International Affairs Program
Research Report

The Paris Attacks: A Northeastern Forum

An International Affairs Program and Center for International Affairs
and World Cultures Panel
25 February 2015

The International Affairs Program is one of the largest majors in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities at Northeastern University, which is located in the heart of Boston, MA, USA.

International Affairs Program
201 Renaissance Park
360 Huntington Ave.
Boston, MA 02115
617.373.5472/5367 (f)
www.northeastern.edu/cssh/internationalaffairs
THE PARIS ATTACKS:
A NORTHEASTERN FORUM

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2015
4:30 – 6:30 P.M.
310 RENAISSANCE PARK
NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
1135 TREMONT ST, BOSTON, MA 02115

Paris, 7-9 January 2015: 17 people are killed in armed attacks on the offices of the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine, at a kosher supermarket, and on the streets. The attacks raise many questions germane to our teaching, research, and learning at Northeastern University, and to our concerns as citizens: free speech versus hate speech; multiculturalism versus marginalization and extremism; Islamophobia and anti-Semitism; terrorism and the fallout from foreign policy; religion and international affairs.

THE PANEL DISCUSSION WILL INCLUDE:

Max Abrahms
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science

Valentine Moghadam
Director, International Affairs Program
Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Shakir Mustafa
Teaching Professor
World Languages Center

Gordana Rabrenovic
Associate Professor
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Dov Waxman
Professor
Department of Political Science

An open discussion will follow.

For questions regarding this event, please contact nuhumanities@neu.edu.
The Attacks in Paris: A Northeastern University Forum

Wednesday, 25 February 2015, 310 RP

Note: The Forum was planned immediately after the attacks took place and was originally scheduled to take place on the 5th of February but was postponed twice due to snow days. It convened on the 25th of February and was attended by a large group of students and faculty, some of whom hailed from France

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Photo Gallery: Historical Representations of the Prophet Muhammad
Last month’s tragic events in Paris and beyond raise many questions germane to teaching and research at Northeastern University, as well as to our concerns as citizens: free speech versus hate speech; multiculturalism versus marginalization and extremism; Islamophobia and anti-Semitism; terrorism and the fallout from foreign policy; religion and international affairs.

In early January 2015, two coordinated attacks were carried out by two Algerian-French brothers and a Malian-French man, all three products of the French banlieus (suburban ghettos). Their murderous rampage resulted in the deaths of 17 people, including staff members of the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine, shoppers at a kosher supermarket, and two police on the streets (one a black policewoman and the other a Muslim policeman). The killers themselves later died in shootouts with police. I want to begin by pointing out the global context of conflicts, wars, inequalities, and tensions in which the attacks took place:

1. A world in which the US and its allies can undermine or overthrow sovereign states and help spawn jihadism – from Afghanistan in the 1980s to Iraq in 2003 to Libya and Syria in 2011; worldwide resentment over brutality in Abu Ghraib, Fallujah, Guantanamo and the European countries that facilitated extrajudicial extraditions, renditions, and torture; U.S. drone strikes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and elsewhere – which often hit civilians;
2. A brutal civil conflict in Syria that has been encouraged by the US, France, UK, and their regional partners Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Israel;
3. Non-resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the summer 2014 Israeli attacks on Gaza;
4. A world in which reckless financiers and obscenely compensated CEOs can precipitate a global recession, but the only ones to suffer are middle- and low-income people.

In such a world, marginalized, unemployed young men feeling alienated and angry – such as the Kouachi brothers and Coulibaly – are likely to turn to criminality and various expressions of hyper-masculinity, but they also have political grievances, as were mentioned by Coulibaly in his infamous video. So the cycle of violence continues on both sides.

And where do these young men (and some young women) go? They go to ISIS/ISIL in Iraq and Syria – a nihilistic cult group generated by the military interventions in Iraq and Syria; they join the resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan and in Pakistan; or they link up with the al-Qaeda network in Yemen and North Africa.

