



# ‘Being’ Charlie: a matter of course for all of France?

A qualitative content analysis on the stigmatization of Muslims in the light of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack

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# Abstract

The satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* situated in Paris was target of a deadly terrorist attack in January 2015. The purpose of this study is to examine the stigmatization of French Muslims in the light of the aftermath of the attack. This study examines eleven open letters which were written by French citizens in the month of the tragedy. I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the letters following a conceptual framework by the researchers U.H. Graneheim and B. Lundman. The central themes found using the method are *national unity* and *Muslims as the 'Other'*. The content categorized under these themes was in this study further analyzed in the light of the overarching theme of *'being' Charlie*. The theoretical perspective used here is grounded in Brenda Watson's understanding of what significance French secularism has for the stigmatization of the Muslim population. The open letters were written by Muslims and non-Muslims which resulted in findings of highly differing perspectives on the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. This study found romanticized understandings of a France which stood united in the aftermath of the tragedy. It also found perspectives which explicitly criticized the demand to 'be' Charlie as further stigmatizing and portraying the Muslim population as the 'Other' in French society.

## *Keywords*

Charlie Hebdo, France, stigmatization, freedom of speech, secularism, national unity, open letters, Muslim French, qualitative content analysis.

# Abstrakt

Högkvarteren av den satiriska tidningen *Charlie Hebdo* i Paris blev mål för en dödlig terrorist attack i januari 2015. Syftet med denna studie är att undersöka stigmatiseringen av franska muslimer i ljuset av efterdyningarna av attacken. Denna studie undersöker elva öppna brev som skrevs av franska medborgare i samma månad som tragedin. Jag genomförde en kvalitativ innehållsanalys av breven följande en konceptuell ram framtagen av forskarna U.H. Graneheim och B. Lundman. De centrala teman som hittades med hjälp av metoden är *nationell enighet* och *Muslimer som den 'Andre'*. Det innehållet som kategoriserades under dessa teman analyserades även mot bakgrund av det övergripande temat *'att vara' Charlie*. Det teoretiska perspektivet som jag använt bygger på Brenda Watsons förståelse om vilken betydelse den franska sekularismen har för den muslimska befolkningens stigmatisering. De öppna breven är skrivna av muslimer och icke-muslimer vilket gav resultatet av varierande perspektiv på efterdyningarna av *Charlie Hebdo* attacken. Denna studie hittade romantiserade föreställningar av ett enad Frankrike i efterdyningarna av tragedin. Det hittades också ett perspektiv som uttryckligen kritiserade begäran att 'vara' Charlie. Detta perspektiv var grundat i en övertygelse om att begäran ytterligare stigmatiserade den muslimska befolkningen och porträtterade dem som den 'Andre' i det franska samhället.

## *Nyckelord*

Charlie Hebdo, Frankrike, stigmatisering, yttrandefrihet, sekularism, nationell enighet, öppna brev, Franska Muslimer, kvalitativ innehållsanalys.

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# 1. Introduction

The headquarters of the weekly satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris were attacked on January 7, 2015 by Chérif and Saïd Kouachi. The two brothers of Algerian descent killed twelve persons before being shot two days later by the National Gendarmerie Intervention Group. Five of the victims were satirists at the newspaper which has previously gotten attention for its provocative cartoons and satirical news. Millions of people glorified the newspaper as a symbol for freedom of speech in the aftermath of the terror attack, uniting under the slogan ‘I am Charlie’. It became the dominant opinion in France that it was the duty of all citizens to ‘be’ Charlie in order to condemn the terror act and to show support for Republican values. A minority in France did however feel reluctant to join the Republican marches held in the first days of mourning.<sup>1</sup> The two attackers claimed to have committed the attack in the name of Islam. The broader society in France regarded it therefore as essential for the Muslim population to join in the public homages to the satirical newspaper in order to disconnect their religion from the attack. It became hard to justify if one did not want to ‘be’ Charlie, especially for the around five Million Muslims living in France.<sup>2</sup>

The French state, as well as the broader society, has a complex and sometimes paradoxical relationship to its largest religious minority. Efforts for actively institutionalizing the faith have been made. On the other hand, Muslims also face discrimination, exclusion and stigmatization. This has resulted in a widespread feeling among France’s largest religious minority of not being fully French. This feeling of not being an accepted member of society does exist in particular amongst the Muslim youth who often live in the low-income suburbs which in France are referred to as “*banlieues* or *cités*.”<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The marches, which in French were called *Marches Republicaines*, were held on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> January 2015 in Paris with the latter including the participation of numerous political leaders from all around the world. They were regarded as an expression of national unity. They were however also criticized for being hypocritical since some of the participating politicians are known to fail to provide an environment in which a free press can exist in their own countries.

<sup>2</sup> Laurence, Jonathan & Vaisse, Justin (2006) *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France*. Brookings Institution Press, p.15.

<sup>3</sup> Laurence & Vaisse (2006) p.36.

purpose of this study is to examine the stigmatization of Muslim French in the context of the aftermath of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. In this paper, I conduct a qualitative content analysis examining eleven open letters which were published by French citizens within the month of the attack. I use a perspective by Brenda Watson which explains the significance of secularism in France for the stigmatization of the Muslim community due to their faith. The open letters were written by Muslims and non-Muslims which makes it possible to examine the stigmatization of the religious minority regarding different perspectives.

## 1.1. Purpose and the research questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the stigmatization of French Muslims in the light of the aftermath of the terror attack on the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*. The study conducts a qualitative content analysis following a methodological framework by the researchers U.H. Graneheim and B. Lundman. The empirical material consists of eleven open letters written and published within the first month of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. The open letters were all written by distinct French citizens as reactions on the terror act. The method is used to structure the material through the creation of meaning units, codes and themes. The content which was categorized under the overarching theme '*being Charlie*' is examined in two distinct parts of the analysis of this paper. The first section analyses the content categorized under the central theme *national unity*. The second part presents the analysis of the content which discusses the theme *Muslims as the 'Other'*. In the analysis of the open letters, the content is examined from a theoretical perspective grounded in Brenda Watson's understandings of the secular character of France's society having resulted in the stigmatization of Muslims. The distinct perspectives expressed in the open letters can thus be put into context and made comprehensible.

The central research questions of this study are: How do the authors of the open letters understand what came to be called national unity in the aftermath of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*? Do they support or criticize the demand to the Muslim population in France to publicly express their support for the satirical newspaper and to 'be' Charlie? What underpins the distinct understandings of the authors of the open letters?

## 2. Previous research

The overview on previous studies puts the purpose of this paper into perspective and provides the reader with an understanding of the relevant field of study. The previous research concerning France's relationship towards its largest religious minority is a comprehensive one. This chapter discusses six academic works which were found during the research process of this study. Understandably, I do not claim that this overview is exhaustive. The presentation of previous studies is nevertheless sufficient in providing an understanding of the context which surrounds this study. The collection of the previous research was made through academic databases using the key terms *Charlie Hebdo; France; Islam; stigmatization; unity; secularism; freedom of speech*. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first section presents previous research concerning the stigmatization of Muslims in secular societies. Then, two studies of the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attack are discussed in the second part. This chapter ends with a discussion of all the previous research presented in the chapter and places my own study's purpose in the field of study.

