

## #IAmNotCharlie - when does satire go too far?

By [Ciarán Morrissey](#), Comment Editor (2015/16)

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Responses to last week's attack on French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo have, on the whole, been positive and supportive of the cartoonists. But support is not unanimous, and many feel that the cartoons were crass, grossly offensive, and inflammatory. #IAmNotCharlie is currently trending on Twitter, and those using it generally feel that while the attacks themselves were horrendous, we should not be supporting the sorts of people who make racially-charged imagery for cheap laughs.

That's certainly a good argument, and one that must be dealt with when we discuss free speech. Satire's purpose is to mock, deride and generally poke fun of topics that are generally considered to be serious. Does that mean that Muslims are supposed to smile and nod when Muhammad – the most important man in Islamic theology – is openly insulted?

Well, certainly not. Muslims, much like anyone else, are free to voice their displeasure at imagery that they find offensive. While there is a right to free speech in most of the West, free speech does not shield you from the consequences of your speech. You can express whatever views you like, but it doesn't mean anyone has to listen, and it certainly doesn't mean you have to be agreed with. There are many ways to express your discontent with public broadcasts. Dapper Laughs had his TV show cancelled, Julien Blanc had his visa denied, and Ched Evans has been prevented from successfully joining any football team. All of this was achieved by voicing anger and offence without a shot being fired.

Previously, Charlie Hebdo has run issues mocking Christianity, Judaism, the French far right, and a whole smorgasbord of ideologies and worldviews. None of these groups then attacked the paper's offices. Of course, we must stress that we cannot use the actions of a few to demonise the many, but it is plain to see that to criticise Islam is to put yourself in much more danger than to criticize other groups.

There is something about the Islamic population of Europe that motivates them to violently defend their Prophet from criticism in a manner that differs from other religious and political groups. This, to me, seems to show that rather than sweep the cartoons under the rug, we should continue re-printing them. The message needs to be out there: you cannot bully our presses into submission. They are free to print what they want. We should not aim to offend for the sake of offending, but if we are to achieve a harmonious society, we cannot allow some religions to enjoy special privileges that others don't. We cannot allow the limits of satire to be dictated in the name of not offending others, because in doing so, we've missed the point. Either every public figure is fair game, or none of them are.

The point of satire is to mock, deride, and make fun. But this can often be of great political use. The KKK in the U.S. was largely brought down by a series of radio stories that featured KKK figures (Grand Wizards, Dragons, etc) as side characters in Superman's adventures. When the KKK's secrets were revealed and mocked by the general public, the organisation largely collapsed.

Satire made them look ridiculous, and it helped to destroy their ability to do harm. The various Churches in Europe have all been mocked and ridiculed in satirical publications, and this is one reason why they've got so little secular power nowadays.

You can make something big and scary look stupid and unappealing if you make fun of it enough. This is what the Islamists fear. They fear their ideology will be exposed for the violent, coercive sham it is, and that's why they're attacking journalists and newspapers across Europe. If we allow them to silence the presses, while they continue their own extensive press operations, then they've won half the battle.



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### 3 comments

Ickbal Mahmood ov York

22 Jan '15 at 7:10 am

Very, very thinly veiled racism here. Trying to pretend an islamophobic article is really about satire does not make your hatred, bigotry and xenophobia any less obvious. Everyone expects Muslims (note the capital M) to have thicker skins than everybody else, why? Because we are seen as the outsiders. Once the borders of the Caliphate habe reached Northern France and we have the UK next on the list, then you will be sorry and your sins punished.

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Anonymous

2 Feb '15 at 3:12 am

By stating how much power satire has to reduce a group to powerlessness, do you not therefore raise important questions about whether satire should be allowed of political figures?

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Ciarán Morrissey

3 Feb '15 at 1:55 pm

That's a very interesting point, and one that I've never seen raised before.

I guess my argument would be that while satire does have the power to reduce groups to powerless, it's not capable of doing this alone. When we see satire bringing a person or group to its knees, we see

it in conjunction with other factors.

Therefore, I don't think there's any need to restrict the criticisms and satires that may be made of political figures, as if they're going to be brought down, they're going to be brought down due to other factors.

I also think satire is completely ineffective against figures and ideas that are generally held in high esteem; it's an effect, not a cause, of unpopularity.

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