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Region: Worldwide

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The satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo has featured the prophet Muhammad on its front cover once again. The Prophet is crying, just as did [the cartoonist who made the cover](#). The headline says "All is forgiven".

As it has been only a week since the attack and the killings in Paris, some could question the magazine's decision to put the Prophet on its cover again. But no one can deny the right to free speech in a secular state, as no one can avoid responsibility for the spoken and written word. Therefore, there are things that the world media could do and could have done differently in the coverage of the Charlie Hebdo killings and the events that have followed.

1. Avoid graphic images: the first mistake most of the world media made, according to the director of the Ethical Journalism Network, Aidan White, is broadcasting the video showing the execution of the police officer Ahmed Merabet.

“This is a time for ‘slow’ journalism, when everyone in the media—and even those would-be journalists outside the newsroom—needs to think carefully about the consequences of what they write and the images they show. Within minutes of the Paris shootings, a video was being circulated online showing the point-blank execution of a police officer. It should never have been shown and never shared”, wrote Aidan White for [Open Democracy](#) .

2. "All Muslims think the same": There have been numerous TV and radio programmes, analytical columns and even more tweets on the topic of Charlie Hebdo. Most of the contributors, like many journalistic associations, world institutions and Muslim associations, condemned the killings, especially killing in the name of religion and the blatant violation of freedom of expression. But what does the Muslim population around the world think? Why did we hear, just sporadically, Muslim voices, mostly very liberal, and how could we have included a bigger variety of Muslim voices in the media coverage by western mainstream media? Also, a call for some sort of collective Muslim responsibility “over the growing jihadist cancer” would not be worth mentioning if it didn’t come from one of the most powerful people in the media worldwide, Rupert Murdoch.

3. Providing Context: While analysing the complex international (and other) relations, one must keep in mind to provide a context. A good example of that is an article by the legendary Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk in the [Independent](#) who thought about the relationship and violent history France and Algeria share, even before the names and Algerian origins of the two brothers who attacked and killed the staff at Charlie Hebdo, were publicised.

‘Algerians had long provided the majority of France’s Muslim population and in October 1961 up to 30,000 of them staged a banned independence rally in Paris – in fact, scarcely a mile from the scene of last week’s slaughter – which was attacked by French police units who murdered, it is now acknowledged, up to 600 of the protesters,’ writes Fisk for the Independent. Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek wrote for [New Statesman](#) that “the fundamentalist Islamic terror is *not* grounded in the terrorists’ conviction of their superiority and in their desire to safeguard their cultural-religious identity from the onslaught of global consumerist civilization. The problem with fundamentalists is not that we consider them inferior to us, but, rather, that *they themselves* secretly consider themselves inferior”.

4. Spreading Fear: Most of the mainstream and corporate media let their coverage in the

aftermath of the killings be overtaken by fear and repetitive strong messages about terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and freedom of expression. But the media needs to be careful not to fall into the trap of spreading fear and reporting about extreme measures such as the deployment of 10,000 soldiers by the French authorities, without having some distance. The situation in France today, according to the journalist and the co-founder of [The Intercept](#), Jeremy Scahill, can be compared with the one in the USA after the attacks of 9/11 when “civil liberties were swept away”.

'One of the core issues of press freedom, if this is a moment where the whole world is saying we have to have a free press, and that no matter how controversial or hateful some of the speech is or may be interpreted in some communities, that we judge a free press by how we treat the journalists or the stories that we don't like or that we're offended by.

But on the other hand, it is sort of a circus of hypocrisy when all of those world leaders march in the frontline in Paris in solidarity. Every single one of those heads of state or representatives of governments there have waged their own wars against journalists. You know, David Cameron ordered *The Guardian* to smash with a hammer the hard drives that stored the files of NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. Blasphemy is considered a crime in Ireland. You had multiple African and Arab leaders whose own countries right now have scores of journalists in prison. Benjamin Netanyahu's government in Israel has been targeted for killing numerous journalists who have reported on the Palestinian side, have kidnapped, abducted, jailed journalists,' warned Jeremy Scahill in the interview for [Democracy Now](#) .

5. News versus Creative Media: So often satirical cartoons and covers cause a debate, and also an offence. 'When satire goes beyond its intended audience, it often becomes offensive. Given the fact that most things that get published go beyond their intended audiences in this era of the Internet, it would be easy to shy away from satire, just to avoid the headache. That would be a shame. Instead, I think the current climate simply means the purveyors of satire have an added layer of responsibility. First, ensure the satire is well-executed, because it's impossible to defend lame attempts at satire. Then, explain. And make sure that explanation is available to anyone who might be looking for it,' [wrote](#)

[Poynter's Kelly McBride](#)

back in 2008.

In the light of contemplating differences between journalism and satire, the acclaimed graphic artist and journalist Joe Sacco debates the limits of satire and what it means if Muslims don't find it funny, [in a cartoon published in the Guardian](#) .

Amongst the numerous statements of condemnation of the Charlie Hebdo killings and in defence of freedom of expression, the 18th century French philosopher Voltaire resurfaced again as he often does “[invoked by those](#) who feel the legacy of the Enlightenment to be under threat.” His apparent quote, even if it is not his (*“I do not agree on what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it”*), served as an appropriate reminder about unprecedented freedom of speech after people were killed in the Charlie Hebdo office and in the kosher supermarket in Paris last week.

But what can we, a modern 21st century global bunch, offer to the contemporary reading of Voltaire’s words? How did our societies progress since his time and his ideas, not only about freedom of speech, but also about freedom of religion and freedom to be non-religious? The media need to offer a debate free of negative stereotypes, generalisations and presumptions.