### 2.1. The stigmatization of Muslims in secular societies

In the anthology *Islam in the West*,<sup>4</sup> Paul Wetherly discusses a Western understanding of freedom of speech. He discusses free speech in the light of the aftermath of the publication of the Muhammed cartoons in Denmark. In the aftermath of the publications of the caricatures in Denmark, distinct positions were taken and there was a reluctance within society to engage in an open dialogue. Wetherly found that both sides were simply asking from their opposing side to confirm with its own understanding of the situation. One side regarded those Muslims who rallied against the cartoons as not supporting Western values while the Muslim community regarded the publication as insensitive and disrespectful towards believers.<sup>5</sup> The former position was widely accompanied by the wrongful assumption that the critique of the cartoons by Muslims could be understood as prove of Islam being incompatible with 'Western' values. Wetherly's work is relevant

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<sup>4</sup> Wetherly, Paul. Freedom of Expression, Multiculturalism and the 'Danish cartoons'. In *Islam in the West*, Max Farrar, Paul Wetherly, Simon Robinson, Yasmin Valli (red.), 36-55. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Wetherly (2012) p.51

for my study since it shows that the controversy and complexity surrounding discussions on free speech in a secular country with a religious minority are recurring issues.

Wetherly's work helps to understand the context in which a secular majority can easily advocate for the acceptance of depicting the faith of a religious minority while relying on the importance of an unrestricted use of free speech. A book which provides a more specific understanding of the French context is Cesari's *When Islam and Democracy meet*.<sup>6</sup> Cesari discusses how the secular state in France is handling the presence of the religious minority of Muslims. In her perspective, contemporary France is characterized by a wide acceptance of questioning Islam within the broader society. Due to their influential position in French society, Cesari especially regards public intellectuals as playing a major role in having made criticism of the religion acceptable.<sup>7</sup> The book highlights the issue of Muslims often primarily not being regarded as French citizens. Cesari points out the double-standard in France where children of immigrants are labelled as "second-generation"<sup>8</sup> while the importance of an equal and fraternal society proudly is emphasized in the national motto. This stereotyping of Muslims into the 'Other' in France is a central aspect of the perspective used in my study.

Laurence and Vaisse, similarly to Cesari, see a common ground for Muslims of feeling excluded from the majority society. In their book about the challenges of integration of Islam in France, they foremost focus on the situation of the Muslim population in the low-income *banlieues*. The youth living in these areas are - according to Laurence and Vaisse - lacking a faith for a good future and do not feel that they are "fully French."<sup>9</sup> The feeling of not being included in the French society among many Muslims is a continuing one. Discriminatory practices in France namely cause complications for Muslim French trying to improve their living situation. It often keeps them in low-income jobs and makes them stay in suburbs where schools are facing many problems. Laurence and Vaisse regard these as the major issues for French Muslims since it causes the cycle to continue.<sup>10</sup> Their study is used in the concluding discussion to put my own findings into perspective.

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<sup>6</sup> Cesari, Jocelyne (2014) *When Islam and Democracy meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>7</sup> Cesari (2014) p.4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>9</sup> Laurence & Vaisse (2006) p.48.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.30.



Vincent Geisser is another researcher who has studied France's relationship to its largest religious minority.<sup>11</sup> Geisser's perspective on the French context is characterized by what he terms "French blindness."<sup>12</sup> He uses this term in order to describe the ignorance which exists within the broader society of the actual issues the Muslim population is facing. Similar to Cesari, he points out public intellectuals as playing a major role. Geisser states that they are widely influenced by a postcolonial thinking. Public intellectuals are, according to Geisser, seeing themselves as the ones who need to free Muslims from what they regard as a backwards religion. They celebrate Republicanism and secularism as modern while portraying Islam as outdated in a free society. Similar to Wetherly and Cesari, Geisser concludes that this social climate makes it possible for intellectuals, media and politicians to express their criticism of Islam while advocating Republican values.<sup>13</sup> In the perspective used in my study, the focus is on the stigmatization of Muslims in the French public debate which is characterized by its believe in reason and religion being incompatible.<sup>14</sup> The above presented findings are thus highly interesting for the concluding discussion of this study.

## 2.2. Muslims and the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack

Before presenting the empirical material in the following chapter, two academic works which have been examining distinct aspects surrounding the attack on the satirical newspaper are presented here. The book *Who is Charlie?* written by Emmanuel Todd<sup>15</sup> is used to put certain aspect in my analysis into context. Especially his understandings of the Republican Marches in the aftermath of the terror attack in January 2015 is relevant. He explains these Marches held under the slogan of 'I am Charlie', as having become symbols for a national unity in France and "a synonym for 'I am French.'"<sup>16</sup> Todd does not aim to conduct his discussion in an academic tone. However, one should not completely dismiss his study because of that. Certain aspects that he discusses are well-grounded and

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<sup>11</sup> Geisser, Vincent. Islamophobia: a French Specificity in Europe? *Human Architecture: Journal Of The Sociology Of Self-Knowledge* 8 no.2 (2010): 39-46.

<sup>12</sup> Geisser (2010) p.39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.41ff.

<sup>14</sup> Watson (2016) .

<sup>15</sup> Todd, Emmanuel (2015) *Who is Charlie? Xenophobia and the New Middle Class*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>16</sup> Todd,(2015) p.2.

relevant for an understanding of the complexity surrounding national unity in France. Todd portrays primarily the March held on January 11, 2015 as an expression of the longing for a feeling of “a collective identity.”<sup>17</sup> *Who is Charlie?* is furthermore relevant for my study since it provides an understanding of which significance the emotive mentality in the aftermath of the tragedy had for how the act was discussed in France. He states for instance that it was not possible to bring forward any opinion which differed from the dominant discourse which glorified *Charlie Hebdo*. Todd argues that reflection was not possible within this emotional mentality. This resulted in people who refused to ‘be’ Charlie as simply being dismissed as supporters of the terror act. Todd found that it was Islam and not its stigmatization in France which was in the spotlight in the aftermath of the attack.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to Todd’s understandings, John Bowen writes in his academic article *France after Charlie*<sup>19</sup> about the excluding character of the ‘I am Charlie’ slogan. Bowen discusses the slogans “I am Muhammed” and “I am a Muslim, a Jew, and French” which could be seen during rallies and on social media. He highlights that the two expressions are more including than what the dominating slogan was. Bowen expresses the widespread opinion among the Muslim population of the satirical newspaper being disrespectful to their faith. He highlights the choice of those living in the suburbs of Paris not to participate in the gatherings held in the name of the editorial due to their understanding of the rallies being ignorant to the current situation in France. Bowen writes that Muslims felt that the blind support for newspaper was not recognizing the issues of separation and the distress that *Charlie Hebdo* had caused the religious minority with its satirical cartoons of their faith.<sup>20</sup> Bowen’s article helps to counter the dominant discourse which prevailed in the aftermath of the attack in which many in France assumed that the refusal by Muslims to join the gatherings was prove of their support for the terror. My study aims to identify both content in the open letters which expresses this majoritarian discourse as well as content which challenges it. Bowen’s findings are thus interesting to regard.

