far right are the only ones who are going to address those issues,

0:21:35.840,0:21:40.960

and they are going to win. So this is also what Charlie Hebdo represents in France,

0:21:40.960,0:21:47.840

an alternative to hate, the fact that we prefer to think and love, to resist that.

0:21:47.840,0:21:56.400  
So when I read some journalists, and most of them are writing in the newspaper we know: The New

0:21:56.400,0:22:03.520  
York Times, The Washington Post, deforming, really deforming what is going on in our conversation,

0:22:03.520,0:22:09.360  
trying to accuse or blame secularism for the crimes of the jihadists,

0:22:09.360,0:22:16.960  
trying to accuse the free thinkers and the journalists for the crimes of the killers,

0:22:16.960,0:22:22.640  
It made me more than angry, it made me very, very worried actually for the future of

0:22:22.640,0:22:27.760  
our democracies.  
[EP] Let's contrast that with what happened immediately after the Charlie Hebdo

0:22:27.760,0:22:33.520  
attacks. Now at that point, in early 2015, there was a wave of sympathy and fellow feeling with

0:22:33.520,0:22:36.960  
the Charlie Hebdo journalists from people around the world.

0:22:36.960,0:22:44.400  
In France, in particular, what has been the response of the public and the establishment to the

0:22:44.400,0:22:52.720  
attacks, and has this response changed at all over the last six years?

[CF] I think that this communion

0:22:52.720,0:23:00.320  
that we experienced on 11th January, for example, during this big, big gathering,

0:23:00.320,0:23:06.720  
millions of people were gathering around Charlie Hebdo and the freedom of speech.

0:23:06.720,0:23:14.000  
This communion helped first to avoid the National Front at the presidential election

0:23:14.000,0:23:22.800  
the first time, after the terrorist attacks. And I think that it's really now a base to be

0:23:22.800,0:23:32.160  
a party that can that can govern, the left and the republican right are

0:23:32.160,0:23:39.600  
quite, the center also of course, on the same page in supporting freedom of speech, including

0:23:39.600,0:23:49.520  
a freedom of speech that can offend sometimes the fundamentalist, but with time, the more we faced

0:23:49.520,0:23:59.600  
terrorist attacks, the more we faced a temptation to confuse the debate, intoxication, manipulation, the more

0:23:59.600,0:24:08.080  
we saw some, especially on the extreme left, we saw some intellectuals, activists and

0:24:08.080,0:24:17.120  
sometimes politicians trying to now undermine this

unanimity around Charlie Hebdo, around secularism,

0:24:17.120,0:24:26.560

and certainly to win some votes also. So there is an ongoing debate about what is the

0:24:26.560,0:24:35.200

right balance, and sometimes in the name of having more peace, the temptation is there to say

0:24:35.200,0:24:43.760

"Let's speak less about fanaticism"

[EP] So in a way, actually, the Charlie Hebdo murders may have

0:24:43.760,0:24:50.320

achieved to some extent what the attackers wanted, which was to start to silence debate.

0:24:50.320,0:24:58.000

[CF] Exactly. This is why they are killing some symbolic people, like cartoonists, but actually they are

0:24:58.000,0:25:07.040

attacking every symbol of democracy, and if it works, I mean, if the intimidation leads to silence

0:25:07.040,0:25:14.480

the people that are annoying them and disturbing their agenda, why would they stop? They're actually

0:25:14.480,0:25:20.320

more applauding sometimes, of course nobody applauds officially to a terrorist attack,

0:25:20.320,0:25:27.040

the way to applaud to it is more subtle than that. It is to say "Well, I disapprove of the

0:25:27.040,0:25:34.080

killing, of course I disapprove of terrorism, but you have to admit that those drawings

0:25:34.080,0:25:40.933

should not have been made, that this conversation in a classroom should not have been

0:25:41.120,0:25:47.120

started." This is a victory for the jihadis of course.

[EP] Because once you say that "but",

0:25:47.120,0:25:51.360

once you say well these cartoons shouldn't have been shown, you're halfway to

0:25:51.360,0:25:56.800

to silencing any sort of criticism.