Let us not forget earlier manifestations of jihadism and Islamic extremism – Khomeini’s indefensible fatwa against Salman Rushdie’s book The Satanic Verses; the wave of Islamist terror in Algeria in the
1990s, where intellectuals were among those deliberately targeted and many women taken into sexual slavery; 9/11; the 2004 Madrid railway attacks; 7/7/2005 (the London bombings); the protests against the Danish cartoons; the attacks in Mumbai; the attacks in the Netherlands, Belgium, and elsewhere. In my analysis, jihadism is both the product of destructive and self-defeating Western foreign policies and a cancer in the body politic of the dar-ol-Islam. When we consider Boko Haram, al-Shabab, and Daesh, we recognize that the threat of jihadism is real, and its victims are Muslims and non-Muslims alike. But I want to make clear the very sharp distinction between jihadists, radical Salafists, and other extremists and terrorists on the one hand, and the vast majority of Muslims on the other.

My colleagues Max Abrahms, Dov Waxman, Gordana Rebrenovic and Shakir Mustafa will be speaking more about those issues, and I will focus on the question of free speech vs. hate speech. Following our presentations, we will open up the floor to your questions and comments.
Why are Jews being attacked and murdered in France?

Dov Waxman
Professor of Political Science, International Affairs and Israel Studies
Co-Director, Middle East Center

It is important to recall that two attacks took place in Paris. One was against freedom of the press. The other was against Jews. Four Jewish shoppers at a kosher supermarket were murdered for no other reason than the fact that they were Jewish. Why did this happen and what does it say about the security of Jews in France, or indeed Europe as a whole?

We must recognize that this was not a one-off, isolated incident. On the contrary, it was just the latest in a string of terror attacks against Jews. On May 24, 2013, Mehdi Nemmouche, a French citizen who had fought with ISIS in Syria, killed four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. On March 19, 2012, Mohammed Merah, another French citizen, killed a teacher and three children at a Jewish school in Toulouse in the south of France. Although he claimed to be a member of Al Qaida, he was not actually a member of Al Qaida. He was just inspired by Al Qaida.

Why are these radical Islamists targeting Jews? Some may argue that it is because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is mistaken. Jews are being targeted not because of what Israel is doing to the Palestinians, but because of who they are—because they are Jewish. Anti-Semitism is a central component in radical Islamist ideology. The claim that there is a worldwide Jewish conspiracy aimed at the destruction of Islam and Muslims is a major feature of jihadist propaganda. This claim is not new. In an essay written in the 1950s entitled “Our Struggle with the Jews,” Egyptian Islamist ideologue Sayyid Qutb accused Jews of trying to destroy Islam and blamed them for modern “atheistic materialism . . . animalistic sexuality . . . [and] the destruction of the family.” Qutb even claimed that Hitler was sent by God to deal with the Jews, and that the Jews founded the State of Israel as revenge for being defeated by Muslims thirteen centuries earlier.1

Radical Islamist ideology, therefore, is inspiring individuals to carry out terrorist attacks against Jews in Europe. As a result, the greatest threat to Jews in France, and to European Jews in general, now comes from Al Qaida and ISIS sympathizers, and individuals and groups that identify with the global jihadist movement.

Anti-Semitism in France, however, is not limited to a small group of radical Islamists. Unfortunately, it is much more widespread than that. According to French government figures, over the last two decades the number of anti-Semitic acts has tripled. Last year alone saw a doubling of anti-Semitic incidents in France to a record high. The Jewish community’s watchdog on anti-Semitism recorded 851 incidents in 2014 compared to 423 the previous year. About 40-50 percent of all racist attacks in France last year were committed against Jews, even though they number less than 1 percent of the population. In other words, around half of all racist attacks in France were anti-Semitic attacks.

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There has been a wave of violent attacks, intimidation, threats, physical damage against synagogues, and graffiti. The vast majority of these anti-Semitic acts were not perpetrated by skinheads and neo-Nazis, as they once were. Neo-Nazi acts of violence against Jewish targets, such as the 1990 desecration of the Jewish cemetery in Carpentras, have almost entirely disappeared. The far-right National Front party is not the virulently anti-Semitic party that it once was under Jean-Marie Le Pen. Now led by his daughter, Marine Le Pen, the National Front has actually been trying to gain Jewish voters. More broadly, anti-Semitism among French Christians has significantly declined over the past few decades.

