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In Its March 30 editorial, French “Charlie Hebdo” is saying what feminists in Muslim contexts said for so long on the “warning signs of fundamentalisms”

Wednesday 13 April 2016, by [HELIE LUCAS Marieme](#) (Date first published: 9 April 2016).

The writer, an Algerian sociologist, is the founder and former international coordinator of the international solidarity network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws. Editors of *SabrangIndia* had sent the author a critique of the Riss editorial in *Charlie Hebdo* dated March 30, 2016 to which this is a response

Understand Where They Are Coming From, *Charlie Hebdo* is Not Racist

Why do friends in Asia and Africa brand Charlie Hebdo racist when it is saying just what feminists in Muslim contexts said for so long?

Today, I receive in rapid succession two articles against the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial (March 30, 2016), one from friends in Africa and another from friends in Asia; both articles attacked Charlie Hebdo as racist, and, from the little I have seen, they both twist facts to fit into their analysis. I do not intend to waste my time responding to these bad-faith articles.

However I took pains to read the translation into English of the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial. I have not read the original in French but I assume it is the ‘official’ translation. You can read it too, below:

“How did we end up here?” Par Charlie Hebdo – March 30, 2016 [[1](#)]

What does it say?

In substance, it says what WE, the networkers in the ‘Women Living Under Muslim Laws’ (WLURL) solidarity network, have been saying for three decades and more, i.e. that there are warning signs of the rise of Muslim fundamentalism; and that if one does not want to end up facing terrorist actions, one should try and control it beforehand, at the level of the early warning signs.

Or, in the words of several Algerian women interviewed by Karima Bennoune in her book on the internal resistance to Muslim fundamentalism (“Your fatwa does not apply here”), that fighting terrorism should go hand in hand with fighting the ideology that brings about, at a later stage, the terrorist actions, i.e. the ideology of “Islamism”. Please note: not “Islam”: “Islamism” (A concept I never use, precisely because it may lead to confusion).

Were we “Islamophobic” when we worked on the warning signs? When we listed the restrictions on freedom of thought, of movement, on women’s rights, the change in dress codes, etc...(See: ‘Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms’, 2004, WLUML Publications)

Were the (Muslim) women interviewed by Karima Bennoune “Islamophobic” when they denounced the ideology of Islamism?

I still hope that you will say that no, we were not “Islamophobic”, we were warning our sisters that when these signs first appear in their countries - as they already did in some of our countries -, they should know how it is likely to end... Remember? We worked on the warning signs AFTER the terrible assault on democrats and feminists in Algeria in the nineties that made 200 000 victims who died horrible deaths, just like the ones who die now at the hands of Daesh or Boko Haram...

This is exactly what *Charlie* is doing: warning the French people that it is too late to lament about terrorist actions, if one does not also limit “Islamist” propaganda; *Charlie* is warning the French people of the consequences of bending to the various limitations that one silently accepts in the name of respect of the Other; *Charlie* gives the example of the fundamentalist speaker Tariq Ramadan , - and Ramadan is far from being the only one - who is, again and again, invited to speak in universities and other public functions. Let me ask you: why him?

Why not Professor Karima Bennoune? Why not Dr Fatou Sow? Why not our pro-secularism former Great Mufti of Marseilles Soheib Bencheikh who is far more knowledgeable about Islam than Ramadan is? Why not any of us, feminists in Muslim countries and communities who for decades have been standing against the Muslim fundamentalist far-right?

This is the question that is raised by *Charlie Hebdo*: it points at the French people’s own responsibility regarding Muslim fundamentalism rising in France and in Europe. Anything wrong with that?

Charlie Hebdo also points at the example of the increasing use of Saudi-style veiling in Europe, something which has already happened in our countries. We always had some veiled women in our countries, but the warning sign of fundamentalism is when so many women at the same time start adopting the veil at a fast multiplying pace, and when this veil is not even the traditional indigenous one of their fore-mothers but a foreign imported one.

What I find appalling is that what we, women from Muslim background, have said for so long - for decades - is seen, when it is said by *Charlie Hebdo*, in their own words and in their own national context, is immediately branded racist. And what is even more dangerous is that the critics are circulated by our friends in Asia and in Africa, even without having looked at the incriminated text.

We do not need to ‘be Charlie’ to understand that, whether or not we like their style, they address a burning question. And that we are all in the same boat, facing the rise of religious fascists that curtail rights, put women ‘in their place’, assassinate opponents and all those who do not share their interpretation of Islam, including deeply believing Muslims.

Beware of getting rid of the last few honest allies we have on this planet.

Marieme Helie Lucas

P.S.

* “Understand Where They Are Coming From, Charlie Hebdo is Not Racist”. Sabrang. Published on: April 9, 2016:

<https://sabrangindia.in/article/understand-where-they-are-coming-charlie-hebdo-not-racist>

Footnotes

[1] Reproduced on ESSF (article <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article37621>),
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