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# **Terrorism discourse on French international broadcasting: *France 24* and the case of *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris**

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## **Abstract**

This article offers an inquiry into the discursive construction of 'terrorism' by *France 24*, the French international broadcaster, in the aftermath of the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* satirical magazine in January 2015. The article argues that the broadcaster seems to employ a relatively narrow definition of terrorism linking it to Islam and Muslims. *France 24* portrays the attacks as an external phenomenon coming to France from outside. The blame is assigned to non-French factors, mainly to foreign extremist organisations, Islamist ideologues and overseas training. No reasons for violence are sought inside the country. Internal developments, such as discrimination, youth marginalisation, lack of educational and work opportunities, relations between law enforcement and the Muslim community that could potentially contribute to the acts, are not explored by the broadcaster's investigative journalism. This narrow interpretation of 'terrorism' that assigns responsibility to Muslims, Islamic indoctrination and overseas training may further alienate Muslim communities in France's already divided society. It points to narrow policy responses that focus mainly on stricter monitoring of Muslim minorities, on limiting combat and cross-border movement. This type of discourse excludes long-term policy solutions that address broader socio-politico-economic conditions in which 'terrorism' might flourish.

## **Keywords**

*Charlie Hebdo*, *France 24*, international broadcasting, media and terrorism, terrorism discourse

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## Introduction

This article offers an inquiry into the discursive construction of 'terrorism' by *France 24 (F24)*, the French international broadcaster, in the aftermath of the attacks on the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, in January 2015. Totally, 12 people were shot dead in the attack. The majority of the victims were cartoonists, employees of the magazine, known for making fun of politicians, religions and famous personalities. It became the deadliest assault on human life to have been committed on the French soil in the preceding two decades. The cartoons of Prophet Mohammed published by *Charlie Hebdo*, considered offensive by followers of Islam, were the reason behind the attack. However, this was not the first time the magazine had published pictures of Mohammed. Earlier in December 2012, French Muslim communities sued *Charlie Hebdo* over the publication of similar images. The magazine later received numerous threats from radical Muslims which led the French police to allocate security officers to protect the magazine's journalists and their right to free expression.

This article focuses on the othering process of terrorists by *F24*. It poses three questions with regard to the broadcaster's narrative of *Charlie Hebdo* attacks: (1) What makes a 'terrorist' in the eyes of the broadcaster? (2) Which drivers, *root causes* and *permissive factors* contributed to the attacks? and (3) What broader debate does this discourse enable? It is argued that the broadcaster employed a relatively narrow definition of terrorism linking it solely to Islam and Muslims. It portrayed the attacks as an external phenomenon and assigned the blame to non-French factors, mainly to foreign extremist organisations, Islamist ideologues and overseas training. No reasons for violence were sought inside the country. Internal developments, such as discrimination, youth marginalisation, lack of educational and work opportunities, relations between law enforcement and the Muslim community that could potentially contribute to the acts, were not explored by the broadcaster's investigative journalism. This narrow interpretation of 'terrorism' may further alienate Muslim communities in France's already divided society. It reinforces the 'Us' and 'Them' divide creating animosity between the West and Islam and sustains the climate of fear of terrorism.

## **Muslims as France's 'others': Orientalising Islam**

Western media officially began their onslaught on Muslims in the post-9/11 era, publicly associating Islam with terrorism, and Muslims with terrorists (Nurullah, 2010). This trend did not affect other religions as no connections were made in scholarly debates, or media coverage, between, for example, Christianity, or Judaism, and terrorism. In his book *Covering Islam*, Said argued that the Western media's coverage and interpretation of Islam is extremely influential and the success 'of this coverage can be attributed to the political influence of those people and institutions producing it rather than necessarily to truth or accuracy' (Said, 1981: 169). The fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s helped the West to discover a new enemy to fight against and claim their superiority. As Said observed, 'fundamentalism', particularly Islamic Fundamentalism 'equals everything we must now fight against, as we did with communism during the Cold War' (Said, 1981: xix). This idea was further supported by Samuel Huntington in 1993. His 'Clash of Civilizations' predicted that 'the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural' and that 'the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations' (Huntington, 1993: 22).