[CF] Oh you're doing it more effectively than the

0:25:56.800,0:26:03.360

kalashnikov, because the next people will not dare.

They are already afraid. If nobody supports them,

0:26:03.360,0:26:09.440

who is going to be brave enough to continue this conversation, to continue to educate

0:26:09.440,0:26:18.364

further generations to be open-minded and to accept the fact that freedom of speech can hurt .

0:26:18.560,0:26:28.560

But as long as it's not incitement to hatred, as long as it's not made to to demonize and kill,

0:26:29.120,0:26:36.480

it has to be part of the debate, it has to be free.

This is the difference between free speech and

0:26:36.480,0:26:42.080  
hate speech that is sometimes very difficult to understand. And this is why we need so much

0:26:42.080,0:26:48.640  
journalists and intellectuals to, with patience, remind the context of every single case.

0:26:48.640,0:26:56.062  
After every single case, to remind for example, that Samuel Paty, the teacher that was beheaded in France...

0:26:56.062,0:27:01.520  
[EP] Yes, let's talk about him. What was the context in which he showed his cartoons?

0:27:01.520,0:27:10.320  
[CF] Again, he just tried to prevent a new generation from becoming killers. He just wanted to address the issue

0:27:10.320,0:27:20.160  
of those misunderstandings that are poisoning the youth. We know, and we have very clear studies about

0:27:20.160,0:27:27.600  
that, we know that a big majority of the youth does not understand the difference between

0:27:27.600,0:27:36.000  
blasphemy and racism, that for them criticizing a symbol of a religion in order to criticize

0:27:36.000,0:27:44.560  
fundamentalism is the same as inciting hatred against Muslims, as a person, as believers,

0:27:44.560,0:27:50.880  
which is obviously not the case. Criticizing ideas, criticizing dogmas and religion is

0:27:50.880,0:28:00.160  
not inciting hatred against people. This is racism. Free speech, secularism or atheism even,

0:28:00.160,0:28:06.240  
is not racism. So the main goal of educating, especially in public schools, regarding the

0:28:06.240,0:28:12.400  
story I just told you, about where public schools are supposed to be there to reinforce

0:28:12.400,0:28:19.840  
citizenship, fraternity, to help understand each other and to accept also different points of view.

0:28:20.880,0:28:26.080  
It was obvious, and it's actually asked by the republic and by

0:28:26.080,0:28:32.960  
the Minister of Education that teachers in public schools try to have this conversation. So

0:28:32.960,0:28:37.520  
to have this conversation in a classroom you say to students "Well, I'm going to show you some

0:28:37.520,0:28:43.680  
drawings, some are going to hurt you, you can leave the room if you want, or if you want to be part of

0:28:43.680,0:28:50.240  
the conversation you can stay and criticize it if you want, but let's discuss about the context,

0:28:50.240,0:28:57.520  
why they have been done, and why it is legal, and why some people can criticize

0:28:57.520,0:29:02.160  
some symbols of religion when people are using those symbols to kill

0:29:02.160,0:29:09.440  
other people. That was the purpose of Samuel Paty, and he has been beheaded for that,

0:29:09.440,0:29:19.440  
following a hate campaign led by a group of students, parents, and especially a father, that now

0:29:19.440,0:29:26.960  
has to face justice, has to be accountable for what he has done, because he's the one who targeted

0:29:26.960,0:29:33.200  
Samuel Paty as Islamophobic, he presented that moment where even his own daughter was not

0:29:33.200,0:29:40.720  
attending the class. She lied. She said to her father that a teacher tried to incite

0:29:42.080,0:29:49.280  
hatred against Islam, and he made a video saying that this teacher was a big Islamophobe

0:29:49.920,0:29:53.840  
and that he should be punished, and then we know what happened next.

0:29:54.720,0:29:58.720  
[EP] Let's compare the situation in England, because, as you'll know, in

0:29:58.720,0:30:03.920

April this year a school teacher at a school in Yorkshire, in the north of England, Batley Grammar

0:30:03.920,0:30:09.120  
School, was suspended for showing cartoons of Muhammad. Now he's received death threats.

0:30:09.120,0:30:14.240  
But the major difference was that the school absolutely did not support him. They suspended him.