Nowadays, the main perpetrators of anti-Semitic attacks in France are young Muslims, who tend to be second-generation immigrants from North Africa. There is, undeniably, a problem of Muslim anti-Semitism in France. What is the cause of this? Rather than simplistically blame Islam as some do (after all, not all Muslims are anti-Semitic and, in fact, many have positive relations with Jews), I think that there are two factors primarily responsible for this.

First, it is partly driven by political support for the Palestinians. This is evident from the fact that there is a significant correlation between events in the Middle East and the number of anti-Semitic incidents in France (as well as in other European countries). Anti-Semitic incidents generally peak whenever there is a particular outbreak of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Second, it is also driven by a social resentment against Jews who have been more successful as a minority, and are perceived to be privileged in France and to receive favorable treatment by the French state. Attacks by French Maghrebi Muslim youth against Jews are not simply a ‘spillover effect’ of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They are also a product of the anger and discontent felt by young people who are economically marginalized, often unemployed, and the victims of racism, discrimination, and police brutality. French Jews, therefore, become scapegoats because they are seen as successful.

As a result of the growth of anti-Semitism among the Muslim community in France, there has been a serious deterioration in the relationship between France’s two largest minority communities, and the two largest Jewish and Muslim populations living side by side outside Israel. France is home to the largest Jewish population in Europe, numbering between 500,000 and 600,000 people. The future of this community has now been cast into doubt. Increasing numbers of French Jews are leaving the country. Last year, for the first time ever, more Jews moved to Israel from France than from any other country in the world—around 7,000 people, or more than 1 percent of the Jewish population in France, double the number in 2013. Other French Jews have left the country for the UK, the US, Canada and elsewhere in Europe. There are no precise figures of how many Jews left France in 2014 because France does not collect census data regarding religion, but it was probably around 2 percent of the entire Jewish population, a huge increase on all previous years. It has recently been claimed that up to 50 percent of French Jews are now considering moving to Israel. Although claims in the media that there will be a mass exodus of Jews from France because it is no longer a safe place for them to live are wildly exaggerated in my view, the threats facing French Jews today are very real and there is now a widespread sense of fear and anxiety in the French Jewish community.
Nevertheless, as a whole, Europe remains a hospitable environment for Jews. While there are certainly dangers, the claim that Europe is, once again, a dangerous place for Jews—a claim recently made by some politicians in Israel, including Prime Minister Netanyahu—is both untrue and unhelpful.

It is untrue because Europe today is fundamentally not the same place that it was in the 1930s, and comparisons with that era are grossly inaccurate (and offensive to the memory of those Jews who perished in Europe in the 1930s and in the Holocaust). Back then, anti-Semitism was state-sponsored, a central part of the practice, ideology, and rhetoric of regimes (especially, but not only, Nazi Germany). Today, by contrast, governments across Europe strongly condemn anti-Semitism and pledge to protect their Jewish populations. Anti-Semitism now comes from the social and political margins, not from the center. It is mostly expressed by the powerless, not the powerful.

It is also unhelpful to characterize Europe as unsafe for Jews and to encourage them to leave en masse because it detracts from the fight against anti-Semitism. Instead of leaving, Jews in France and elsewhere in Europe should be reassured and protected. They are an important part of the fabric of European life and every effort should be made to ensure their security. Actively and aggressively combatting anti-Semitism is the answer, not emigration.
ISIS Terrorism: Rational Albeit Surprisingly Apolitical

Max Abrahms
Assistant Professor of Political Science

There are two main schools thought which can be symbolized with movies.

School of Thought 1: Clockwork Orange

Dominant paradigm in the media.

According to this view, terrorists have no strategy at all; they’re just crazy, fanatical, violent nihilists who want nothing more than to make people suffer as an end in itself.

School of Thought 2: Battle of Algiers

Dominant paradigm in political science: What I have identified as the Strategic Model.

Groups turn to terrorism because it’s an effective strategy for pressuring governments into making political concessions.

According to this view, terrorism is a rational political strategy for groups to obtain their political demands. Inflict pain to coerce political accommodation.