Movies, serials and news coverage followed in the Western media that 'portrayed Muslims as uncivilized, anti-modern, anti-democratic, and terrorists, fundamentalists, radicals, militants, barbaric, and anti-western' (Nurullah, 2010: 1022). Individual violent incident or any extremist movement in Islamic countries became quickly attributed to Islam. The persistent bias in the Western media with regard to the Arab world was quickly accepted as a fact in the Middle East (Powell, 2011: 92) and led many Muslims to perceive the media as an enemy and conspirator against them (Siddiqi, 1999: 204). Research has shown that terrorism is regularly connected to Islam and as a result, Muslims and Arabs now represent a negative 'Other' (Nurullah, 2010: 1022). Stereotypes and fear of terrorists have led to sweeping changes in governmental practices in the West, including curtailing of civil liberties and increased support for racial profiling (Altheide, 2004).

France's encounters with Muslims and Islam date back to 8th century when Northern African soldiers established a protectorate and mosque in Narbonne. Muslim settlers continued to arrive throughout the Middle Ages and early Modern Period (Clément, 1990). In 1830, France captured Algeria, its first colony with large Muslim populations. World

War I resulted in the first large-scale migration of Muslim colonial subjects who came to serve in the Metropolitan army and replace French workers in factories (Frémeaux, 1991). Post-World War II labour shortages brought another wave of migrants from the colonies. By 1975, over 1 million of Muslim immigrants from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey were living in metropolitan France (Noiriel, 1988). Today, France is home to 6 million Muslims, the largest Muslim population in the European Union. Estimates indicate that 78% of them are of North African descent and 12% come from the Middle East, including Turkey (PEW, 2011).

The Muslim community has generally tended to be marginalised in socioeconomic terms (Camillieri, 2013). A recent study demonstrated that unemployment rates among immigrants from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey are particularly high and are even higher among the descendants of immigrants from these countries. Muslims also report higher rates of discrimination than other immigrant communities in France. In 2005, a series of riots erupted in the suburbs of Paris and other French cities resulting in three deaths and nearly 3000 arrests. The unrest was an expression of frustration with high unemployment, police harassment and brutality among France's large immigrant population, mostly North African (Canet *et al.*, 2008).

Islam did not present a challenge and remained absent from official and media discourses at the time of large Muslim arrivals in mid-20th century. However, when migrant workers did not return home as previously expected, and instead brought their families to live with them, 'France suddenly found itself concerned with the integration of Muslims of all ages and backgrounds into what was previously a predominantly Catholic Christian nation' (Fetzer and Soper, 2005: 65). A series of unsuccessful efforts to cut back on the number of North Africans followed, ranging from paying migrants to leave the country, to deportations, to revisions to the French Code of Nationality in early 1990s (Hargreaves, 1995). The 1980s saw the rise of Le Pen's Front National, a far-right anti-immigration and anti-Muslim party, whose racist and neo-Nazi rhetoric generated considerable electoral support in years to come (Marcus, 1995). Although Le Pen never succeeded in presidential elections, his far-right views on immigration influenced national debate around Muslim communities. The wearing of all visible religious symbols in public schools was banned in 2004 followed by a ban on face veils in public places in 2010 (Allen, 2010). The relationships

between the French society and Muslims became characterised by mutual suspicion: the French exhibit taste-based discrimination against Muslims and Muslims perceive French institutions as systematically discriminatory and therefore dislike the French (Adida et al., 2014).

Today, national discourses in France portray Muslims as a mostly homogenous group, unwilling to integrate with the wider population. Lamont (2003) notes that while the American 'them' are Blacks, the French 'them' are Arabs. Fredette (2014) discovered that an identity for the Muslims has been constructed in France by a small, yet highly influential group of people, with centralised media at its forefront. This elitist discourse disregards the diversity of the Muslim communities and defines them exclusively by their religious background. This reductionist view asserts that Islamic values and traditions are in opposition to French republicanism and that it is Islam that keeps Muslims from becoming fully French.

### **Terrorism on the French soil and its connection to Islam**

Islam was linked to terrorism in French discourses during the Algerian war of independence throughout the 1950s. With a series of street assassinations 'the war rapidly degenerated into a gruesome, civil-war-style conflict of indiscriminate, merciless terrorism pitted against horrific, systematic torture and counterterror' (Fetzer and Soper, 2005). The Algerian Front de libération nationale (FLN) drew much of its rhetoric and motivation from Islam, and many French soon developed a tremendous fear of this religion. A wave of terrorist attacks throughout 1990<sup>1</sup> and rapidly rising crime rate – blamed largely on immigrants – further aggravated the already tense relations between ethnic French and residents of North African heritage. The riots in predominantly immigrant suburbs (*banlieues*) in 2005 were not classified as acts of terrorism. A state of emergency was introduced for 3 months, but no direct relationship was established between mostly ethnic-based riots and radical Islamism or jihadism.