The previous research presented here has a clear focus on the stigmatization of Muslims in a secular society. Further studies of the stigma of Islam in France are

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<sup>17</sup> Todd,(2015) p.8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>19</sup> Bowen, John. France after Charlie Hebdo. *Boston Review Forum* 40 no.2 (2015) 18-35.

<sup>20</sup> Bowen (2015) p.22.

needed to put the situation of the Muslim community further into perspective. Studies of the stigmatization of Muslims should preferably be conducted taking into account the perspectives of members of the group as does the article by Bowen. My study also analyzes the perspectives of Muslim French of the aftermath of the terror act since some of the open letters are written by French citizens of Muslim faith. This paper will contribute to the field of research concerning Muslims' stigmatization in France in the light of the terror attack with a focus on national unity, freedom of speech and the demand to 'be' Charlie. Another contribution is that the study uses a material which has not yet gained a lot of attention in academic studies. The fact that open letters traditionally aim to challenge societal issues makes them highly interesting to analyze in the aftermath of the complex tragedy in France. A short history of the genre of open letters and the choice of the empirical material is presented in the following chapter.

## 3. The empirical material

This chapter provides an understanding of the genre of open letters. The written form of open letters has been an important form of public expression for many centuries. There does however not yet exist an extensive field of research about the genre. The first section of this chapter presents the origins of open letters and their traditional characterizations. How they historically have been used as a means of communication is also shortly discussed. Then, the significance of open letters is placed in the specific context of France with reference to Émile Zola's infamous open letter *J'accuse*. The delimitations of this study and the criteria of selection for the choice of the empirical material are discussed in a second section. Then, the chapter ends with a short presentation of the authors of those open letters which make up the empirical material of this study.

### 3.1. The genre of open letters

Künzler and Reuters-Jahn have conducted a study about Musical Open Letters in Africa.<sup>21</sup> They describe the roots of the genre of written open letters as lying in the époque of ancient Greece. The two authors state that since then, open letters have been “a means of public discourse.”<sup>22</sup> Written open letters tend to have a highly appellat writing style and often have the purpose of making clear demands for change in a given society. Open letters appear to be effective tools for individuals who feel that they can contribute something to the public discussion which is not being said or focused on. One does not need a certain title or status in a given society in order to be able to publish an open letter. Open letters today are widely published on the internet by newspapers, on blogs and other platforms. A special characteristic of open letters is that they both are addressed in an explicit manner to someone specific while at the same time intending to reach a wider audience.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Künzler, Daniel & Reuster-Jahn, Uta. "Mr. President": Musical Open Letters as Political Commentary in Africa. *Africa Today* 59 no. 1 (2012) 89-113.

<sup>22</sup> Künzler & Reuters-Jahn (2012) p.92.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Open letters are intended to be spread and to affect society. They are therefore effective tools to create a public awareness about a specific issue and often in order to pressure the individual or group (which the letter is explicitly addressed to) to take a specific action since having been called out in public. In the words of Künzler and Reuters-Jahn, the content of open letters primarily is about “sociopolitical issues” mostly written in a justifying, affirming or criticizing manner.<sup>24</sup> When it comes to genre’s history in the French context, the open letter which has had the most significance is *J’accuse*. The open letter concerning the Dreyfus-case written by Émile Zola was published in a French newspaper in 1898. It was not the only open letter Zola published but it was the one which gained most attention.<sup>25</sup> It has not only been discussed in France but also in other countries. That the open letter got so much attention has to do with that that it succeeded in pointing out specific individuals behind abstract laws and systems. Through addressing those individuals personally while also publicizing the letter, Zola could push them to take a take a stand in public.<sup>26</sup>

The open letters analyzed in my study are for instance explicitly addressing the editorial of *Charlie Hebdo*, the Muslim population and the younger generation in France. It is however not the impact of the open letters which is object of this study, but solely their content. Therefore, only the fact that all of the open letters chosen for this study are addressing a wider French audience is relevant to keep in mind in this study. The choice to analyze open letters in this study is grounded in that they traditionally are used to point out a societal issue and to add something to the public discussion. As will be explained more detailed in later chapters, the public discussions in France were not welcoming to voices that were criticizing the duty to ‘be’ Charlie. In such a context, the open letters are a way for the distinct authors to discuss their understandings of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack and its aftermath in an alternative to the public debate. In the next section follows a presentation of the process in which the empirical material was collected. The choice for the distinct delimitations of this study is discussed and the authors of the selected open letters are shortly introduced.

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<sup>24</sup> Künzler & Reuters-Jahn (2012) p.92.

<sup>25</sup> Essig, Rolf- Bernhard. (2000) *Der Offene Brief. Geschichte und Funktion einer publizistischen Form von Isokrates bis Günter Grass*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, p.174.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.188.

## 3.2. The material and the delimitations of the study

As earlier mentioned, the fact that numerous people felt an urge to write open letters as reaction to the terror attack targeting *Charlie Hebdo* makes the material interesting. It also meant that the delimitation of the material had to be comprehensive in order to narrow down the scope of the study to a feasible purpose. The delimitation was conducted through consequently following the chosen criteria for selection. The criteria and the eleven open letters which fitted the selection criteria are presented below.

To collect the open letters, a search on google.fr using the key terms “lettre ouverte *Charlie Hebdo*” and “lettre ouverte Janvier 2015” was conducted.<sup>27</sup> This paper solely has made use of the search engine Google since the open letters which can be found there are accessible for the broader French society. The letters have been published on diverse webpages and most were spread to several internet pages. Some have been published on websites of more well-known news agencies like The Huffington Post and Le Monde. However, the majority can be found on distinct other platforms as for instance Clique TV and distinct blogs. Most open letters were published by someone other than the original author. However, as long as the letters are still in their full and original version (as first published by the actual author) they were included in this study.

In order to solely examine the first reactions in the aftermath of the terror attack, only letters which were published in January 2015 have been included as material. Solely open letters which had been written in French by French citizens were included. They are the ones who primarily did experience the distinct reactions within their society in the aftermath of the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* headquarters. As already mentioned earlier, open letters do intend to make an impact on society. This is a highly important aspect of the genre. This paper does however only examine the content of the letters and not the impact they have had in the public debate. To include answers on the open letters or other reactions on them is however an interesting topic for a further study. All the chosen eleven open letters are highly personal and use emotive language. To further exclusively focus on the content of this study, the linguistic form of the letters is however not analyzed in this study.

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<sup>27</sup> *Lettre ouverte* means open letter in French.

The study incorporates the background of the authors only to a certain degree in the analysis. The authors are: the medical student and activist Dorian Cessa, the rapper Kery James as well as rapper Disiz, the writer and professor JMG Le Clézio who earlier has received the Nobel Prize in Literature, member of the Muslim community Nina S., the teacher Marie who works in Seine Saint-Denis, novelist and film director Yann Moix, the President of the Union of the Scientology Churches in France Eric Roux, human rights advocate and lawyer Guy Aurenche, lector Michael Fralin and editor Corine Goldberger. Among these individuals are both Muslims and non-Muslims. This is an interesting mix of individuals and it was made in the hope of finding varying perspectives.

The study focuses solely on the individual perspectives found in the eleven open letters and does not aim to generalize the position among specific social groups in French society. The concluding discussion does however link my own findings to previous results from relevant studies. This makes it possible to regard the perspectives found in the analysis of the open letters in a wider context. The method and the theoretical framework presented in the following chapters are used to structure the content of the letters and to place it within the specific French context.

