

ÉDITO

## After Brussels : How did we end up here

mercredi 13 avril 2016, par [Charlie Hebdo](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 30 mars 2016).

**There have been quite a number of reactions to the Riss editorial in the latest issue (March 30) of *Charlie Hebdo* weekly, often based on bad or incomplete translations. For the records, we reproduce here this editorial as it appears on *Charlie's* website.**

### HOW DID WE END UP HERE ?

For a week now, experts of all kinds have been trying to understand the reasons for the attacks in Brussels. An incompetent police force ? Unbridled multiculturalism ? Youth unemployment ? Uninhibited Islamism ? The causes are numerous beyond counting and everyone will naturally choose the one that suits best their own convictions. Law and Order fans will denounce the haplessness of the police. Xenophobes will blame immigration. Sociologists will rehash the evils of colonialism. Urban-planners will point to the evils of ghettoisation. Take your pick.

In reality, the attacks are merely the visible part of a very large iceberg indeed. They are the last phase of a process of cowing and silencing long in motion and on the widest possible scale. Our noses are endlessly rubbed in the rubble of Brussels airport and in the flickering candles amongst the bouquets of flowers on the pavements. All the while, no one notices what's going on in Saint-German-en-Laye. Last week, Sciences-Po [\[1\]](#) welcomed Tariq Ramadan. He's a teacher, so it's not inappropriate. He came to speak of his specialist subject, Islam, which is also his religion. Rather like lecture by a Professor of Pies who is also a pie-maker. Thus judge and contestant both.

No matter, Tariq Ramadan has done nothing wrong. He will never do anything wrong. He lectures about Islam, he writes about Islam, he broadcasts about Islam. He puts himself forward as a man of dialogue, someone open to a debate. A debate about secularism which, according to him, needs to adapt itself to the new place taken by religion in Western democracy. A secularism and a democracy which must also accept those traditions imported by minority communities. Nothing bad in that. Tariq Ramadan is never going to grab a Kalashnikov with which to shoot journalists at an editorial meeting. Nor will he ever cook up a bomb to be used in an airport concourse. Others will be doing all that kind of stuff. It will not be his role. His task, under cover of debate, is to dissuade people from criticising his religion in any way. The political science students who listened to him last week will, once they have become journalists or local officials, not even dare to write nor say anything negative about Islam. The little dent in their secularism made that day will bear fruit in a fear of criticising lest they appear Islamophobic. That is Tariq Ramadan's task.

Take this veiled woman. She is an admirable woman. She is courageous and dignified, devoted to her family and her children. Why bother her ? She harms no one. Even those women who wear the total, all-encompassing veil do not generally use their clothing to hide bombs (as certain people were claiming when the law to ban the burqa was being discussed). They too will do nothing wrong. So why go on whining about the wearing of the veil and pointing the finger of blame at these women ?

We should shut up, look elsewhere and move past all the street-insults and rumpus. The role of these women, even if they are unaware of it, does not go beyond this.

### **The visible part of a very big iceberg.**

Take the local baker, who has just bought the nearby bakery and replaced the old, recently-retired guy, he makes good croissants. He's likeable and always has a ready smile for all his customers. He's completely integrated into the neighbourhood already. Neither his long beard nor the little prayer-bruise on his forehead (indicative of his great piety) bother his clientele. They are too busy lapping up his lunchtime sandwiches. Those he sells are fabulous, though from now on there's no more ham nor bacon. Which is no big deal because there are plenty of other options on offer - tuna, chicken and all the trimmings. So, it would be silly to grumble or kick up a fuss in that much-loved boulangerie. We'll get used to it easily enough. As Tariq Ramadan helpfully instructs us, we'll adapt. And thus the baker's role is done.

Take this young delinquent. He has never looked at the Quran in his life, he knows little of the history of religion, of colonialism, nor a great deal about the proud country of his Maghreb forefathers. This lad and a couple of his buddies order a taxi. They are not erudite like Tariq Ramadan, they don't pray as often as the local baker and are not as observant as the redoubtable veiled mothers on the street. The taxi heads for Brussels airport. And still, in this precise moment, no one has done anything wrong. Not Tariq Ramadan, nor the ladies in burqas, not the baker and not even these idle young scamps.

And yet, none of what is about to happen in the airport or metro of Brussels can really happen without everyone's contribution. Because the incidence of all of it is informed by some version of the same dread or fear. The fear of contradiction or objection. The aversion to causing controversy. The dread of being treated as an Islamophobe or being called racist. Really, a kind of terror. And that thing which is just about to happen when the taxi-ride ends is but a last step in a journey of rising anxiety. It's not easy to get some proper terrorism going without a preceding atmosphere of mute and general apprehension.

These young terrorists have no need to amass the talents of others, to be erudite, dignified or hard-working. Their role is simply to provide the end of a philosophical line already begun. A line which tells us « Hold your tongues, living or dead. Give up discussing, debating, contradicting or contesting ».

This is not to victimise Islam particularly. For it has no opponent. It is not Christianity, Hinduism nor Judaism that is balked by the imposition of this silence. It is the opponent (and protector) of them all. It is the very notion of the secular. It is secularism which is being forced into retreat.

Above all, in a sense, this stops us asking perhaps the world's oldest and most important question - « How the hell did I end up here ? ». « How the hell did I end up having to wander the streets all day with a big veil on my head ? » « How the hell did I end up having to say prayers five times a day ? » « How the hell did I end up in the back of a taxi with three rucksacks packed with explosives ? » Perhaps, very sadly, the only people who are still asking themselves that most important of questions are the unlucky victims. « How the hell did I end up here, six yards away from that big bomb ? »

The first task of the guilty is to blame the innocent. It's an almost perfect inversion of culpability. From the bakery that forbids you to eat what you like, to the woman who forbids you to admit that you are troubled by her veil, we are submerged in guilt for permitting ourselves such thoughts. And that is where and when fear has started its sapping, undermining work. And the way is marked for all that will follow.

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**P.-S.**

\* <https://charliehebdo.fr/en/edito/how-did-we-end-up-here/>

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## **Notes**

[1] Sciences Po is an elite French public research and higher education institution.