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Liberté, Égalité, Identité:

Media and the Construction of French National Identity

Hannah Lahey

University of San Francisco

April 28, 2023

Master of Arts in International Studies

Liberté, Égalité, Identité:

Media and the Construction of French National Identity

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

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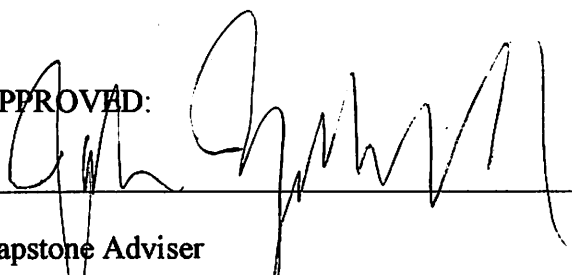
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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Abstract

In 2015, France was rocked by a series of terror attacks that seemed to act as a tipping point for the fears and tensions that had been brewing in Europe in the months leading up to the strike. These attacks, and the subsequent responses to them, point to the influence of a much longer history of French involvement in the Middle East, and the lasting impact that colonization has on French national identity formation. With the creation of French national identity, and therefore the creation of the group that is deemed necessarily outside of this identity, the moral values and priorities at the heart of the identity are revealed. Although the cornerstones of national identity are fairly stagnant—a shared, communal history—the day-to-day realities of national identity can shift to reflect the anxieties of a given period. During the post-colonial period, these figures were harnessed to redefine boundaries of French national belonging, boundaries which are still visible in common understandings of the national community today. Analyzing how the figures of the “French National” and the “Other” are constructed—the other transforming from the ‘colonial other’ to the figure of the terrorist—exposes the true mutability of these figures. Though these figures themselves may be imagined, the impact they can have on national sentiment and national policy are concrete and can have a lasting influence over policies domestically and abroad. The media plays a substantial role in the development and reinforcement of these narratives and can shift the focus of national conversations in the wake of terror attacks. How certain aspects of national identity are constructed for the specific exclusion of other groups can be seen throughout the media responses to the attacks, and grasping this phenomenon is becoming increasingly more important increasingly interconnected and borders become increasingly porous.

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I. Introduction

On January 7, 2015, two gunmen broke into the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris, opened fire, murdered 12 people, and injured 11 others. Among those killed were the editor of the publication and several cartoonists known for embodying the irreverent style of the weekly satirical newspaper, which had often been at the center of controversies following various moments of mockery of religious and political leaders. The two gunmen, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, were French-Muslim brothers and self-proclaimed members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

This attack seemed to act as the amalgamation of fears and tensions that had been brewing in France, and in Europe as a whole, for the months leading up to this strike. In the years leading up to 2015, France gradually got more vocal in its support of the Syrian opposition, which is often attributed to France's colonial legacy in Syria. The attacks in 2015 and the responses to them by the media point to a much longer history of French involvement in the Middle East, as well as the lasting—but often unrecognized—legacy of colonization in France.¹

Four days later, nearly 2 million people, including 40 world leaders, met in Paris for a rally of national unity and freedom of expression in the wake of traumatizing fear.² *Je suis Charlie* became the rallying cry for the outpouring of support that came from around the globe on social media and in the press, and the following issue of *Charlie Hebdo* ran 7 million copies

¹ Samuel Ramani, "Why France Is So Deeply Entangled in Syria," *The Washington Post*, WP Company, December 7, 2021.

² Anthony Faiola and Griff Witte, "Massive Crowds Join March for Solidarity in Paris," *The Washington Post*, WP Company, January 11, 2015.

in six languages,³ in an astounding show of global support. Less than a year later, on November 13, a series of coordinated terror strikes killed over 100 people across Paris.

In the wake of the attacks, it becomes necessary to understand the phenomena at the root of the nationalist sentiment that often blooms in the face of terror attacks: national identity. Therefore, it becomes important to understand not only the formation and maintenance of national identity, but the role that it has in shaping national narratives and policies. Analyzing the historical threads of different facets of national identity allows for the recognition of how social systems and established social hierarchies are developed, including how and why certain groups are institutionally excluded and marginalized.

After terror attacks, a commonly understood notion of national identity is often drawn upon by the state in order to legitimize intervention and justify the continuation of state interference and power. In many cases, national identity is harnessed to extend state power beyond its usual boundaries, including the use of indeterminate searches and increased surveillance on citizens. Essentially, an imagined figure of the ideal citizen is constructed to act as a binding agent for a national community in times of duress. This figure embodies the moral values and shared history of the nation as it is understood by the public. If an individual were to protest any overstepping of government power, they would relegate themselves outside of the understood national community, and suspicion could be cast on whether their values truly align with the national norm.