## 4. Method

This chapter provides a presentation of the method which has been used to structure the content of the empirical material. As mentioned earlier, this study does not aim to generalize and solely aims for qualitative findings. This chapter starts with an explanation of the genre of qualitative content analysis and why it is a relevant choice for the purpose of this study. It gives an overview of the central aspects of Graneheim and Lundman's methodological framework which this study follows. In a second section, this chapter provides a discussion of the specific conceptual tools which were used to structure the empirical material. The chapter ends with a presentation of the results from the structuring of the content from the open letters. The overarching theme of *'being' Charlie* as well as the secondary themes which are the objects of the analysis, are also discussed.

### 4.1. Qualitative Content Analysis

There do exist many differing perspectives on the method of qualitative content analysis among researchers and distinct concepts have been interpreted in various ways. This study of the content of open letters follows the use of concepts put forward by U.H. Graneheim and B. Lundman. Their article, which is the foundation for the methodological framework of this study, explains qualitative content analysis with the example of nursing research.<sup>28</sup> I am aware that there exists a wide range of perspectives on qualitative content analysis within the fields of humanities, too. The methodological framework by the two researchers should however not be dismissed simply on the grounds of not coming from the same field of study as my paper. Graneheim and Lundman provide a comprehensive review of distinct conceptual tools who traditionally have been used in qualitative content analyses. Their choice of the most suitable concepts is well-motivated. Since the empirical material only consists of eleven letters and the study has not as aim to generalize the understandings found in them, a qualitative analysis is suitable. Open letters are traditionally written in a highly personal manner and it is thus interesting to focus on the specific content of each letter.

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<sup>28</sup> Graneheim, U.H. & Lundman, B. Qualitative Content Analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today* 24. (2004) 105-112.



As with any other method, there do exist some issues one needs to be aware of when conducting a qualitative content analysis. Written texts can namely always be understood in a variety of ways and Graneheim and Lundman admit that in the analysis of a written material, "there is always some degree of interpretation."<sup>29</sup> With a consequent usage of the chosen conceptual tools together with the theoretical framework, it will however be possible to avoid an arbitrary conduct of the analysis of the empirical material. Particularly since the structuring of the content of the open letters into central themes was made taking into account the specific context of French society - as well as the distinct letters in their wholeness – it was made possible to avoid missing any latent content that had relevance for this study. The choice to include quotes from the open letters is also helpful to make the analysis more transparent and comprehensible for the reader.

The suitability of a qualitative content analysis following Graneheim and Lundman is further shown in the following section. The course of action of the structuring of the content of the open letter is explained in detail. The central themes which resulted from the first assessments of the empirical material are also presented. The following section thus provides what makes up the basis for and the structure of the analysis of the empirical material.

## 4.2. Methodological concepts and central themes

This sections aims to provide a more transparent understanding of how the analysis of the empirical material presented in chapter 6 has been structured. The central themes which were created during the structuring of the content of the open letters are presented and the choice of using the overarching theme of *'being' Charlie* is explained.

After a first read of the open letters, the distinct meaning unites were selected due to their capability of answering the central questions of this study. Within each of the letters, meaning units stating highly similar content were found. In this study, I have used the concept of condensation following Graneheim and Lundman's definition. Condensation makes it possible to shorten the content while still keeping the most central aspects in place.<sup>30</sup> I have used the concept in order to merge meaning units in which an author states similar content to make the analysis of the material less repetitive. In some instances, quotations of meaning units which express the most comprehensive content concerning a certain theme are included in the

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<sup>29</sup> Graneheim & Lundman (2004) p.106.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

analysis to make the conduct of the analysis more transparent for the reader. After several first readings of the empirical material, numerous central aspects who are explicitly discussed in the letters were categorized into codes. These codes were relating to distinct phenomenon and aspects that were recurring in the majority of the open letters. Here, it was important to keep in mind the specific context of France to make certain content comprehensible and thus to avoid missing latent content. The letters were all also examined in a whole and with regard to the French context to avoid missing implicit meanings. The central codes which could be deduced from the material and which was used to structure the content were *national unity*, *the Republican Marches*, *'being' Charlie*, *freedom of speech*, *radicalization*, *France's future*, *stigmatization* and *the attackers*.

Further following Graneheim and Lundman's usage of qualitative content analysis, I created distinct themes in the phase of "abstraction."<sup>31</sup> Here, the meaning units and codes were categorized under central themes. It was striking that even though the letters widely contained rather distinct focuses in their messages, they all did discuss the *'being' Charlie* theme to a certain degree. The choice to analyze the themes in the light of *'being' Charlie* was therefore made. The overarching theme concerns content which discussed the 'I am Charlie' slogan, the Republican Marches held in the name of the editorial and the demand for Muslims to join those public gatherings. Furthermore, the two themes of *national unity* and *Muslims as the 'Other'* were created and all interconnected to the primary theme. The former theme concerns content under the codes of *national unity* and *the Republican Marches*. The content categorized under the codes *freedom of speech*, *the Republican Marches* and *stigmatization* were brought together under the theme of *Muslims as the 'Other'*. This is the basis for the course this study takes.

The discussion of radicalization in France and visions for the future in the open letters are no less of importance. In order to delimit this study to feasible research questions, I however have chosen to solely analyze the content of the open letters categorized under the two themes *national unity* and *Muslims as the 'Other'* which connect to the overarching theme of *'being' Charlie*. As explained throughout this chapter, the method was used to deduce the central themes from the open letters and to structure the content of the empirical material following these themes. How the perspective is used to examine this specific content in the analysis of this paper is in detail explained in the following chapter. It presents Brenda Watson's

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<sup>31</sup> Graneheim & Lundman (2004) p.106.

understandings of the significance of secularism for the stigmatization of the Muslim population in France.

## 5. Theory

As previously explained, the content of the open letters has been structured through the usage of the method. The primary use of the theory is to make this selected content comprehensible in the specific context of the French society. Recalling the purpose of this study, I aim to examine the stigmatization of Muslim French in the light of the aftermath of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. The chosen perspective presented in this chapter is grounded in Brenda Watson's understandings of the specific secular context in France.<sup>32</sup> The perspective is suitable for my study since it explains how the dominating understanding of reason and religion being incompatible has resulted in Muslims being regarded as the 'Other' in France. This study further uses the theoretical concept of what Watson terms intellectual apartheid in order to analyze how the voice of the Muslim population was silenced in the aftermath of the terror attack. The perspective makes it possible to identify the stigmatization of French Muslims and to provide an understanding of the significance of a unilateral notion of free speech in France. A presentation of these central aspects of the chosen theory and their usage in the analysis of this study follows below.

### 5.1. The stigmatization of Muslims in a secular France

Brenda Watson understands the silencing of the Muslim population in France as grounded in their disadvantageous position in society. In the words of Watson, Muslims do "conspicuously lack the money, education, networking skills and expertise realistically to have a voice."<sup>33</sup> She further discusses this societal disadvantage in the light of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. The public mourning of the victims was held under the slogan 'I am Charlie'. Muslims who expressed their frustrations over this were misunderstood and portrayed as supporters of the terror. Watson criticizes this reaction by the broader society. The perspective she expresses in her article about reason and religion, which my study makes use of, highlights the issue of the

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<sup>32</sup> Watson, Brenda. Belief and Evidence, and how it may aid reflection concerning Charlie Hebdo. *Think* 15 no. 42 (2016) 151-161.