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Based on my terrorism research, I have to say there’s very little empirical support for the Battle of Algiers/Strategic Model. About a decade ago, I began publishing the first studies ever done on the political effects of terrorism. What I’ve found is that attacking civilians with terrorism isn’t an effective way for groups to obtain government concessions. Instead of inducing concessions, terrorism tends to shift the electorate to the political right, increasing the odds that governments will dig in their political heels and go on the offensive to crush the terrorism threat both at home and abroad. I’ve found this to be true statistically in a sample of every group listed by the State Dept. as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. But the same trend is evident when you look at the political effects of the most recent terrorist attacks around the world.

The Battle of Algiers/Strategic Model predicts that Islamist inspired terrorism would moderate the foreign policies of target countries by shifting them to the political left; making them less anti-Muslim at home and abroad; causing countries to drop out of the coalition against ISIS; and inducing a retrenchment from the Arab world.

But let’s look at what actually happened. With respect to the U.S., ISIS said it would behead our journalist James Foley if we didn’t stop our military campaign. But immediately after the beheading, Obama said we were consequently going to ramp up our air campaign in Iraq and extend it into Syria.
The beheading simultaneously galvanized the American public to more aggressively pursue Islamic State. This is how the US typically responds to terrorism, reflected best perhaps on 9/11.

The Charlie Hebdo had a similar effect on France. The French were the opposite of intimidated. Instead, they were defiant! Attendance at the post-attack Paris march was essentially unprecedented. Crowds like that hadn’t been seen since the end of WWII. Sales of the Charlie Hebdo magazine soared from about 60,000 to millions worldwide. The Islamophobic far-right Front National picked up numerous supporters; in some polls now Le Pen leads all other candidates for the 2017 presidential election. In terms of its foreign policy, France immediately escalated its involvement in the coalition, reflected best in its deployment of the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier to the Gulf.

Canada too did the political opposite of what the Strategic Model would predict. After a couple recent “lone wolf” attacks, Canada gave its spy agency unprecedented powers to disrupt terrorist attacks while the public became more supportive of Canadian involvement in the coalition. Many people outside Canada aren’t paying attention to the new political tide in Canada. But thanks to the recent terrorist attacks in Canada, the conservative leader’s aggressive counterterrorism policies have gained steam. Canada today is arguably even more hawkishly anti-terrorism than the United States.

The same trends apply in Australia. After the Sydney siege attack on that chocolate cafe, Australians turned to the political right and reaffirmed their commitment to the campaign against ISIS. At home, Prime Minister tony Abbott has pushed to tighten citizenship laws that revoke citizenship for jihadists hoping to return home. There have also been a bunch of restrictions placed on free speech to help combat ISIS propaganda, which disproportionately affect the Muslim community.

Following the Copenhagen attacks, the government has substantially boosted funding for domestic and foreign intelligence gathering, mostly to prevent wannabe Danish jihadists from joining ISIS. A quick Google search of Denmark and terrorism since the Copenhagen attacks displays titles like: “Denmark to beef up fight against terrorism”, and “Denmark won’t submit to terrorism”.

Jordan was a question mark. Would it withdraw from the coalition after its pilot was torched to death in a cage? Many people suspected Jordan might be like Spain was after the 2004 Madrid train attacks by dropping out of the coalition because the Jordanian public had been deeply conflicted about participating in the coalition.

But Jordan has instead ramped up its involvement in the coalition, killing hundreds of ISIS members from the air and is now buying additional F-16’s to crush more ISIS fighters in Syria.

In terms of Egypt, the beheading of 21 Coptics in Libya has set off a massive counterterrorism effort against ISIS and related groups. Egypt isn’t formally part of the coalition, but the beheadings have galvanized the country into assuming a leading role in the counterterrorism effort. In fact, because of the beheadings, Egypt now wants to lead a pan-Arab military force against the terrorists.

Even Japan has become more bellicose since its citizens were beheaded by ISIS. Since 1947, Article 9 of the Constitution has banned Japan from having war-making capabilities. But there’s been a huge rally
around the flag effect and we’re now seeing unprecedented support for repealing Article 9, allowing Japan to use military force against threats like ISIS.