French Muslims, who have been involved in terrorist attacks, are usually from immigrant communities, predominantly Algerian, they have very low level of education. At least 70% of them have been unemployed and the remaining 30% had basic manual jobs (Marret, 2010). Only a handful of individuals reached graduate level of education. According to Marret, 'French Jihadists' suffer from long periods of unemployment, display various forms of delinquency and

often undergo radicalisation process in prisons. Due to this very low level of education and minimal technical ability, French terrorist 'soldiers', as Marret argues, are not in a position to co-ordinate and carry out sophisticated operations, such as American 9/11, that require highly skilled, educated, financially well-off and well-informed masterminds.

### *The path to terrorism*

Defining 'terrorism' and a 'terrorist' is not an easy task. Le Sage (2007) argues that terrorism is a manifestation of political violence that is distinct from other types of violence, such as organised crime, mass civil conflict, riots or uprisings. It is characterised by deliberate premeditation with the aim of creating a climate of extreme *fear*. According to Crenshaw (2002), terrorist *aims* exist at several levels: it targets a wider audience to attract attention at one level, but conveys a political or ideological statement beyond its immediate victims, at another. Its *targets* are often symbolic, frequently not aims in themselves. The acts of terrorism are planned to be spectacular in an effort to capture the public and media attention. Through its choice of symbolic targets of representative meaning and shocking *methods* terrorism is repeatedly used to influence broader political behaviour and advance a particular set of political and social objectives.

Scholars agree that no one is born a terrorist and that individuals become terrorists through a comprehensive process of radicalisation (Ranstorp, 2010). Dannin (2005) has examined recruits' path to terrorism through their conversion to Islam and the role of religion in the process. He observed that the instructions given to new converts do not necessarily allow them to distinguish between the sectarian divisions of Islam. In some cases, recruits were motivated exclusively by a ready-made Islam, an adaptation reduced to basic practices related to clothing, food or prayers, rather than a thorough study of the faith. Many new converts are recruited in prisons, but the self-imposed discipline that restructures their lives down to the way they eat, dress, break up their day, study and think also attracts individuals outside of prisons who are to some extent socially frustrated.

Terrorism also needs an environment in which it can thrive: the possible *root causes* that encourage individuals to lead or support terrorist enterprises and *permissive factors* allowing terrorist groups to perform operations on a given territory (Le Sage, 2007: 6). The two

common *root causes* that are believed to fuel terrorism include lack of democracy and desperation associated with extreme poverty. Undemocratic rules with repressive or under-representative governance, combined with popular resentment towards a government's inability to effect change, preclude options for peaceful solutions and lead to violent efforts to overthrow the existing political establishment (Windsor, 2003). Furthermore, poverty and unemployment may lead to marginalisation of entire social groups and serve as fertile ground to breed potential recruits (Piazza, 2006; UN, 2004). *Permissive factors* often consist of physical, economic, institutional and political weaknesses in countries where terrorist acts are carried out, as well as low capacity of security forces to prevent terrorists from entering their territories. Anger at unpopular policies of governments may also clash with sympathies worldwide and lead to increased ideological support for terror. No single aspect can explain why terrorism happens and multiple reasons may lead to the feelings of alienation and antagonism that make terrorist recruitment possible.

### **Discourse as theory and method**

The article examines the discursive formation of terrorism by *F24* (English) in its reporting of *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. It draws on the daily online stories and broadcast news bulletins recorded for 2 weeks after the January attack on *Charlie Hebdo* magazine. From the overall 78 online stories tagged 'Charlie Hebdo' in the examined period, 28 news items were selected on the theme directly related to the attacks and the persons of the attackers. Discourse analysis was conducted on the stories and footage gathered. The article explores *discourse productivity* of *F24's* particular representation of the attacks, the way the broadcaster produces (or re-produces) the problem it explains. The article investigates the voices that speak in the stories, as well as their 'truths' on the attacks. It looks at the *production of publics* (audiences), the public's *common sense* and reactions in which the publics are expected to act (Keeley, 1990). This is to discover the conveyed meanings that render certain policies logical and proper and, thus, influence and legitimise practices (Campbell, 1993). According to Foucault (1980), those who produce discourse have the power to produce a 'regime of truth', to enforce its validity, its scientific and factual status. Through the study of discourse, this article enquires into the knowledge/power nexus (Campbell, 1993; Foucault, 1980, 1991). It wishes to expose to critical



questioning the discursive and social practices that discourse enables, as well as the *ideological* consequences it carries.