<sup>33</sup> Watson (2016) p.156.

secular majoritarian society in France regarding its ideas as the sole truth. In Watson's understanding, the majority can easily claim to hold the morally correct ideas when those who disagree do not have a chance to be taken seriously by its environment.<sup>34</sup> This perspective is crucial for this study since it makes it possible to identify content in the open letters which expresses certain understandings as self-evident. This is especially crucial in the analysis of the content about national unity, freedom of speech and the Republican Marches. As earlier mentioned, to support the satirical newspaper was widely regarded as a matter of course in France. The perspective makes it thus further possible to put content in the open letters which fits the majoritarian discourse into context. It also makes a discussion of which understandings underpin the ideas expressed by the authors of the letters possible.

To make the perspective of the silencing of French Muslims more comprehensible in the analysis, I have chosen to make use of the theoretical concept which Watson terms *intellectual apartheid*.<sup>35</sup> Watson defines this concept as the accepted view in French society on religion as something strange and deviant from the societal norm. This is a highly important aspect to make both the silencing and the stigmatization of the Muslim community in France comprehensible. Watson explains this societal climate as grounded in the dominant opinion in the secular West in which religion is regarded as totally distinct from and incompatible with reason. This has resulted in a public debate in which religion is regarded as outdated and as opposite to modern values. Watson concludes that this has resulted in Muslims not being able to influence public opinion since they are regarded as a distinct category due to their faith.<sup>36</sup> This perspective is highly relevant for the purpose of my study since it makes it comprehensible how the Muslim community was denied their access to free speech. I foremost use this aspect of the perspective to analyze what underlies the understandings expressed in the content of the open letters categorized under the theme *Muslims as the 'Other'*.

This perspective is further suitable to make the discussion of free speech comprehensible in the light of the attack on the satirical newspaper. Watson argues that France is characterized by a unilateral form of free speech which solely accepts the understandings shared by the majoritarian society. In her article about religion and reason, she critiques *Charlie Hebdo* for being ignorant of the fact that their own ideas are questionable in a context of unre-

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<sup>34</sup> Watson (2016) p.156.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.160.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.160.

stricted freedom of speech. Watson critiques this understanding namely as being misunderstanding the concept of free speech while at the same time claiming to be a symbol for it. In Watson's perspective, opinions which challenge the secular discourse in France are not accepted as being part of free speech and instead dismissed as inappropriate. She concludes that those who contest the majoritarian discourse can therefore easily be deprived from exercising their right to free speech.<sup>37</sup> This aspect of the perspective makes it possible to identify content in the open letters in which a unilateral understanding of freedom of speech is expressed.

The theory by Watson discussed in this chapter has been chosen to put the empirical material of this study into perspective. The perspective is used to identify whether a specific content of an open letter is expressing or challenging specific aspects of the dominant discourse in France. The perspective provides understandings of a unilateral form of freedom of speech, the stigmatization of the Muslim community due to their faith and the significance of an intellectual apartheid which silences and portrays Muslims as the 'Other'. These understandings are in the analysis used to make content about the aftermath of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* comprehensible. It is suitable for the purpose of this study which is to examine the stigmatization of French Muslims in the light of the aftermath of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. The next chapter reminds the reader of the benchmark and the structure of the analysis before presenting the actual analysis.

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<sup>37</sup> Watson (2016) p.157.

## 6. Analysis of the empirical material

The central themes which were found using Graneheim and Lundman's method of qualitative content analysis make up the structure of this chapter. The analysis is divided into two distinct sections. *'Being' Charlie* is the overarching theme in both parts. The first section analyses content of the open letters which was categorized under the theme of *national unity*. The second part presents the analysis of the content responding to the theme *Muslims as 'the Other'*. The perspective presented in the previous chapter is used to make this content comprehensible in the specific context of a secular France. Recalling the research questions of this study: How did the authors of the open letters understand the notion of national unity in the direct aftermath of the attack? Do the authors see a responsibility among French Muslims to 'be' Charlie after the terror attack or do they condemn such a demand? What underlies their understandings?

The two-part analysis presented below takes the letters' wholeness as well as the author's background into account to a certain degree. The citations from the empirical material used in the analysis are all my translations from the original publication language French. The findings from the two distinct parts of the analysis are afterwards discussed in the ending chapter of this study.

### 6.1. Understandings of national unity

As discussed in previous chapters of this paper, millions of people united under the slogan 'I am Charlie' in the aftermath of the terror attack on the satirical newspaper. The gatherings held under the dominating slogan came to be regarded as expressions of national unity. Seven of the selected open letters discuss the theme of *national unity*. All of the content presented and analyzed below is further analyzed in the light of the principal theme of *'being' Charlie*. This part of the analysis analyzes how the authors define and discuss national unity in the light of the attack on the newspaper in their open letters.

Medical student Dorian Cessa writes in his highly emotive open letter that it comes without saying that all of France supports *Charlie Hebdo* in the aftermath of the terror attack. Cessa expresses an understanding of a united France in the days of public mourning. In the following quote, Cessa addresses the staff of the satirical newspaper, stating what he regards as the uniting factor among the people in France.

In the streets of Paris and France today, it is the loss of this model of freedom for which we cry. If these bullets took your lives with them, they also tore apart a part of our hope, a part of our innocence.<sup>38</sup>

With ‘this model of freedom’, he refers to the free speech which the satirical editorial represents for him. In other meaning units, Cessa further expresses an understanding of the slogan of ‘I am Charlie’ as being a collective grief for the liberty *Charlie Hebdo* symbolizes for him. Cessa’s open letter is an example of the majoritarian discourse which could be seen in the aftermath of the attack. It is a discourse which in Watson’s perspective is convicted of holding the sole truth.<sup>39</sup> Cessa regards it as a matter of course to ‘be’ Charlie. Like the dominant discourse, he understands the ‘being’ of Charlie as an expression of national unity in France. Cessa expresses a feeling of what Emmanuel Todd, in the light of January 2015, called a longing for “a collective identity.”<sup>40</sup> Cessa for instance thoroughly uses ‘we’ in his open letter. Claiming to be talking in the name of all of France, Cessa addresses *Charlie Hebdo* and claims that “we all need people like you.” Then, he ends his letter with stating “#NousSommesTousCharlie”.

Cessa shows an ignorance of the fact that there were people in France who refused to join the gatherings. His ignorance can be understood in the light of what Watson defines as a unilateral understanding of freedom of speech. Cessa regards his ideas about free speech as self-evident and as being shared by the entire French society. This understanding makes it comprehensible why the public gatherings symbolized an absolute national unity for him. Michael Fralin is another author who expresses a feeling of unity around the support for *Charlie Hebdo* in his open letter. He, similarly to Cessa, claims to speak for France as a whole as can be seen in the quote below.

Today, I write and I pray for Charlie. In my name, in the name of all. Not in the name of a God but in the name of us humans, in the name of this bunch of idiots which we are, but especially in honor of these great men who in my eyes only are guilty of one thing: having tried to be a little less stupid than we are...<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cessa, Dorian. Nous sommes tous Charlie – Lettre ouverte. *Le Huffington Post*. 2015-01-07. [www.huffingtonpost.fr](http://www.huffingtonpost.fr) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.156.