So let’s return to the question of strategy. Clearly, the Battle of Algiers/Strategic Model has weak explanatory power. The dominant paradigm within academe for understanding terrorist strategy is empirically unsupported. In the face of terrorism, target countries haven’t become more politically conciliatory towards the terrorists. No country has fallen out of the coalition or tried to appease the terrorists. In fact, in each case the target country has increased its involvement in the coalition while enhancing its counterterrorism measures at home.

Although I don’t find supporting evidence for the conventional wisdom in political science that terrorism is a rational political strategy for groups to obtain their demands, I actually don’t subscribe entirely to the Clockwork Orange model either. Terrorism isn’t strategic behavior in terms of pressuring government concessions, but that doesn’t mean terrorism is categorically irrational. While it’s politically counterproductive in terms of its effects on target countries, it can be useful for the organizational goals of the group. To the extent there is a strategy, I think it’s an organizational one more than political.

Violence is used as a communication strategy; we find a strategy of outbidding rival groups (ISIS vs AQ). They do this by appealing to rational Muslims all over the world who might want to use violence; rape women; travel to foreign countries; find meaning in their lives; and gain respect among their peers.

In this sense, ISIS terrorism is just like most other terrorism—rational but surprisingly apolitical.
Did the Paris massacre emanate from a belief that violence is the answer for “actual injustices”? People commit violence for many reasons. Some see violence as a means to an end. Others use violence as a way to obtain control and dominance in a world that they perceive is unfair and unjust. Groups also use political and ideological violence to impose their own vision of society onto others.

Benjamin Ginsberg, a political scientist, argues that we use violence because it works. He sees violence as a driving force in politics. Violence makes it possible to achieve political goals. One way to interpret the events in Paris and Copenhagen is to see these violent events as a provocation that the perpetrators hoped might in the long run undermine the French society by creating fear and fostering division among population. Perpetrators of politically motivated violence typically work with what is available to them to manipulate, such as perceived divisions within a society. Their motivation may be less to rectify injustice and more to exploit and increase differences and alienation. In the case of Paris, the perpetrators appear to be trying to exploit and increase religious differences, among Muslims, Christians and Jews.

If terrorist violence is primarily politically motivated, how are we to respond to this violent provocation? Is the use of repression or violence a way to go? Are we to accept the interpretation of the perpetrators and punish other Muslims for the crimes committed?

The strength of the society depends on its social, economic and political fabric. Since French Revolution, France has used “Liberte, egalite and fraternite” as its motto. But, are the French upholding those ideals? Is France treating all its citizens equally? And who are French? Are Moroccans the French citizens of Moroccan decent? Or are they doomed to be seen as outsiders—to be tolerated but not embraced.

Farhad Khosrokhavar a sociologist at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales wrote recently in the article for the New York Times about the typical trajectory of most French Islamist terrorists. Based on his research, Khosrokhavar argues they follow four steps: “alienation from the dominant culture, thanks partly to joblessness and discrimination in blighted neighborhoods; a turn to petty crime, which leads to prison, and then more crime and more prison; religious awakening and radicalization; and an initiatory journey to a Muslim country like Syria, Afghanistan or Yemen to train for jihad.” Muslims, he argues account for about 7 to 10% of France’s total population but they account for around half of it prison population of 68,000.

Khosrokhavar’s work indicates the context is also important for our understanding of violent attacks. Thus, when we examine these events, we also have to examine context within which the violence occurs. Social and economic indicators show bleak prospects for many young French, and in particular minority youth in France. Although official unemployment in France is 10.4%, among youth it is 25.2%.
And France is not the only European country with high levels of youth unemployment and particularly high levels among minority youth. So, there is a larger question that Europe is dealing with: how to create conditions for young people to find their place in society. The increased competition for jobs and resources is pitting nations against each other and within nations groups against each other. Under these conditions, differences based on race, ethnicity and religion can be used to further pull them apart. Segregation, discrimination and isolation are some of the strategies used to acquire resources for its own group. Perhaps more importantly, these same differences and forces are used by some leaders to advance their own careers. It is no surprise that Marina Le Pen, the leader of right wing National Front Party took this as an opportunity to attack French immigration policy.

So, does France have an integration problem? The popular argument is that multiculturalism is to be blamed for this problem. It allows immigrants to keep their own culture, which prevents them from integrating into French society. This argument is used to explain economic inequality that persists among groups in Germany, Sweden and Great Britain among others as well.