Discourse analysis follows the three-dimensional model suggested by Fairclough (1995): (1) textual, (2) inter-textual and (3) contextual. *Textual analysis* concentrates on the formal/linguistic features of the text and examines texts for their common lexicon of terms (labels and attributes ascribed to things). It allows for the uncovering of *relationships* in which things are placed in a discourse, where one object is distinguished from, or privileged, over another, usually in binary oppositions, to ultimately uncover the relation of power (De Saussure, 1974; Derrida, 1981). *Inter-textual analysis* examines how authors of texts draw on already existing discourses to create their texts. *Contextual analysis* puts text into context and explores the links between language use and social practice.

### **Coverage of terrorism by F24**

In the first days after the attacks, coverage by *F24* tended to lean towards episodic reporting focusing exclusively on reporting the incidents of the day. Episodic coverage directly follows an event, while thematic coverage generally occurs later, after time has passed (Iyengar and Simon, 1993). Episodic reporting is usually event or case oriented and focuses on concrete incidents, with no connections between isolated cases. The cameras, which followed the 'manhunt' (*France 24*, 2015c) for 3 days, did little more than document the developments unfolding. The coverage concentrated on incidents of terrorism rather than on comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon, its root causes, convictions, motives, intentions of terrorist agents and the role of enabling environment. As days passed, the coverage became more thematic. Terrorism was interpreted by *F24* as Muslim-related activity and as an external activity threatening France from outside. Terrorism was not seen as home-grown phenomenon whose advent and presence in France might have been caused and accelerated by domestic conditions.

### *Construction of terrorism acts*

The immediate coverage by *France 24* (2015a) defined the act as a 'terrorist attack' on the day of its occurrence, before the act was established by investigators as terrorism or any arrest or formal action

was undertaken by the authorities. The first reports depicted the shootings as a 'bloody attack' and a 'deadly rampage' (*France 24*, 2015b). The use of heavily charged descriptors intensified as the police search for the attackers continued. The attacks, viewed as the 'worst assault on France's homeland security for decades' (*France 24*, 2015d), were quickly described as the 'French September 11' (*France 24*, 2015e) and 'the country's deadliest terrorist attack in half a century' (*France 24*, 2015f).

The only footage available to television channels was an amateur video by a local resident filmed on his mobile phone from the window overlooking the scene. The uncredited video captured two men in black, wearing balaclavas, on their way from the magazine's headquarters to the car, with machine guns in their hands. Their anonymous identity was partly revealed by their own words, 'Hey! We avenged the Prophet Muhammad! We killed Charlie Hebdo'. Subtitles translated their French words into English for *F24's* global viewers. The suspense, mystery and the unknown identity of the two gunmen were further increased by images of blood on the street and the sound of gunshots in the background. The graphic record of their act perpetuated the feeling of horror among the broadcaster's global audience.

It was evident from the follow-up reporting that broadcasting media, *F24* included, thrived on the coverage of terrorism. According to Neumann and Smith (2005: 583),

sophisticated terrorists recognize that there is a potentially symbiotic relationship between themselves and the media. All they need to do is to satisfy the media's appetite for a 'good story', which means providing the 'mystery, quick action, tension [and] drama' for which the big television networks are longing.

*F24* indulged in live coverage of the events unfolding and what was described as the 'day of terror in Paris' (*France 24*, 2015d) turned into a live soap-opera of '53 hours of terror' (*France 24*, 2015f). Journalists took their viewers on a drive around the French countryside in the chase for the two attackers on the run. They reported the police operations, road blockades and home searches from their cars, talking to the camera positioned on the back seat. Landscapes passing by the side-windows and wipers clearing the front screen gave viewers the impression of physical presence in the heart of the chase. The raids on a

print factory in one part of Paris and on a supermarket in another televised live gave the 'dramatic climax' (*France 24*, 2015f) to the story, 'the bloody climax with not one, but two hostage sieges' (*France 24*, 2015g). Suspense was maintained by the lack of footage from inside the locations of the two police takeovers and by the use of short statements for dramatic effects: 'gunfire rang out, followed by blasts, and then silence, as smoke could be seen billowing from the roof of the print shop' (*France 24*, 2015f). Images of smoke, sounds of gunshots, hostages running out in fear kept audiences central to the broadcaster's reporting. The meaning of images was manifest in the interpretation it generated in viewers. The old battle between good and evil was televised live in an unscripted string of events.