<sup>40</sup> Todd (2015) p.8.

<sup>41</sup> David, Jarry. Lettre ouverte d’un lecteur à propos de Charlie Hebdo. *Le Nouveaux Paradigme*. 2015-01-09. [www.2012un-nouveau-paradigme.com](http://www.2012un-nouveau-paradigme.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).



The quote appears as rather contradictory when taking into account Fralin's open letter as a whole. He states for instance that he hopes that the attack "will not divide us even more." His awareness of existing division in French society is puzzling since he simultaneously claims to be writing 'in the name of all' which creates a sense of unity. As Cessa's open letter, Fralin's homage to *Charlie Hebdo* does not at any point discuss the fact that some in France did not want to join the gatherings. Fralin defines the newspaper as a symbol of freedom of speech since they, in his words, "understood the importance of the fact of accepting differences, of knowing how to agree with disagreeing with the other."<sup>42</sup> Here, he expresses a contradiction in claiming the importance of agreeing to disagree, while regarding it as self-evident that everyone should unite in the name of *Charlie Hebdo*.

Another open letter in which I found content responding to the theme of *national unity* is the one written by Eric Roux. Like Cessa and Fralin, Roux regards it as a matter of course to 'be' Charlie. He similarly portrays the newspaper as a symbol of liberty and free speech. His perspective is however differing since he, like he himself states, does not like the work of the satirical newspaper as a Scientologist. In the light of the majoritarian discourse in France, as well as his understanding of what the newspaper represents, it becomes comprehensible why he sees it as a matter of course to unite in a support for the editorial. For Roux, it is not important whether he likes the publications by *Charlie Hebdo*. He, similarly to Fralin, defines the aspect of agreeing to disagree as the foundation of free speech. In the quotation below, Roux expresses his opinion on why the French society needs to unite.

We must all carry the grief with those who are suffering directly from this act, whatever our ideas, our belief and our convictions are. Because if we are not, we are giving our consent to what the human stupidity creates at its worst: extremism and terror. Liberty has been violently hit, and she does nevertheless stay alive. She has however to embody our disagreements.<sup>43</sup>

This content in Roux's open letter portrays national unity as a crucial response to the attack. He acknowledges that it will be difficult for France to unite in what he in his open letter calls "a a-confessional as much as in a multi-confessional manner."<sup>44</sup> It is however this form of unity which he regards as essential for not letting the attackers succeed in instilling more divisions

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<sup>42</sup> David, Jarry. Lettre ouverte d'un lecteur à propos de Charlie Hebdo. *Le Nouveaux Paradigme*. 2015-01-09. [www.2012un-nouveau-paradigme.com](http://www.2012un-nouveau-paradigme.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>43</sup> Roux, Eric. Lettre ouverte à Charlie Hebdo. *Le Blog d'Eric Roux – Ministre de l'Eglise de Scientologie*. 2015-01-07. [www.ericroux.com](http://www.ericroux.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>44</sup> Roux, Eric. Lettre ouverte à Charlie Hebdo. *Le Blog d'Eric Roux – Ministre de l'Eglise de Scientologie*. 2015-01-07. [www.ericroux.com](http://www.ericroux.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

and hatred in society. ‘We must all’ in the quote above gives a sense of the uniting as a duty for everyone in France. Roux’s open letter, like the ones by Cessa and Fralin, are examples of the majoritarian discourse in France in which uniting under the slogan of ‘I am Charlie’ was regarded as a self-evident response to the tragedy. The open letter written by Le Clézio, similarly to the above mentioned letters, portrays the Republican Marches as a symbol of unity among Frenchmen. He regards this unity as foremost grounded in a shared outrage over the attack. Le Clézio’s definition of the significance of the Marches is expressed in the quote below.

During this miraculous moment, the barriers of classes and backgrounds, differences of belief, the walls separating us human beings, no longer existed. There was only one people of France, multiple and unique, diverse and beating with the same heart.<sup>45</sup>

Here, Le Clézio’s understanding fits the words of Emmanuel Todd which describe the gatherings as having become a symbol of “the re-emergence of a united, resolute France.”<sup>46</sup> Le Clézio further portrays the Republican Marches as “having pushed back the specter of disagreement which threatens our plural society.”<sup>47</sup> Similar to Fralin and Roux, he expresses an awareness of France having a divided society. Like the two other authors, Le Clézio does however not discuss these divisions in the light of the gatherings under the slogan of ‘I am Charlie’. For him, the unity was absolute in the days of public mourning as expressed in the quote above. Corine Goldberger portrays the aftermath of the attack in January 2015 in contrast as characterized by division.<sup>48</sup> She sees a divide between those who believe in freedom of speech and those who felt disrespected by the satire. She writes in her open letter that the responsibility of unity in France lies on the latter group. In order for national unity to be able to exist in France, Goldberger sees it as crucial that those who do not like the work of *Charlie Hebdo* have to join the Marches. As Fralin and Roux, she defines freedom of speech being grounded in the ac-

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<sup>45</sup> Le Clézio, Jean-Marie Gustave. “Lettre à ma fille, au lendemain du 11 janvier 2015”, par JMG Le Clézio. *Le Monde*. 2015-01-14. [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>46</sup> Todd (2015) p.8.

<sup>47</sup> Le Clézio, Jean-Marie Gustave. “Lettre à ma fille, au lendemain du 11 janvier 2015”, par JMG Le Clézio. *Le Monde*. 2015-01-14. [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>48</sup> Goldberger, Corine. Lettre ouverte à ceux qui proclament “Je ne suis pas Charlie”, et à ceux qui les likent. *Marie Claire*. 2015-01-09. [www.marieclaire.fr](http://www.marieclaire.fr) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

ceptance of disagreeing with the other. Goldberger does however not realize that her understanding of unity is excluding and ignoring those who did not want to celebrate the satirical newspaper.

While the ‘being’ of Charlie is regarded as a self-evident expression of unity by Cessa, Fralin, Roux, Le Clézio and Goldberger, Nina S. and Guy Aurenche have differing perspectives on French unity. Nina S. writes in her open letter: “National unity, okay, but then we must first agree on the so controversial concept of living together.”<sup>49</sup> Regarding this in the light of the attack and her letter in its wholeness, Nina is showing that real national unity only can be obtained if France genuinely would engage in working against existing divisions in society. Guy Aurenche describes the evening of the attack as having seen real national unity in the streets of France. In contrast to the majority of open letters I have mentioned in this chapter so far, Aurenche expresses that he does not see the ‘being’ of Charlie as needed for national unity. Aurenche states that on January 7, Frenchmen came out on the streets “without a slogan or a call, simply to show that it felt good to be together.”<sup>50</sup> Aurenche saw unity in the act that people came out on the streets to simply mourn together. Aurenche expresses, like some of the other authors, an awareness of divisions in France. In contrast to the other author, this awareness makes him understand the need to accept dissenting voices. His open letter does not fit the unilateral understanding of free speech, and thus of national unity, which in Watson’s perspective influences the majoritarian discourse in France. Aurenche’s opinion of the slogan being excluding and not representative of a national unity appears to be grounded in his belief in the importance of respecting “*the liberty of the other*”.<sup>51</sup>

