

Freedom Of Expression And Morality In The West

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Abstract

This paper discusses the Freedom of Expression and Morality in the West with special reference to Charlie Hebdo attack and its implications. It highlights some of the reactions to the attack, with many western Scholars calling on Muslims to apologize. The paper has rather drawn their attention to the root cause of the attack which seems to have been ignored by them, being the attitude of the western society to Islam. Solution has been suggested for the attention of the Western Powers and other International Human Rights Organizations to set out Standards of respect for people's faith for which one may be indicted for violating the moral laws.

Introduction

It was on Wednesday morning, 7th January 2015; two brothers from a Muslim Algerian family in France forced their way into the office of the French satirical weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris killing about twelve people (Wilsher, 2015). Charlie Hebdo is a satirical magazine which features cartoons, reports, polemics and jokes. It is a secularist anti-religious newspaper, publishing articles which mock religions including the three major religions of the world, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The newspaper also mocks various groups, whether in political arena or something of that nature. Such publications once appeared from 1962 to 1981, and again from 1992 on (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Their satirical articles disguised under the freedom of expression has given rise to hot debates, as many begun to ask what is freedom of speech and what is hate of speech? On what ground should some issues become protected by the principles of freedom of expression? Why should it be a crime to deny the Holocaust but similar issues ignored? Charlie Hebdo in February 2006 republished a cartoon depicting the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) which had been published by Danish newspaper Jylland Posten (Hirst, 2015). Similarly in 2011, the magazine named the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as its editor-in-chief, and in return, the magazine was firebombed (BBC, 2015). In 2013, the magazine published a comic book on the life of the Prophet (SAW) (Hirst, 2015).

Muslims across the world felt affront at having their Noble Prophet (SAW) insulted, resulting a massive protest worldwide. This is what instigated many militant groups to wage attacks against Charlie Hebdo, and the recent attack executed by Kouachi brothers is not different. According to BBC (2015), the attack is the deadliest attack in France since 1961 during the Algerian war.

REACTIONS TO CHARLIE HEBDO ATTACK

Charlie Hebdo staff glossed over the barbaric nature of the attack, and found it necessary as another way of bemoaning the loss of their employees, to publish about 5 million copies in contrast to their normal print run of 60,000 in France (BBC, 2015). The French President Holland said it was act of exceptional barbarity, with many world leaders condemning the attack (euronews, 2015). On 11th January more than 3 million people including 40 world leaders met in Paris for a rally of national unity (BBC, 2015) while 3.7 million joined demonstration across France (Daily Mail, 2015).

The attack attracted a warm debate as scholars, writers, freelance journalists and thinkers expressed their opinion. Some of them reiterated that Muslims worldwide are not to blame for the attack, most western writers held Islam and Muslims responsible. Morgan (2015) in his Daily Mail column said: “*I want to hear the leaders of the predominant Muslim countries like Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia come out and condemn these murderous bastards without equivocations*” while Murdoch was so obsessed that he called for total annihilation of the growing jihadist cancer in his twitter account (Murdoch, 2015).

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE WEST

Freedom of expression is a principle widely accepted by the International Human right Instruments, considered to be fundamental pillar of any democratic society. It is recognized as human right under article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), also recognized in international Human Right Law in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right (ICCPR), all emphasizing on the need for everyone to have right to hold opinions without interference (The Council of European Union, 2014).

The complex nature of this principle lies on how to strike an appropriate balance between freedom of expression and injury of reputation such as hate speech, freedom not to be attributed a false statement and so on. International and regional human rights organizations recognize that freedom of expression can be sanctioned by law, but any restriction on one to express his opinion must be unambiguous and precisely drawn to enable individuals to determine with certainty the legality of it or otherwise (Global Campaign for Free Expression, 2000, Pg: 10). This doesn't mean there are no restrictions; according to Index Censorship (2013) France has some of the toughest hate speech laws in EU. For instance, wearing religious signs and clothing in school was prohibited in 2004, Muslim streets prayers was then banned in September 2011, restricting their right to any public religious expression.

Similarly, it is a crime to deny the Holocaust, the systematic genocidal killing of millions of ethnic minorities (including Jews) by Nazi Germany in the 1930s to 1940s in many European countries including France (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia). It is also crime to deny the Armenian genocides until when the French highest court deems the law unconstitutional (CNN, 2012). This clearly shows that there are limits to any rights.