### *Construction of terrorism agents*

Four people were implicated in two separate attacks. Said and Cherif Kouachi, two brothers were behind the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical magazine. Amédée Coulibaly was responsible for the attack on the kosher supermarket. Hayat Boumeddiene, Coulibaly's female companion, was believed by the police to be his assistant in the attack. Journalists remained cautious with the application of the term 'terrorist' and used 'suspects' instead to describe the attackers. Captured by the amateur video, perpetrators' claim, 'We a venged the Prophet Muhammad!' left no doubt about the connection between the killings and Islam. Without verification, media organisations quickly assumed that the attackers were Muslims, and the *Muslim connection* was the only thread pursued by *F24's* reporters. It was discussed, however, not in relation to faith, but in relation to Islamism as a terrorist force.

The two attackers on the satirical magazine were introduced to the public as Cherif (32) and Said (34) Kouachi. The family relationship between the pair became clear from day 2, after their identities had been established on the basis of an ID card left by one of the brothers in the abandoned getaway car. The broadcaster briefly mentioned that both men were born in Paris, after which attention was swiftly directed to one of the brother's 'record of funnelling jihadi fighters to Iraq' known to the French intelligence services (*France 24*, 2015f). For *F24's* global audiences who might be unfamiliar with the French *jus soli*, no effort was made to explain that a person's place of birth determines citizenship. Having been born in Paris made the two brothers French

citizens, a fact never mentioned by *F24* in the period covered. Instead, frequent references to their 'Algerian origin' and status of 'off-spring of Algerian parents' (*France 24*, 2015h) portrayed them as foreign. The suspects were depicted as extreme, professional and very well-trained killers who carefully planned and executed their attack. Their 'cold-blooded professionalism' (*France 24*, 2015j) remained unspoiled by the news emerging about an ID card left, perhaps by mistake, in the abandoned car after the shooting. The clumsy conduct did not lead the broadcaster to doubt the quality of their expertise.

Amédry Coulibaly was the third suspect, who 'clearly linked' to the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings, 'threatened to kill the hostages if police launched an assault on the Kouachi brothers' (*France 24*, 2015i). Described by the broadcaster as the 'gunman' (*France 24*, 2015h), 'hostage-taker' (*France 24*, 2015i) or an 'Islamist militant' (*France 24*, 2015q), he was portrayed as a criminal, 'jailed several times for petty crimes, including theft and drug dealing' (*France 24*, 2015f). Apart from references to Boumeddiene, his wife and alleged partner in the attacks, no background was explored. Family, friends, childhood, education or professional activities were omitted from the image that *F24* constructed. References to his 'African descent' and Malian parents did not bring his French citizenship to audiences' attention (*France 24*, 2015g).

Hayat Boumeddiene, a Paris-born 26-year-old woman, was the fourth suspect in the attacks. *F24* described her as 'wanted by police in connection with the deadly attacks' (*France 24*, 2015l), committed together with Amédry Coulibaly, her married partner. Considered by the police as 'armed and dangerous' (*France 24*, 2015k), she allegedly fled the crime scene after the supermarket standoff, left France and remained 'France's most-wanted woman'. By contrast to the three male attackers, she was attributed human characteristics. One of her childhood friends was quoted recalling Boumeddiene's attendance of a 'girls' dinner' and describing her as someone who was 'emotionally fragile' who 'often cries and has little confidence in herself' (*France 24*, 2015d). The origin of her parents was not mentioned, nor was her birth place and citizenship, a manoeuvre that silenced her connection with France.

## *Construction of Muslims*

In its coverage of *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, the broadcaster associated being Muslim with being a terrorist. The Kouachis statement 'We avenged the Prophet Muhammad!' captured by the amateur video, used and re-used in all news bulletins after the shootings reinforced the stereotype that terrorists are Muslim. All suspects were quickly identified as Muslims and quickly linked to jihadist cause through their allegiance to terrorist groupings and military training. Belonging to foreign terrorist groups was suggested by *F24* from the outset despite the lack of evidence or verification (*France 24*, 2015h, 2015m). Anonymous 'police source' was quoted saying that Coulibaly, the hostage-taker, 'was a member of the same jihadist group as the two suspects in the *Charlie Hebdo* attack' (*France 24*, 2015i). Yet, Coulibaly was later connected with the Islamic State (IS) and the two brothers with Al Qaeda (*France 24*, 2015d, 2015r).