Some of the open letters showed an awareness of existing divisions in France. Most of the open letters however also showed an ignorance of divisions in the aftermath of the attack, regarding the national unity as absolute. Only one letter explicitly stated that there was no need for a slogan to feel unity in the country, acknowledging the exclusionary character of uniting in the ‘being’ of Charlie. The dominant understanding of a unilateral use of freedom of speech in France, following Watson’s perspective, makes the ignorance in the majority of the letters comprehensible. The perspective makes it visible how the understanding of the majority

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<sup>49</sup> S., Nina. “Non, je ne suis pas Charlie”: lettre ouverte au peuple français. *Saphir News*. 2015-01-16. [www.saphirnews.com](http://www.saphirnews.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>50</sup> Aurenche, Guy. Guy Aurenche du CCFD-Terre solidaire: “Lettre ouverte à mes petites-filles”. *Le Pèlerin*. 2015-01-13. [www.pelerin.com](http://www.pelerin.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

of France who regards *Charlie Hebdo* as a symbol for Republican values influences an idea of a national unity in the name of the newspaper as a matter of course for all of France. In the following section, this is further analyzed in the light of the demand to the Muslim population to join the public support for the newspaper.

## 6.2. French Muslims as the ‘Other’

The majoritarian society in France demanded Muslims to join the homages to *Charlie Hebdo* in order to prove their attachment to France and to condemn the terror. In this part of the analysis, I examine how the open letters advocate for or criticize this demand. The central questions posed on the empirical material are the following: What does the demand imply for the distinct authors of the open letters? What underlies their understandings? This section of the analysis aims to answer these questions, analyzing the content of 6 of the open letters which was categorized under the theme *Muslims as the ‘Other’*. As in the previous analysis section, the content goes under the overarching theme *‘being’ Charlie*.

Novelist and film-director Yann Moix states in his letter that he does not understand those who were convinced that the aftermath of the attack would imply a difficult time for French Muslims. He claims that it has on the contrary never been easier for a Muslim to show the broader society in France the disconnect from Islam to the terrorism act. In his open letter explicitly addressing the Muslim population, Moix writes as follows.

I suggest that in fact, that from now we call those of you *Muslims* who go down willingly with us, with the laity, atheists, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, to demonstrate in the streets – for the maintenance of peace, freedom, equality and brotherhood in the streets of the Republic. It has never been easier for a Republican French Muslim to show and to prove that Islam has nothing to do with and is not related to the religious fascism which is Islamism.<sup>52</sup>

Moix’s understanding of what the participation of Muslims in the Republican Marches means is grounded in his understanding of ‘being’ Charlie as the sole alternative to express a condemnation of the attack. A similar perspective is put forward by Goldberger in her open letter. As

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<sup>52</sup> Moix, Yann. Lettre un peu désagréable à l’intention de mes amis musulmans. *La Règle du Jeu*. 2015-01-10. [www.laregledujeu.org](http://www.laregledujeu.org) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

previously analyzed in chapter 6.1., Corine Goldberger expresses it as self-evident that all citizens need to support *Charlie Hebdo* in order to prove a support for free speech and Republican values. Goldberger states that one needs to defend ideas one disagrees with while at the same time dismissing those who explicitly stated that they “*are not Charlie*” as unacceptable. If she really would advocate a freedom of expression which includes the acceptance of disagreements, she should accept diverging voices as part of free speech. In the quote below, she portrays those who felt disrespected by the satirical work by *Charlie Hebdo*, many of them Muslims, as a distinct group from those who support free speech.

In response to the massacre of “Charlie”, there should not be one side of Democrats, believers and atheists who are committed to the freedom of speech, and other believers who are allergic to disrespect.<sup>53</sup>

Goldberger furthermore regards her believe in blasphemy as self-evident, stating that she advocates “the right to criticize religions, like any system of thought and belief.” In the light of Watson’s understanding of the secular character of French society, her opinion is the norm. In the understanding of Emmanuel Todd, it was the highly emotive social climate in the aftermath of the attack which made it was impossible for people in the days of mourning to calmly reflect on “that the right to blaspheme *against your own religion* should not be confused with the right to blaspheme *against someone else’s religion*.”<sup>54</sup> The notion of the right to blaspheme as a matter of course, as defined by Goldberger, is according to Todd further easily created when the depicted religion is the faith of a group which already faces discrimination and stigmatization in French society.<sup>55</sup>

Numerous of the other open letters stated content concerning the stigmatization of Muslims. That content was categorized under the theme *Muslims as the ‘Other’*. Muslim rapper Disiz expresses for instance his frustration over feeling pointed out in the aftermath of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* because of his religious faith. He describes that he faced the same issue after the terror attack on the Twin Towers in New York, stating: “I spent 15 years tacitly justifying myself as a Muslim, about a crime I had not committed.”<sup>56</sup> He further expresses that

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<sup>53</sup> Goldberger, Corine. Lettre ouverte à ceux qui proclament “Je ne suis pas Charlie”, et à ceux qui les likent. *Marie Claire*. 2015-01-09. [www.marieclaire.fr](http://www.marieclaire.fr) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>54</sup> Todd (2015) p.5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Bilal. Disiz s’exprime suite aux attentats de Charlie Hebdo. *Linkis*. 2015-01-08. [www.linkis.com](http://www.linkis.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

after the attack on Charlie Hebdo, he feels the same “shame of a thing I haven’t done, and of which I have never thought of even in my deepest anger.”<sup>57</sup> It shows his understanding of Muslims being made suspicious in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attack. Rapper Kery James, who also is a Muslim, discusses this suspicion of the broader society against his faith in the quote below.

The big majority of Muslims, whom I belong to, is equally victim and hostage by extremists from all sides. And it is this majority which is constantly ordered to make pledges to their citizenship and of patriotism which never seem to be sufficient. It is from her that we require in an almost threatening tone that she needs to come out on the streets to prove her attachment to France. As if it was this majority who had financed and armed the terrorists.<sup>58</sup>

The image he gives of the Muslim population in this quote is an image of a suspicious ‘Other’ which never succeeds in being accepted as ordinary French citizens. Here, one can identify an understanding of the stigmatization of Muslim French as defined by Watson and the previous research presented in this paper. Consistent with Watson’s understanding of intellectual apartheid,<sup>59</sup> Kery James writes in his open letter that this stigmatization has resulted in Muslims being regarded as a distinct group from the broader French society due to their religion. He criticizes that Muslims were asked to join the Marches, regarding it as just another example of the stigma of their faith. Like the two rappers, Nina S. is also a member of the Muslim community in France. Nina S. challenges the dominant idea of the participation in the Marches being the sole way to express a condemnation of the terror. In her opinion, the newspaper is not being “representative of a freedom of expression worthy of a France that respects its fellow citizens.”<sup>60</sup> In her open letter, she states that it is this understanding underlying her choice to refuse to ‘be’ Charlie. Nina critiques foremost the role of the media as having established the idea in France that refusing to participate in the gatherings meant a support of the terror. She further criticizes the media for having portrayed Muslims as the ‘Other’ as can be seen in the quote below.