What is French culture? Who define its? Defending free speech also means defending the rights of those with whom we disagree. If this is true, are we denying ethnic groups right to be different? So, the question of integration is a complex one and will not be solved by just insisting that they become just like us. Research done on minority communities show that a lack of opportunities for minority members is a key obstacle to their integrating into the society. Especially unhappy are young people, who see themselves as French or German, who embrace French and German culture, but are still denied that membership.

So, what can we do? We have to keep those three slogans of liberté, égalité and fraternité strong and true in practice not just in rhetoric. A strong society treats all its citizens well. It is based on equality of opportunity and justice for all.
Je Suis Moh: Muslims & the Terrorism Conversation

Shakir Mustafa
Teaching Professor, World Languages Center

Reinventing Islamophobia [See slide 1]

A European Union report on "Islamophobia" published almost ten years ago details the monumental hurdles Muslims, especially the young, face in Europe in nearly all sectors—education, housing, employment. The report was based on data rather than polls, interviews, or cultural studies, and its findings were alarming. Discrimination against Muslims is described as so pervasive, widespread, and systematic that it often included Muslims with “long historical presence in the countries in which they live.” [See slide 2]

Data in that report also show that discrimination was not related to Muslims’ religious education or views. In other words, it made little difference if Muslims shared or opposed European secular education or lifestyle. The EU then urged its member states to consider measures to address Muslims’ dire conditions, but little, it seems, has been achieved because subsequent reports and commentaries by the EU and by separate agencies in some member states saw little change in the data. In some states, conditions seem to have worsened due to a surge in migration due to war conditions in Syria, Libya, Iraq, among other countries. Today, for instance, the Austrian legislature approved a measure that bans foreign funding for Islamic houses of worship, while allowing such funding for Christian and Jewish counterparts.

I am not suggesting that Islamophobia is behind the Paris terrorist acts. A deranged individual or group will always have the option to terrorize others by manipulating inevitable vulnerabilities, and because it’s next to impossible to fathom terrorists’ reasoning or motives. My point here is that hate groups of all colors in Europe are steering anti-Muslim sentiments towards their goals. PEGIDA, the most notorious of right-wing groups, have been spearheading rallies across Germany to stop the “Islamization” of Europe. [See slide 3]

Ridiculous as it sounds, reinventing Islamophobia has become such an intriguing chore that Western bigots are not just shouting, “the Muslims are coming, the Muslims are coming,” but they are doing something about it. As Europeans work on stopping “Islamization of the continent”, their American counterparts want to make sure Islamic Sharia doesn’t become the law of the land. It’s really puzzling that over two-dozen states in the U.S. have legislations to block Sharia law when American Muslims themselves have little incentive to submit to such laws.

Islamization of Europe and the urgency of blocking Sharia law in the States are examples of fear mongering that has nothing to do with credible fears! And here I would like to move to my second

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2 “Moh” is a common diminutive of Mohammad among Muslim Americans. If my name was Muhammad, I wouldn’t mind that shortened version, but my experience suggests that some also favor it because it mutes the name’s Muslim connotations. Numbers in the brackets refer to slides on the powerpoint presentation.
argument: **Trivializing Muslim communities.** I’ll start by pointing out a startling ironic clash: On the one hand to bigots, Islam seems poised to vanquish Europe and take the United States to the dark ages, and on the other, representations of Muslims in Western media and pop culture invariably show pathetic and cowardly villains fit for extermination. Such trivializing is poised to dominate representations of Muslims for years to come.

“American Sniper” is just one such example of representations predicated upon unusually dismissive attitude towards Muslims in which killing them seems the right thing. Threatening tweets soon after the film’s release show that audiences didn’t miss the point. “Great f***ing movie and now I really want to kill some f***ing ragheads.” In another tweet, since deleted, a user wrote, “American sniper makes me wanna go shoot some f**kin Arabs,” which was followed by emojis of three handguns. [See slide 4]

These positions have been consolidated by reckless anti-Muslim statements from public figures such as Bobby Jindal, Republican Governor of Louisiana and a possible 2016 presidential candidate: “If they want to come here and they want to set up their own culture and values, that’s not immigration. That’s really invasion, if you’re honest about it,” Jindal said in a radio appearance.