0:30:14.240,0:30:20.000  
And the government and the political establishment, especially on the left, has largely failed to

0:30:20.000,0:30:26.160  
support him. As an observer, how do you think that the reactions of the public in Britain

0:30:26.160,0:30:30.800  
in general differed from the French reactions to the Samuel Paty case, and why do you think

0:30:30.800,0:30:37.680  
there is this big difference between British or Anglo-Saxon attitudes and French attitudes?

0:30:37.680,0:30:45.280  
[CF] The first word that comes to mind is fear, fear and caution. I was not surprised to see that the

0:30:45.280,0:30:54.000  
head teacher threw the teacher under the bus and the way he has been abandoned, purely and simply.

0:30:54.000,0:31:00.240  
I was not surprised because since the cartoons

affair, I am one of the people defending Charlie

0:31:00.240,0:31:08.080  
Hebdo in the English newspapers and media, and the American media, and we

0:31:08.080,0:31:14.880  
really understood that defending those sensitive issues is really hard in that

0:31:14.880,0:31:23.040  
area, because people prefer to avoid touching those thorny issues and look somewhere else.

0:31:23.040,0:31:28.400  
So I was not surprised, but I have to say that yes, most of the French have been very shocked still,

0:31:28.400,0:31:34.640  
by the fact that this teacher has been really, really abandoned, because he tried to do something

0:31:34.640,0:31:42.000  
that all teachers should do actually. He tried to educate, to be more open-minded and you cannot be

0:31:42.000,0:31:51.200  
punished for that. And the fact that you prefer to obey fundamentalists and people who are angry

0:31:51.200,0:32:00.160  
than to protect the mission of a school, this very, very vital mission of school, that

0:32:00.160,0:32:07.840  
means again that the fundamentalists are already

ruling us inside secular democracies.

0:32:07.840,0:32:13.120  
But to explain the difference of reaction between France and the UK, first I would say we

0:32:13.120,0:32:20.000  
have been more hidden than you. We now have more than 250 victims of terrorism.

0:32:20.000,0:32:25.760  
The conversation was really different between the UK and France until the attack in London. I've

0:32:25.760,0:32:33.760  
felt that slowly the conversation is also changing in UK. I think, honestly, today the gap between

0:32:33.760,0:32:41.120  
UK and France is less obvious than between Europe and and the US, but still there is

0:32:41.120,0:32:47.760  
this temptation of being a coward, in denial, of taking no risks. I understand that it is taking

0:32:47.760,0:32:53.280  
a risk to protect that teacher and to support him. I understand that people prefer,

0:32:53.280,0:32:57.040  
probably they imagine that they are going to be beheaded if they do so,

0:32:57.040,0:33:03.253  
but people who don't risk anything, I'm speaking now against my

0:33:03.440,0:33:12.115  
colleagues in the press, we don't risk, as the teacher did,

to be beheaded just for doing their job,

0:33:12.115,0:33:19.715

just for informing on those issues,  
just by reminding us again why Samuel Paty  
did

0:33:19.760,0:33:28.080

show those drawings, reminding us why this  
teacher  
did so. I'm quite amazed that this teacher

0:33:28.080,0:33:31.360

is still hiding. We still don't hear about him.

0:33:31.360,0:33:37.840

We don't have his version. We don't have his  
voice. He doesn't speak. He has been  
silenced. Completely.

0:33:37.840,0:33:45.360

And we hear so much from the protester. We  
have heard  
so much from those accusing him of being  
Islamophobic.

0:33:45.360,0:33:52.960

That, in a democracy, to give so much voice,  
so much power, to the most oppressive,  
violent

0:33:52.960,0:33:58.800

anti-democrats, and not even a few seconds  
to  
to the democrats is really a problem.

0:33:58.800,0:34:04.720

[EP] Do you think that part of the problem in  
the UK compared  
with France, is that in France, because you  
have

0:34:04.720,0:34:11.200

laïcité so entrenched in your political system  
and in your culture, you understand and  
respect the

0:34:11.200,0:34:17.120

concept of free speech and criticism and  
satire

more than we do in the UK, because we don't  
have

0:34:17.120,0:34:24.640

secularism entrenched in our constitution?  
[CF] I think yes. It has a link with the secular  
system for sure.