The suspects' past was thoroughly explored by *F24* reporters in search of evidence for their Muslim connections and radicalisation process that led them to the attacks. The younger brother Cherif Kouachi was described as 'known to the counter-terrorism authorities' for his involvement in a 'recruitment pipeline for Muslim holy war in the multi-ethnic working-class 19th arrondissement of Paris' (*France 24*, 2015h). He was said to have travelled to Yemen for training, and 'it was the teachings of a firebrand Muslim preacher that put him on the path to jihad in his rough-and-tumble neighbourhood of north-eastern Paris'. *F24* found evidence that Cherif had 'appeared in a 2005 French TV documentary on Islamic extremism and was sentenced to 18 months in prison in 2008 for trying to join up with fighters battling in Iraq' (*France 24*, 2015h). According to his lawyer, however, Cherif was a 'reluctant holy warrior, relieved to have been stopped by French counterespionage officials from taking a Syria-bound flight that was ultimately supposed to lead him to the battlefields of Iraq'. The evidence gathered by *F24* thus did not clearly suggest that the purported military training directly transformed Cherif into a terrorist soldier. The cloud of doubt over Cherif's prior involvement in terrorist combat was quickly dismissed by the reporters, who sealed his devotion to jihadi cause with official statements. The Minister of Interior was quoted saying that 'Kouachi had been described by his fellow would-be jihadist at the time as "violently anti-Semitic"' (*France 24*, 2015h). Comment from another lawyer followed on Cherif's

subsequent time in prison was, 'Kouachi became closed off and started growing a beard'. The lawyer also wondered 'whether the stint behind bars transformed his client into a ticking time bomb' (*France 24*, 2015h).

Exploration of the brothers' private lives in the broadcaster's efforts to build their terrorist profile also evolved around their Muslim connection. The younger brother, Cherif, was described as a person with 'criminal record', arrested for 'conspiracy to prepare acts of terrorism' back in 2005. French news reports 'from that time', wrote *France 24* (2015j), 'described Kouachi, a pizza deliveryman, as being a one-time pot smoker who "even had a girlfriend before marriage"'. According to *France 24* (2015h), Cherif 'was keener on spending time with pretty girls than on going to the mosque'. In the video obtained by the broadcaster, Cherif was seen 'relaxed and smiling as he pals around with his friends', and at one point, 'with his baseball cap worn backward, Kouachi belts out some rap music and breaks into a joyful dance' (*France 24* (2015h)). He was not portrayed as in possession of human characteristics such as joy, or having friends, in the period after receiving ideological instructions from the preachers. According to Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2009: 82), this 'clustering' of terms and 'retrospective pre-mediation', the use of self-recorded footage can be imposed by media and public officials retrospectively, 'rendering what the individual considered to be an innocent life one of criminal guilt', illustrating one's 'propensity towards violence and/or its justifications'.

Little was said about the older brother, Said Kouachi. The lack of criminal records, however, did not prevent Interior Minister from describing Said as 'the jobless resident', who was also 'known to the authorities', despite having never been prosecuted, because he was 'on the periphery' of illegal activities his younger brother was involved in (*France 24*, 2015h). Out of its own initiative, *F24* conducted a check at a mosque in the brothers' hometown to verify Said's regular attendance. Local Imam confirmed that Said 'frequented a prayer room' and 'wore traditional North Africa clothes to prayers' (*France 24*, 2015h). This search for links with Islam was the only exploration of Said's life which neatly connected Said's suggested involvement in his brother's criminal life to a Muslim environment. It further solidified the perception that crime and terrorism must indeed have a Muslim background.

Hayat Boumeddiene is another example of a 'terrorist' produced by the mix of official and media discourses. Portrayed by *F24* as Muslim

who as an adult 'converted to Islam, started wearing a niqab and consequently lost her job as a cashier' (*France 24*, 2015k). Weaving Islam into her alleged participation in the attacks ultimately pronounced her guilty. This was evident when in a sudden twist of events, Boumeddiene's status of a 'suspected accomplice in the killing of a young female officer' dramatically changed, with media reporting that she had in fact not been present in the country at the time of the attacks. *F24* admitted that 'she had left France for Turkey on January 2' (6 days before the killing of the policewoman and a week before the supermarket hostage crisis). The broadcaster did not question, however, why she remained France's 'most wanted' despite her clear absence from the scene of the crime. Instead, the broadcaster brought up a photograph of a fully veiled woman, allegedly Boumeddiene, posing with a cross-bow, in what was referred to as a '2010 training session in the mountainous Cantal region' (*France 24*, 2015k). The insertion of the picture of an armed Muslim woman immediately after the comments on her absence from the attacks served as the broadcaster's apparent verdict. It directed viewers' attention towards her *potential* guilt and further cemented the connection between Muslims and terrorism.