This is not an isolated example, and extreme as it is, it’s not the rhetoric that matters as much as its consequences. More and more Americans and Europeans are saying too little or nothing to curb Islamophobia. A telling, and certainly a teachable moment came during President Obama’s State of the Union address where he made a brief reference to “It’s why we continue to reject offensive stereotypes of Muslims—the vast majority of whom share our commitment to peace”. In a speech typically punctuated with cheers and applause, that sentence was met with silence. In a congregation that is fairly representative of American decency, not a single person present showed support to a fairly benign statement about Muslims.

A more alarming sign of trivializing Muslims came with the circumstances involving the execution style murder of three young Muslims on the UNC Chapel Hill campus. The murders became news worthy only after a twitter # “Muslim Lives Matter” started to question the media’s absence. As of today, the crime that has strong bigoted undertones is being presented by law enforcement as a parking argument. In fact *Inside Edition*’s Deborah Norville used the young Muslims’ tragic shootings to segue into a segment providing viewers tips on how to avoid aggressive drivers and find parking spaces while shopping.

Predictably, European and American Muslims’ reactions to the aftermaths of the Paris shootings wavered between alarm and defiance, and both positions cannot be beneficial to Muslims, Europe, or the U.S. Polls reported by the BBC today show that about 50% of British Muslims believe they are discriminated against, even though 95% of these Muslims pledge allegiance to Britain [See slide 5]. Many positions in the West also reflected ones in Muslim countries that saw in the Muhammad cartoons an assault on Islam and a perpetuation of the ills of the Crusades. Demonstrations in Arab and Muslim countries and coverage of the Paris shootings came with the mixed message that the cartoonists had it coming. The vast majority of the Arabic press was against the shootings, but one could not miss the lack of sympathy with the victims [See slide 6]. A kind of payback for what the Arab and Muslim press considered lack of sympathy with Muslim victims of terrorism who largely outnumber Western
victims. Such tragic hardening of positions had its counterpart in the United States where public belligerence against Muslims included attacks against President Obama for simply arguing against victimizing Muslims by linking ISIS to Islam.

My last argument is that such hardening of positions on both sides has left little room for nuances or better knowledge and understanding of Islam and western positions on freedom of expression. One such causality of this unfortunate clash is the flattening of Muslims’ reactions to the Muhammad cartoons. Muslims do not always object to representations of the prophet, and their views can be very diverse and complex. Such diversity has come from the Sunni as well as the Shia creed. The powerpoint part of this presentation attempts to illustrate Muslims’ diverse visions through a quick review of images of Muhammad from the Middle Ages to the present, and from the Indian sub-continent to the Atlantic ocean.
There are many satirical magazines and programs around the world, but Charlie Hebdo is squarely in the French tradition of Voltaire, Rabelais, and the anti-clericalism of the French Revolution and afterwards, which did away with blasphemy laws. The murders of Cabu, Charbonnier, Tignous, and Wolinski cannot be justified by any means, but it is worth noting the inherent tension between, on the one side, the irreverent and often scurrilous attacks on religion in France and other parts of Europe as well as North America (justified in the name of Enlightenment values, liberalism, and free speech), and on the other side, the religious sensibilities of believers, especially fundamentalist Muslims seeped in religious values and emotionally attached to the Prophet of Islam. Perhaps this tension would not exist in the absence of first- or second-generation Muslim citizens; but societies such as France, the UK, Denmark, Sweden and other countries have become more “multicultural”. Something needs to be done. A compromise has to be made; both sides need to meet each other half-way; a new common ground must be negotiated.

Many countries have passed legislation against hate speech, and thoughtful citizens consider this to be an advance in the human rights and civil liberties of previously marginalized or excluded populations in particular. But there are inconsistencies and double standards. Muslims are upset by the fact that Holocaust denial is banned in 16 EU countries, but their prophet is fair game for ridicule. Over the past month I have read commentaries pointing out that the Jewish faith is almost never subject to the same ridicule or insults (in magazines, books, movies, comedy shows) that Christianity and Islam endure, due to fear of charges of anti-Semitism. Gay-bashing is now considered not only bad form but a stance that might lead to loss of one’s job. And yet the prophet of Islam can be insulted. Why is this acceptable?