FIRM COALITION AGAINST THE MUSLIMS

Western writers, most if not all of them, call on Muslims to apologize for the Charlie Hebdo attack as well as condemning the Kouachi brothers and their violent reaction. Certainly, only few Muslims would encourage any violent actions against anyone, especially when there are other options on the table. Muslims would not also encourage people like Kouachi brothers to launch attacks on innocent people. But in the same vein, western writers, politicians and other individuals should understand the reason why Muslims would neither moan the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists killed, nor would they be proud of what they died for, or regard their death heroic. Shouldn't by the application of the same demand, every anti-Islamic protest in Dresden carrying the banners of Charlie Hebdo victims be blamed? In fact, such protests we witness in Germany called by the PEGIDA have even more demonstrable effect in the sense that it only incites hatred against the minority Muslims.

Why should Muslims apologize after they knew Charlie Hebdo fired one of its employees over anti-Semitic cartoonist? In 2009, Maurice Senet, a political cartoonist with Charlie Hebdo for 20 years, when he wrote a column mocking the relationship of the former president Sarkozy's son with a wealthy Jewish woman, He was fired and charged with inciting hatred (Samuel, 2009). Similarly, Jylland Posten after denigrating the Prophet of Islam in 2005 which caused vigorous protest throughout the Muslim world, Guardian reported them to have turned down cartoons on the ground that they could be offensive to readers. It reads: “*In April 2013, Danish illustrators Chistoffer Zieler submitted a series of unsolicited Cartoons dealing with the resurrection of Christ to Jylland Posten.*” Later on, Zieler received an email back from the paper's Sunday editor, Jen Kaiser which

said, “I don’t think Jylland Posten readers will enjoy the drawings. As a matter of fact, I think they provoke an outcry. Therefore, I would not use them.” (Fouché, 2006)

Why should it be more immoral to publish an article mocking Christians than the Muslims, shouldn’t by the application of the same norms, every faith be published in their Magazines? It gives Muslims no consolation to know that Charlie Hebdo mocked some personalities within the Christianity and Judaism so long as they are refusing to publish what could provoke an outcry from the followers of the religions.

Kahiye (2015), a freelance Journalist in Nairobi has drawn people’s attention to the fact that, few days before Charlie Hebdo attacks, Muslim place of worship were bombed in Sweden, pig head nailed to mosque door in Vienna without forgetting the Pegida anti-Islamic protest in Germany, and not even a single Muslim asked for an apology.

This clearly shows why Muslims must react, and when diplomacy and negotiations failed, then certainly, the youths among the Muslims may resort to violent reactions and in that case Muslims should not be held responsible, since Western powers decided to treat Islam an enemy of its society.

THE MUSLIM STRUGGLE IN THE WEST

When the Charlie Hebdo attack occurred, the media as Nashashibi (2015) observed, seems reluctant to investigate the cause of radicalism that eventually led to Charlie Hebdo. He also mentioned how attacks against the Muslims are under-reported. Take for instance, the Muslims places of worship bombed in Sweden few days before Charlie Hebdo attack. In a society where justice and fair play prevail, they identify the causes, analyze it and then develop a solution for it. But in Charlie Hebdo case, the entire western leaders seems to entirely disregard the causes of the attack, and no attempt has been made to assess the situation. Only in one sector did the leaders gather to show their allegiance to the values they all cherished and agreed upon, without Muslims given their right to be protected as a minority facing pungent discrimination. As a matter of fact, Charlie Hebdo attacks and its kinds show how Muslims in the West are programmed to always be a terrorist. Had the Western people desire peace and justice, they would have assessed the situation on the moral grounds, but instead, they all stand by the side of Charlie Hebdo, and in some cases, even encourage it to continue its insult based on the premises that it is free to mock people’s faith regardless of whether it transgresses the bounds of decency or not. An example of such encouragements is the decision taken by the PEN American center to give its annual freedom of expression courage award to Charlie Hebdo, although that decision has made six writers to withdraw as literary hosts at the group’s annual Gala, scheduled to take place on 5th May, 2015 (Shuessler, 2015).

This is a clear testimony of the western collective support in the face of Islam and Muslims, and that interprets the purport of what Murdoch said about the total annihilation of what he called the growing jihadists. It is just a call for a firm coalition to thwart what they call “*Islamization of Europe or West*”, which is also the objective of the Pegida anti-Islamic Protests. According to a pew study conducted, CNN reported Islam to be the world’s fastest growing faith leaping from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.76 billion by 2050. Looking further into the future the study says by 2100, Islam’s population could even surpass Christianity (Burke, 2015). Indeed, this report is frightening to even Christians let alone the secularists’ states. To combat this, Muslims have been therefore forced to live in a circumstance which may either lead to their annihilation or abandon their faith for social integration in return. Consequently, the greatest stress of Charlie Hebdo insult on Muslims is to stop Islam from spreading, for the continuity of their secularist states by corrupting the minds of the Muslims.