### *Construction of causes of the terrorist attacks*

According to *F24*, there were four causes behind the attacks: vengeance, pure cruelty, overseas training and influence of foreign terrorist groups. Revenge on the cartoonists was the prime motive driving the killings at *Charlie Hebdo* magazine. The Kouachis directly admitted it in their claim, 'we avenged the Prophet Mohammed!' captured in an amateur video. The broadcaster also acknowledged that 'the Kouachi brothers are thought to have carried out the attacks in revenge for the weekly's repeated publication of cartoons mocking the Prophet Mohammed' (*France 24*, 2015f).

The attackers were also portrayed as having killed for the joy of killing. Their triumphant confession 'we killed Charlie Hebdo!' openly confirmed it. They were portrayed as carrying their plan with extreme cruelty when they 'slaughtered 12 people', and as leisurely confident and utterly fearless perpetrators who 'strolled out ... calmly shooting a wounded police officer in the head as he writhed on the ground' (*France 24*, 2015f).

*France 24* (2015j) also pointed to the ideological guidance from 'Islamic preachers' that the attackers received and to links with foreign terrorist organisations as factors directly contributing to the attacks. The attackers 'epitomized Western authorities' greatest fear: Islamist radicals training abroad and returning to stage attacks on home soil' (*France 24*, 2015f).

## **Discussion**

The Foucauldian 'regime of truth' produced by *F24* in its coverage of January 2015 attacks clearly linked terrorism to Muslim communities. The broadcaster also largely reflected the official message. Powell (2011) argues that news coverage of terrorism has become thematic and siding with governments. This is not surprising, because of the media reliance on the 'framework of interpretation offered by public officials, security experts and military commentators, with news functioning ultimately to reinforce support for political leaders and the security policies they implement' (Norris et al., 2003: 1). The broadcaster also seemed to employ a relatively narrow definition of terrorism. From the outset, the attacks were linked to Islam and Muslims and were portrayed as an external to France threat coming mainly from foreign extremist organisations, such as Al Qaeda and the IS. No reasons for the attacks were sought inside France. No internal developments, such as discrimination, youth marginalisation, lack of employment opportunities, humiliation, relations between law enforcement and the Muslim community that could potentially contribute to the acts, were explored.

### *Included in F24 discourse of terrorism: The Muslim and jihadi connection*

The broadcaster portrayed the attackers as de-personalised, with no references to personal relationships, or displaying human characteristics. Other than the obvious brotherly link between the Kouachis, as well as marriage relationship between two other suspects, Ahmed Coulibaly and Boumeddiene, there were no other relationships explored by the broadcaster. Parents were mentioned for the sole purpose of emphasising the suspects' foreign, Algerian and Malian, background. This, combined with the consistent lack of references to the French citizenship of all involved, allowed the broadcaster to distance the suspects from France and silence the French traits present



in their upbringing. They emerged from *F24* stories as foreigners, strangers to the country. Their attacks were seen as an external undertaking, not directly produced by France and its people.

All attackers were linked to Islam by word and image, and, in return, Islam was linked exclusively to terrorism. The only coverage of Muslims on *F24* after the attacks portrayed them as violent, blood-thirsty perpetrators already involved in, or on the way to, jihad. Being Muslim inevitably leads to radicalisation and becoming a terrorist as a result of the process, 'the radicalisation pattern apparent from his [Kouachi's] criminal record is a familiar one in France, home to Europe's largest Muslim population' (*France 24*, 2015j). *F24* probably saw no contradiction in putting 'radicalisation', 'criminal record' and 'Muslim population' into one sentence. Yet, by doing so, the broadcaster neatly and conveniently linked the three very different phenomena and introduced the causal relationships between them for the consumption of its global audience. In the eyes of the broadcaster, the meaning of 'Muslim' coincided with criminal and military interpretation. Muslims and cross-bows, Muslims and black masks, Muslims and guns, Muslims and military training and Muslims and Al Qaeda were the only associations proposed by *F24* through text and image. This is consistent with, explored by Nurullah (2010), dominant media logic in the West according to which terrorism = Islam = terrorism. The broadcaster did not make an effort to portray Muslims as in possession of, or association with, qualities conveying messages other than violence.

### *The good 'other'*

The only stories that could potentially propose a different image of Muslims were the national burial of the police officer killed in the attacks and the citizenship granted to the immigrant from Mali who saved the lives of several hostages during the attack on the supermarket (*France 24*, 2015n, 2015o, 2015p). The policeman was also of Muslim background. Assigned to protect the magazine and the cartoonists who frequently offended his faith, he died while on duty, protecting French values. The Malian immigrant, whose Muslim faith was briefly mentioned, saved lives of Jewish shoppers in the same supermarket where another gunman, whose 'Malian origin' – not the fact that he was a Frenchman, born and bred in France – was frequently emphasised by the broadcaster, killed other Jews due to his 'anti-Semitic' feelings.