In Political Liberalism, the famous political philosopher John Rawls defends the right of members of religious or traditionalist communities to encourage their children to submit to divine dictates, as long as they adhere to the duty of civility and are able to regard as equal other citizens who do not share their religious views, a capability in principle acquired through education and equal opportunity. Rawls’ insistence on respect for “traditional lives” might appear idiosyncratic and even idiotic to those for whom tradition, religion, and family belong in the past. But even in liberal societies, the civic and academic education needed to cultivate civility and notions of equality are often lacking.

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3 The full names of the murdered cartoonists are Jean Cabu, Stéphane Charbonnier, Bernard Verlhac and Georges Wolinski. This presentation was originally prepared in January 2015. During a subsequent trip to Tunis, in March 2015, I purchased a book on the Tunisian revolution entitled Dégage: La Révolution Tunisienne, Livre-Témoignages (Tunis: Alif et éditions du Layeur, 2011) and discovered a witty and moving contribution by Wolinsky on the revolution that had occurred in the country of his birth. In his piece, “Ça bouge en Tunisie!”, he writes: “Il semble que le people, les jeunes surtout, veuille vraiment tourner la page” (p. 93). Tunisia figured in the Paris attacks in another way: one of the victims at the kosher supermarket was a Jewish Tunisian, the son of the chief rabbi of Tunis, who was studying in France. In Tunis in March, I learned that there had been a public vigil in his honor.
At the same time, extremism, dogmatism, and fanaticism exist within parts of the worldwide Muslim community, including U.S. allies. Apostasy and blasphemy in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are such that poor illiterate Christians are killed in Pakistan on the flimsiest of blasphemy charges; and a Saudi blogger who dares to question religious laws in his country is given a harsh sentence, including repeated floggings. Saudi Arabia has been building mosques throughout the world and financing fundamentalist and Salafist groups for three decades, but churches are not permitted in that country and conversion from Islam is a capital crime. President Obama defiantly spoke of religious freedom and the rights of women and girls during his official visit to India last month, but he appeared to cower before the Saudi princes and uttered not a single word in defense of human rights while in Riyadh immediately after his India trip.

There are more examples of problems in the Muslim world, which need to be addressed just as urgently as Islamophobia and xenophobia in the West. In the 1990s, the Islamic philosopher Professor Zeid Abu Nasr was charged with apostasy by Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated lawyers and forced to leave Egypt – he and his wife, a professor of French, were given political and academic asylum at Leiden University in the Netherlands. When the Egyptian feminist author Nawal Saadawi made remarks in an interview about unequal inheritance laws and the pagan origins of some aspects of the pilgrimage, she too raised the ire of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated lawyers, who charged her with apostasy, threatened to divorce her from her husband (presumably still a Muslim), and forced her to leave Egypt for nearly a year. Many Muslims among my friends, family, and professional acquaintances are secular or “cultural Muslims” only, or even have left their faith, but a Muslim cannot openly free himself or herself from the faith, examine it critically, or subject it to the kind of historical analysis used by scholars of Christianity and Judaism.

In our 21st century world, everything should be subject to inquiry – not gratuitous ridicule and insult but to analysis – and yes, even to artistic representation. And people should be free to extricate themselves from their religion. If Bertrand Russell could write “Why I am no longer a Christian”, and live, Ayaan Hirsi Ali should be able to write “Why I am no longer a Muslim”, and live. Believing Muslims should have to accept this.

In conclusion, I agree with Pope Francis regarding the importance of respecting people’s faith and religion. This is why I so dislike the self-styled New Atheists and their intolerance, ridicule and total disrespect of people of faith. Instead, I believe there is something to be learned from Tunisia. I end by quoting Article 6 from Tunisia’s new constitution:

The state protects religion, guarantees freedom of belief and conscience and religious practices, protects holy places, and ensures the neutrality of mosques and places of worship from partisan instrumentalization. Accusations of apostasy and incitement to violence are prohibited.