

THE HIGH COST OF SATIRE AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

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Ethiopians have bitter sweet sayings and proverbs in line with their tradition of double entendres-- or wax and gold. What you hear is not the real message, what you see is not real at all. Go figure. Your mouth is your first enemy--shut it up. And so we say God does not quarrel with you without first preparing a big feast for you. *Saydegis aytalam*. Self delusion? Maybe, maybe not. May be a cloud has actually no silver lining.

At the risk of offending some late comers to the magazine, I have to admit that the murder of the cartoonists of Charlie Hebdo has become a god sent relief for the satirical magazine which was facing bankruptcy and sold no more than 30,000 copies. It now has 200,000 subscribers and has become world famous. Sad as the death of the satirists maybe, it is a blessing in disguise for the magazine. The blessing has also concerned Francois Holland, one of the dullest French president in recent history. His shockingly low public opinion support has shot up to 40%. On the fringe, there was also Netanyahu, responsible for the deaths of thousands in the Gaza, who waxed lyrical against what he called terrorism while the terrorist gangs of Stern and the Hgannah and their leaders like Menahem Begin are part of his recent history. He is busy using the incidents to call on European Jews to return to Israel. Even the keleptocrat Paul Biya of Cameroon used the Paris murders and his so called campaign against Boko Haram to appear in patriotic garb and to dupe people enough for sane and honest citizens to declare Je suis Biya. For those of us who grew up in the sixties, the sight of people kissing soldiers and police does jar. It would have shocked the martyred cartonnists themselves who had little paience for authority and tyrants of all hues. Dictators who are persecuting journalists in their own countries were part of the massive Paris demonstration and declaring I am Charlie in straight faced mockery. It was a double standard show that verged on the inappropriate and grotesque.

The imposed limits on Satire these days would have resulted in the continuous banning of Charlie Hebdo's irreverent predecessor, Hara Kiri. Charlie Hebdo was

secular at best and in contradicrion with the existing intolerance and religious fanaticism. God is humour is considered as a heresy with men rushing to kill and anticipating paradise and virgins if at all such belief is in their books, The tolerance of the feudal and medieval Saudi regime by the hypocrite West comes to mind. Every Friday, the Saudi regime beheads prisoners (including women) in public just as the ISIL slits the throats of soldiers,civilians,Copts and journalists. Mostly Muslims we should point out. Much as some may look for social reasons for the religious extremism, it is evident that political ends are indeed being sought using religion as a reason for war. The concerted attempt by many in the West to link the actions of extremists to Islam as a religion and the demand that all Muslims apologize and/or come out in condemnation of the extremists is two-facedness at its best. No one demanded Norwegians to apologise for Anders Breivik when this bigot killed nore than 70 people in Norway. Baruch Goldstein, a Jew, murdered 29 praying Muslims in Palestine but no one called on Israelis to apologise en masse for his act. The asassination of Ytzhak Rabin did not suggest that every Israeli was responsible for this act. And the unending saughter in Gaza? That a handful of fanatics killed the Charlie Hebdo journalists does not make Muslims and Islam resposnsible. From the Crusades to Indochina, to Iraq and Afghanistan the burden has not fallen on the White Christian world as a whole. The French prime minister is prattling about Islamo-fascism without adding to this Christiano-fascism for the Crusades type destructive campaign by the West itself to destroy Iraq, Libya. etc.. The protest around Charlie Hebdo was hijacked by the powers that be and behind it all there looms the question on beliefs, censorship and the freedom of the press. In Africa, we are familiar with self censorship unless you have the martyr's complex. Washington's close friend,Saudi Arabia, flogs bloggers. Washington's African ally, that is to say Ethiopia, is a prdator of the free press and has jailed nine bloggers and many more journalists. The so called fight against what the West calls terrorism has made a democrat out of the likes of Idris Debi and imperialist invaders are being praised as liberators.

Who at first stoked the fire of extremism? If not the Wahbists and Salafists, and the West ever hungry for resources and obsessed with domination and hegemony, then who? Saudi Arabia and Qatar-- from the Taliban to ISIL and the Boko Haram their

hand is evident at the same time as they jockingly join the so called coalition set up by Washington. The destruction of Libya by NATO is at the centre of the chaos in the Sahel and the strengthening of the extremist elements. The Boko Haram are Salafists par excellence. Let us say show me the money, follow the money and ask where do all these barbaric elements get their support, money and weapons? The Boko Haram does not even kidnap that many foreigners and ransom them for money and yet is evidently not lacking finance and modern arms. ISIL enjoyed surreptitious support from Turkey and Qatar to name a few. Sudan's Omar Beshir states that Boko Haram is funded and backed by the CIA and Mossad. Conspiracy theory aside, who gives these barbaric groups their military and financial backing? It cannot be Al Qaida only.

In Yemen the Saudi hegemony has collapsed with Iran gaining the upper hand. The West wants to insinuate that all struggles by the oppressed deserve the denigrating tag of terrorist but who is the terrorist par excellence in our world? This is the poppy field of double standard and you can go dizzy at a whiff. The same time as 17 people got murdered in Paris, Boko Haram slaughtered hundreds (Amnesty says 2000) in Baga but this got little coverage. This has surprised many, including Africans who should have known better. Not every life is the same--one white nun killed in the Congo amounted hundreds of Congolese lives and that was years and years ago before such terrible inflation and economic crisis. Black lives are not, as someone aptly pointed out, "grieveable", they are on the contrary "losable". How many journalists have been killed elsewhere than in Paris with little or no outcry? American trained Iraqis have killed many including one inquisitive American killed by a sniper. The recent hullabaloo about a psychotic and ultra patriotic, (is there a different kind of this animal?), American sniper who killed at least 160 Iraqis (some say including women and children) comes to mind. Boko Haram's great great grandfather was surely perfidious British colonialism but its godfathers are the same ones who spawned Al Qaida itself. Who backed the warlords of Somalia and paved the ways for the Islamic Court and today's Al Shabab? Who are ones who paved the way for the extremists in Libya? Who are the ones who, under the cover of Attacking Beshir Assad, gave support to hard liners and fanatics?

Uncomfortable questions that one cannot expect the CNN to ask. America backed and supported the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia and stated that referendum

only concerns Eritreans and has nothing to do with Ethiopians who were actually losing territory and becoming landlocked among other losses. When Crimea wanted to hold its own referendum the first one to oppose was Washington fuming that it concerns all Ukrainians. Double standard is more than alive and kicking and as usual Africa is the main victim. In this broad space the field left for satire to roam free as it should is very limited. Many years back a French cinema hall showing the film on Jesus by Scorsese was fire bombed in San Michel, Paris. If people who consider someone as their prophet seem him depicted as a dog their anger and consternation is understandable. I am sure a book or film blaspheming the Virgin Mary in Ethiopia would be confronted by similar anger and denunciation. The attempt to understand the reality does not in any means condoning censorship and an abridgement of the right of expression. As a longstanding foe of obscurantism, dictatorship, censorship and any form of religious fanaticism have no intention of tolerating aggression against free expression, laicism and irreverence. The problem is multi-dimensional though and the state of our world now does not favor tolerance at all. Racism has become routine and widespread. And if 17 lives lost in Paris draw more attention and indignation than hundreds and millions more in Nigeria or Congo this is to be expected. It is and was our world. Satire and truth cost and even the big powers are not interested in paying the cost but in perpetuating the crisis.