It was perhaps the first time in the history of terrorism in France that the two opposing forces of good and evil converged in the same incidences of the two attacks. In both cases, it was the attackers, only vaguely connected in the coverage to Islam as a religion and more to the Islamist indoctrination, who took lives on one side. It was pure and practising Muslims who protected and saved French lives on the other. In the *F24's* event-driven coverage, however, the broadcaster's narrative did not link Islam and Muslims to saving lives. There were no journalists' visits to the local mosques of the killed policeman or the Malian immigrant, no conversations with Imams that would present Islam as a religion producing noble people or generating virtue. It is a shame that Islam's contribution to peaceful society in France was not given the coverage it deserved.

#### *Excluded from F24 discourse of terrorism: The French connection*

The 'common sense' produced by *F24* portrayed terrorism as external to France and largely unrelated to the domestic environment. Yet, pointing the finger at the brothers' jihadi connection and loyalty to foreign terrorist groups mutes several French aspects of the story. The *root causes*, such as under-representative governance, or individuals' resentment towards a government's inability to affect change (Le Sage, 2007; Piazza, 2006; Windsor, 2003) that might also have been at play, were absent from the reporting. Was there a chance that the attackers felt oppressed, under-represented, desperate, alienated or disillusioned about their life and opportunities in France? Could they have resented the government and society's inability to offer equal opportunities? Likewise, the *permissive factors* existing in France were not explored by the broadcaster, either. Apart from a brief mention of a failure of the French intelligence, other physical, economic, institutional or political weaknesses that could have enabled the attacks were not investigated. Therefore, the political and socioeconomic conditions *within* France that make young French citizens take up arms and willingly undergo ideological and military training were swept under the carpet in *F24's* discourse of terrorism. The broadcaster merely reported the Prime Minister's concerns about the 'social apartheid' of migrant communities 2 weeks after the attacks, a type of reporting not empowered by the broadcaster's own investigation.

Another puzzle missing from the big picture sketched by *France 24* is the gap between the timing of the attackers' ideological indoctrination

and the attacks they orchestrated in January 2015. In that unexplored gap of almost 10 years in one case and 6 years in another, the suspects did not travel overseas to join the holy war despite the numerous opportunities presented by ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or Syria. All suspects remained in France, still inactive when in 2011, the same satirical magazine published cartoons of the prophet Mohammed. The incident did not provoke an extremist reaction from the already indoctrinated and trained in combat techniques Kouachis and Coulibaly. Why then did they not utilise their skills over the years? What was the direct trigger in 2015?

Perhaps *F24* could have investigated the experience of three young men in France and how it affected their lives. Exploration of this period could have proved crucial to the understanding of the wide range of terrorist causes. This could lead to directing eyes onto the political, economic and social setting within the French society that could have contributed to the trends in radicalisation across the country.

## **Conclusion**

The narrow understanding of terrorism employed by French international broadcaster, which points to recruitment of 'soldiers' from Muslim communities, their Islamic indoctrination and overseas training, further alienates Muslim communities in France's already divided society and does not fully explain the problem. It solidifies the image of Muslims as radicals and terrorists and promotes the discourse of Islam as posing threat to western societies. This view reinforces the explored by Fredette (2014: 81) dominant perception of Muslims in France and reduces Muslims to 'religious beings', who isolate themselves from the society. As a result, she believes, although French Muslims are no longer immigrants, they are not fully French either and become the 'undeserving citizens' of France. This discourse is almost a self-fulfilling prophecy which marginalises Muslims socially, politically and legally. The knowledge produced by *F24*, the broadcaster's emphasis on the connection between Islam and terrorism perpetuate the image of Arabs and Muslims as a negative 'Other'. It maintains observed by Said unequal relationship between the West and the East and propels the fear and discrimination of Muslims into the future.

## Note

1. Five groups have been identified as main perpetrators of terrorist acts in the past: (1) Action Direct, a far leftist group; (2) The State-sponsored FATAJ-RC (Abu Nidal Organisation); (3) The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA); (4) 'The Lebanese Connection' (Fractions armées révolutionnaires libanaises/FARL, Comité de soutien avec les prisonniers politiques arabes et du Moyen-Orient/CSPPA, Hezbollah); and (5) the Islamist Armed Group (Groupe Islamique Armé/GIA), considered the deadliest and responsible for assassination of 41 French citizens in Algeria between 1992 and 1996, as well as for the bombing of Paris metro in 1996.

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