0:34:24.640,0:34:31.600

Because we had to fight against  
fundamentalism  
to obtain liberty and freedom, so we have  
been

0:34:31.600,0:34:39.440

through this before. The religion changed  
but the idea, the intention, is the same. No  
matter

0:34:39.440,0:34:46.560

whether it is a Catholic or a Muslim  
fundamentalist, when  
fundamentalism wants to intimidate you and  
silence

0:34:46.560,0:34:53.680

you, the process is the same. When you live  
in a  
country where the separation does not exist,  
where

0:34:53.680,0:35:01.040

the Anglican church is quite privileged,  
is part of the national culture, I understand

0:35:01.040,0:35:08.480

that for politicians, but also sometimes for  
the  
royal family too, you need to be more  
tolerant

0:35:08.480,0:35:15.040

with every religious minority. So then you  
have the  
temptation to forbid more what is not  
acceptable,



0:35:15.040,0:35:21.724  
including fundamentalist protests. I think it's  
part of the denial.  
[EP] Denial on the left.

0:35:21.724,0:35:25.280  
Perhaps you could talk a bit more about  
that, in your experience of writing for

0:35:25.280,0:35:32.213  
American and British newspapers. What sort  
of evidence of denial have you come across?

0:35:32.213,0:35:36.800  
[CF] I've been through a very painful  
experience of denial. I can tell you because

0:35:37.440,0:35:43.333  
when I received a call from the BBC, as  
always during those very hard times

0:35:43.520,0:35:49.840  
since the cartoon affair, so almost 15  
years ago now, when I see BBC on my phone I  
start to

0:35:49.840,0:35:56.800  
have a physical reaction, because I know that  
I'm going to go through the worst. I'm going  
to be

0:35:56.800,0:36:02.480  
accused of being the source of  
all the problems, me and my friends

0:36:02.480,0:36:06.480  
and secularism et cetera. It  
started during the cartoon affair,

0:36:06.480,0:36:14.240  
when some British journalists came to  
the Charlie Hebdo office very angry and very  
brutal

0:36:14.240,0:36:21.040  
against us, saying that we were islamophobic,  
crisis

that we are provocative etc. And when,  
finally,

0:36:21.040,0:36:27.440  
the terrorist attacks occurred, and my friends  
have  
been killed, it was even more painful to go  
back

0:36:27.440,0:36:38.320  
to those arenas, like the BBC, to justify,  
me and others, to justify ourselves.

0:36:38.320,0:36:45.360  
I'll give you just one example,  
the last one, just at the beginning of the trial  
of

0:36:45.360,0:36:50.320  
the accomplices of the murder and the  
terrorist  
attack against Charlie Hebdo. It was the  
beginning

0:36:51.040,0:36:56.480  
and Charlie Hebdo did what I think  
a satirical newspaper is almost forced to

0:36:56.480,0:37:03.200  
do, it just republished the cartoons to say  
they have been killed for those cartoons.

0:37:03.200,0:37:10.560  
So the cover was just saying all of this.  
The purpose was clear. It was:

0:37:10.560,0:37:17.760  
do you realize that people have been  
killed in our time, in democracies, for  
drawings?

0:37:17.760,0:37:24.880  
Then the BBC called and, as usual, it's always  
the same question, a journalist asked me  
why

0:37:24.880,0:37:31.040

Charlie Hebdo intentionally made this provocation.  
I had just a few minutes to answer, just 2-3 minutes

0:37:31.040,0:37:40.000  
to explain well, this is not a provocation, this is journalism, to say and remind that people have

0:37:40.000,0:37:47.200  
been killed for drawings, and that it's not fair. While I was explaining that,

0:37:47.200,0:37:54.960  
I was interrupted by the journalist, who wanted absolutely to quote, and to quote entirely,

0:37:54.960,0:38:00.800  
extensively, the communique of the Prime Minister of Pakistan,

0:38:00.800,0:38:06.080  
accusing France of being Islamophobic, accusing France of being the violent

0:38:06.080,0:38:11.520  
protagonist in the story, and it was the end of the interview.