Perhaps what triggers off the violent reaction from the Muslims’ youths in the west is the way Muslims are inappropriately put under surveillance. In August 2011, Associated Press Journalists (AP) examined with a probe, the NYPD intelligence operations, where informants paid by the NYPD, were assigned to bait Muslims, snapping pictures inside the mosque, cataloging it and even collecting the names of the innocent people. Even Muslims college students are being monitored far beyond the city limits. The same thing happened to a Copenhagen University student, when he was reported to police by a passenger on a train over a possible

terrorist activity, for just seeing his nose buried in a textbook, feeling jittery about his exam (Faiola & Mekhemet, (2014)). Despite this long spying on Muslims for years, the NYPD never generated any lead to a possible terrorist activity. But the information this surveillances give will influence the daily activities of the Muslims. It may even prepare him to be a future criminal because of frustration, making him an enemy of the western society.

This is the price young Muslims are paying for just being Muslims and the most striking now is maintaining the true Islamic Identity whilst at the same time fulfilling the role of statesmanship in the West. This can be understood through what Kathrin Oertel, one of PEGIDA leaders told CNN, when she demanded from Muslims to live only according to the dictates of the German Culture (Noak, 2015). Unless these under siege polices are lifted, one can expect little improvement in the Muslims life in Europe and the West in general.

THE NEED FOR THE MORAL PRINCIPLES

It is only justice and fair play that succeed in any society. We need discipline in our societies which requires strong moral persuasions for its effectiveness. This is because in the absence of moral code for people to uphold, there would be no right or wrong, rather, only chaos and conflict will prevail, all of which are detriment of the national development. That moral persuasion is only found in the teachings of the religion, which helps us to administer justice and respecting one another along with their faiths. The implication of mocking religion or even avoiding it is the tendency for the leadership to create a corrupt political culture, in which leaders become unable to administer justice, while on the other hands, the citizens will refuse to submit with loyalty to their leadership. Take for instance, had the legal provisions are designed to protect the people's faith from being mocked, Charlie Hebdo attacks and its kind will undoubtedly be avoided. Freedom of expression should not have been to say what you want, but rather to express your opinion on the moral ground even when it involves criticisms. The only truly Democratic State is to judge and be judged on the moral grounds above personal or even collective interest. Freedom of expression therefore needs to be remodeled in the light of the aforementioned principles. In Islam, the basis of moral judgment is the demands of the Muslims faith, which requires one to be kind and just, and not to be disgraceful. For instance, it is forbidden by the Qur'an to insult what others worship, Allah (SWT) said:

"Insult not those whom they (disbelievers) worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongfully without knowledge". (6:108)

Allah the Exalted also said urging Muslim to be just:

"O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah as just witnesses, and let not the enmity and the hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is well- Acquainted with what you do". (5:8)

It is therefore only justice and fair play that succeed in any society, and unless the moral principles are uphold in the west, one can expect little improvement for the life of decency in the West.

Summary, Conclusion and Suggestions

This paper has been discussing the Morality and Freedom of Expression in the West with special reference to Charlie Hebdo attack. The paper explained how this attack attracted reactions worldwide, with some western writers holding Islam and Muslim responsible, and consequently, calling on them to apologize. The paper has rather drawn people's attention to the root cause of the attack which is the attitude of the western society to Islam, making it an enemy of the National Development. Many policies were and are still introduced, which suggests that under no circumstance should Muslims be trusted, and are therefore put in the circumstance that may either lead to their annihilation or abandon their faith for the social integration in return. The paper call for

designing a legal provision which will make people indicted for violating the moral laws, and in the light of what have been discussed, the paper wishes to suggest the following:

- Western Societies need strong moral persuasion from the family level up to the political arena, neglecting of which is the root evil of every family breakdown.
- Western Powers and other International Human Rights Instruments should set out a standard of respect for people's faith for which one may be indicted for violating the moral laws.
- For a meaningful and reasonable social integration in the West, legal provisions should be designed to protect Muslims, as a minority facing discrimination.
- Muslims, especially youths, should follow up an evil character shown to them by some western communities with a good one, and should not ignore the teachings of their religion or compromise the Islamic moral principles.
- Surveillances put on Muslims should be stopped for foreseeable future in western communities.

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