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<sup>57</sup> Bilal. Disiz s’exprime suite aux attentats de Charlie Hebdo. *Linkis*. 2015-01-08. [www.linkis.com](http://www.linkis.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>58</sup> Un conseil: lisez la letter de Kery James. *Clique TV*. 2015-01-09. [www.clique.tv](http://www.clique.tv) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>59</sup> Watson (2016) p.160.

<sup>60</sup> S., Nina. “Non, je ne suis pas Charlie”: letter ouverte au peuple français. *Saphir News*. 2015-01-16. [www.saphirnews.com](http://www.saphirnews.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

The excessive media coverage and exposure of ideas who separate French Muslim from the French society are itself dangerous. They underpin that they are a separate category that is not part of the all Republicans because of their faith.<sup>61</sup>

This quote, similar to the content in Kery James's open letter, fits an understanding of what Watson terms *intellectual apartheid*.<sup>62</sup> It points out that it is their religious belief which makes the broader society regard Muslim French as a separate group. Another letter which shows that intellectual apartheid was an issue the aftermath of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* is the one written by teacher Marie. She works with foremost Muslim students in the suburb Seine Saint-Denis. In her letter written for her students and the Muslim community, Marie expresses her solidarity "with all those who we cannot hear."<sup>63</sup> Like Nina S., she discusses the issue of French Muslims having no voice in society due to their religiosity. In the light of Watson's perspective, this is due to the understanding of their religion being incompatible with reason and free speech.

Like Disiz, Kery James and Nina S., Marie discusses the significance the stigmatization of the Muslim population in the light of the aftermath of the terror attack. Marie points out that the media was simply searching for headlines that sell. None of the attackers came from Seine Saint-Denis. In her open letter, she explains her outrage over that a national newspaper however came to the suburb to ask how the students had reacted to the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. She criticizes the media representation as misrepresenting the truth in their headline "The students in Seine Saint-Denis are not all Charlie."<sup>64</sup> She acknowledges that it is true that there were certain students who did not respect the minute of silence held for *Charlie Hebdo*. Marie however also emphasizes the importance of taking into account that this was only a minority. She published her open letter to show the broader society that the majority of her students had been deeply shocked by the attack. Marie portrays French Muslims, similar to Kery James, as equal victims of the attack as the rest of the society.

In this part of the analysis, the content responding to the theme *Muslims as the 'Other'* and the overarching theme of *'being' Charlie* was analyzed. The analysis found both support and critiques of the demand for Muslims to support the newspaper in the open letters. An understanding of the public support of *Charlie Hebdo* as the sole alternative for Muslims to prove their attachment to France, their support for Republican values and their condemnation

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<sup>61</sup> S., Nina. "Non, je ne suis pas Charlie": lettre ouverte au peuple français. *Saphir News*. 2015-01-16. [www.saphirnews.com](http://www.saphirnews.com) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>62</sup> Watson (2016) p.160.

<sup>63</sup> Marie. Pour mes élèves de Seine Saint-Denis. *Tailspin*. 2015-01-10. [www.tailspin.fr](http://www.tailspin.fr) (downloaded 2016-03-29).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

of the attack was found in some letters. The remaining letters criticize the demand, especially in the light of intellectual apartheid. They challenge the dominant discourse that not wanting to 'be' Charlie meant supporting the terror and explain that such a refusal among the Muslim community simply was grounded in their feeling of disrespect by the satirical newspaper. The following chapter further discusses these findings together with the results from the first section of this analysis.



## 6. Concluding discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the two-part analysis of the empirical material. The purpose of this study was to examine the stigmatization of Muslim French in the light of the aftermath of the terror attack on the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*. I did this through an analysis of eleven open letters published in January 2015. A qualitative content analysis by Graneheim and Lundman was used to structure the content of the material. Then, throughout the analysis, a theoretical perspective grounded in Brenda Watson's understanding of the secular French society was used to put the content into context. As a reminder for the reader, the research questions of this study were: How do the authors of the open letters understand national unity in the aftermath of attack? How do they understand the demand for the Muslim population to 'be' Charlie? What underlies their understandings? The findings and their significance are discussed below.

My choice of material written by French citizens with highly differing backgrounds was made in the hope of finding varying perspectives. This choice proved to be suitable. Using Watson's perspective, I could both identify content in the open letters which was consistent with the discourse which dominated in the aftermath of the terror attack and content which challenged it. The authors who expressed an understanding of a public support in the name of the newspaper as self-evident regarded the gatherings as an expression of national unity, a condemnation of the attack and a support for Republican values. The authors of these letters regarded *Charlie Hebdo* as a symbol for a free speech and stressed the importance of agreeing to disagree. This understanding was however found to be rather contradictory in the light of their criticism of those who did not want to 'be' Charlie. Instead of following their own understanding - thus accepting those who did not want to join the gatherings held in the name of the satirical newspaper - the authors of these open letters either dismissed them as oversensitive religious persons or as ungrateful citizens who did not understand Republican values. The discussion whether Islam is compatible with Western values such as freedom of speech as seen in the Danish cartoon controversy, re-emerged in the aftermath of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*.

Interestingly, some of the open letters who did express the majoritarian discourse also expressed an awareness of divisions within their society. Many failed however to take

these divisions into account in the light of the aftermath of the tragedy. I found a rather romanticized image of a France which stands united in some of these letters. This was found to be grounded in the social climate in France being characterized by what Watson has termed intellectual apartheid. The secular majoritarian society in France is convinced of holding the truth and thus regards it as self-evident for everyone to share their understandings of the *Charlie Hebdo* affair. This study further found content in several open letters which challenged the understanding of an absolute national unity in the aftermath. The open letters written by French Muslims were found to have used their letters to explain to the broader society why their community widely refused to participate in the Republican Marches. For them, the refusal was simply grounded in their feeling of their faith over and over again having been disrespected by the newspaper. These authors stated the importance for France to understand that they refused to 'be' Charlie due to their disapproval of *Charlie Hebdo* as a symbol of freedom of speech and not because they supported the terror. The open letters which criticized the demand to 'be' Charlie regarded it as further stigmatizing Muslims and portraying them as a distinct and suspicious group in the aftermath of the attack.

My study contributes to field of previous research which points out the complex relation the broader society in France has with its largest religious minority. As pointed out by Emmanuel Todd, it was Islam and not its stigmatization in France which was in the spotlight in the aftermath of the terror attack in January 2015.<sup>65</sup> My study is contributing to shift the focus on Islam to a focus on the stigmatization of the Muslim community in the light of the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*. The findings presented above show how the stigmatization of Muslim French in the aftermath of the attack is another example of what Laurence and Vaisse have defined as a continuing stigma of the group's faith.<sup>66</sup> Further studies regarding the stigmatization of French Muslims are needed. Especially research examining the perspectives of Muslim French- which my study has done to a certain degree- are favorable for a better comprehension of the issues this stigmatized group faces in a France which portrays them as opponents within their own society.

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<sup>65</sup> Todd (2015) p.5.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

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Some of the open letters were published by other persons than the author. To facilitate it for the reader to find a specific open letter, the list of references of the empirical material is structured after the first name of the actual author. In the case of public figures, the author's artist name under which the letter was published is stated. The name in italics above the complete references is the same as the one I have been using throughout the study to refer to the author.

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