0:38:11.520,0:38:17.760  
You have to understand that a few days after that, the Pakistani jihadists had tried to kill

0:38:17.760,0:38:23.280  
two journalists in front of the old headquarters of Charlie Hebdo because he thought they were still

0:38:23.280,0:38:28.560  
there. He was reading not only fundamentalist newspapers, but he was also listening to

0:38:28.560,0:38:36.080  
English spoken media. And I really do believe

that we should not quote a fundamentalist

0:38:36.080,0:38:41.360  
Pakistani Prime Minister, who is putting religious minorities in jail, in the name of

0:38:41.360,0:38:47.120  
the law, against blasphemy, as a model of someone who we

0:38:47.120,0:38:52.640  
listen to, without criticizing what he's saying in a

0:38:52.640,0:38:58.480  
public debate. Because it's again, one more stone on the side of the fundamentalists.

0:38:58.480,0:39:03.760  
We need all the democrats, we need all the journalists of democracies

0:39:03.760,0:39:11.520  
in the middle of this battle, and we need them

0:39:11.520,0:39:18.320  
to explain and explain and explain the context,

0:39:18.320,0:39:23.280  
the intention, of those who don't want to provoke, don't want to incite to hatred, just want to inform

0:39:23.280,0:39:30.080  
and protect freedom of speech. [EP] And fundamentally, what seems to be the case with the BBC perhaps,

0:39:30.080,0:39:36.080  
judging from your remarks, or American newspapers sometimes, similarly, is that they're

0:39:36.080,0:39:42.080  
just confused, they're deluded, they're afraid, and they don't really understand what's most important,

0:39:30.080,0:39:37.200  
perhaps, why free speech is so important.  
[CF] And also because it costs less to speak  
about:

0:39:38.800,0:39:43.360  
is France responsible for the terrorist attack?  
Is France Islamophobic? than to

0:39:43.360,0:39:50.240  
say: Is Islamism a danger? I'll give you just  
another  
story I went through just a few weeks after

0:39:50.240,0:39:57.600  
the terrorist attack against Charlie Hebdo.  
Again the BBC sent me a team to do a show  
and

0:39:57.600,0:40:05.680  
the first intention was "we want to do  
a report about free speech". Two weeks

0:40:05.680,0:40:12.720  
after that they went back and they told me  
finally  
"we've been through a long process,we spoke  
with

0:40:12.720,0:40:20.320  
the insurance company, the chief of  
the information department and we decided  
to do a

0:40:20.320,0:40:26.880  
story about Islamophobia in France. I said  
"Okay, good  
for you. I think it's definitely more safe for

0:40:26.880,0:40:33.440  
you, but it's not safe for us. If you're  
explaining  
what's going on by a report about  
Islamophobia in

0:40:33.440,0:40:39.440  
France, it's safe for you, but it's not safe for

French citizens. Okay, you choose. As a  
journalist

0:40:39.440,0:40:44.480  
you choose your side, you have the right to  
do  
so, but be aware that you are making a  
choice."

0:40:44.480,0:40:50.400  
[EP] A final question: in a secular  
democracy what is the value of satire?

0:40:50.400,0:40:57.840  
[CF] It's the oxygen of a democracy.  
It's like the air you breathe. It's what

0:40:57.840,0:41:07.040  
nourishes your brain. It's what transforms  
hate to  
a sense of humor. Satire is absolutely,  
absolutely,

0:41:07.040,0:41:15.680  
vitaly necessary. If you suppress that liberty,  
you  
will have hate, and the extremists will be very  
happy.

0:41:15.680,0:41:22.080  
The fanatics, extremists, racist extremists,  
will  
be very happy, but then, in the middle of it,

0:41:22.080,0:41:27.805  
you will not be able to breathe.  
[EP] So suppress satire and the extremists will  
have won?

0:41:27.805,0:41:37.617  
[CF] For sure.  
[EP] Caroline Fourest, thank you very much  
[CF] Thank you.

0:41:37.840,0:41:42.320  
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0:41:42.320,0:41:46.560

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0:41:46.880,0:41:51.440

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0:42:03.760,0:42:15.840

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