In this formation of national identity—and the creation of an ‘in-group’ of a national community—a second figure is created in parallel, that of the “Other.” This figure exists outside

³Julien Guillot and Frantz Durupt, “Le Tirage Vraiment Exceptionnel De ‘Charlie Hebdo,’” *Libération*, January 19, 2015.

of the community and embodies the opposite of the shared values and beliefs identified within the shared national identity. After a terror attack, this figure becomes the vehicle on which any form of national anxiety can be placed, which again allows for an extension of state power past its normal bounds. The figures of the 'national' and of the 'outsider' are ever-shifting, subject to ongoing discussion and negotiation, and are affected by not only those in positions of political power but by the opinions and seemingly objective judgements of the news media. The media, through the nation-affirming mediums of language and history-telling, is in the unique position to create debates within the public about the foundations of national identity formation and the morals and values that are at the root of these communal understandings.

It is necessary to note that these concepts of national identity and those who are deemed outside this national identity are in no way stagnant, but instead shift with regards to the most pressing societal concerns of a given time. In France, this can be seen through fluctuating notions of national community through the post-colonial period and into today. Despite the slow-changing foundations on which a national community is formed, the practicalities of national identity and the impact it can have on official policy are subject to the trends caused by shorter-term fluctuations of day-to-day national anxieties. That is, while the baseline for understanding national identity may remain as a mostly solid shared history, who is allowed to participate in that shared history can shift depending on a given moment in time. Analyzing these shifts allows for understanding how national identity is harnessed for or against the exclusion of a certain group. Tracing how these figures are imagined throughout the media response to attacks offers moments for analyzing how these shifts can occur, and how the debates surrounding national identity are used as a platform for legitimizing the fluctuating goals of the national community.

This paper will analyze the role that the media plays in these fluctuations, particularly in how the media portrays and reacts to moments of national violence and uncertainty in France. To understand how this portrayal shifts perspectives of the “other” while constructing and reinforcing notions of national identity over time is to reveal the true, mutable nature of national identity as a construct. Two years were chosen as case studies, 1962 and 2015. 1962 offers a moment of true national reckoning, when France as a colonial power ended with Algerian Independence after the Algerian War. This provides a major shift not only in the common understanding of national identity but in who is considered to be a true part of that national identity. There is a clear establishment of who is seen as outside that collective understanding, one which is reinforced in how the media covered events from that year. 2015 was a year in which France was rocked by terror attacks that targeted not only Paris, but also the values that are, historically, most closely aligned with French national identity. Whereas in 1962 national identity shifted in response to these events, the 2015 attacks seemed to target French national identity itself. This then offers a strong perspective on how national identity is perceived to be embodied by certain individuals in society, which in turn categorically excludes other groups in the community. These embodied ideals are then weaponized to target the terrorist “other,” a figure constructed and molded to personify many of the fears facing France during that time. This period of immense tension within Europe, regarding not only the refugee crisis but the relationships between European nations themselves, means that the construction of both French national identity and who does not belong to that identity demonstrates how these concepts can shift and mold to fit the dominant national rhetoric.

Recognizing these patterns of inclusion and exclusion are necessary for establishing these figures as a part of the national imagination. In turn, understanding how the figures are

established allows for a more fruitful national discourse surrounding national identity formation and who is considered within that imagined community. The figure of the colonial “other” in 1962 lays the groundwork on which the figure of the terrorist in 2015 can be grafted. This figure in turn can be drawn from the news stories and media responses from each period. This figure then more clearly reveals the figure of embodied French national, and therefore the priorities of values that make up the communally imagined “national identity.” Analyzing these figures reveals not only how national identity itself shifts over time, but how these shifts can be harnessed to influence shared national goals, both domestically and abroad.

II. Literature Review

National Identity

Commonly, national identity refers to the feeling of belonging that one has to a state or nation. It is a social identity which bonds the individual to a collective through historical and cultural traditions, moral values, ideals, beliefs, and language.⁴ In order to analyze how national identity has become a site for discursive debate, it is first necessary to understand how the concept of “nation” has been created in the Western imagination, and therefore how national identity is constructed by a collective whole. Though there are debates surrounding what constitutes the most important aspects of national identity, analyzing how these definitions have shifted since the inception of the modern Western nation offers some sense of what is agreed upon as the strongest and most effective characteristics of national identity formation.

In 1882, Ernest Renan wrote *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (What is a Nation?), which attempted to quantify the societal bonds of “modern, autonomous polities, such as France and

⁴ David Turner and Qiang Liu, “Identity and National Identity,” Taylor & Francis.

England.⁵ He notes that while “unity is always brutally established,” the most successful nations avoid “melting down the diverse elements of its domains,” and instead keep them distinct while under one nation.⁶ To put it simply he states, “the essence of a nation is that all of its individual members have a great deal in common and also that they have forgotten many things.”⁷ Renan argues that imperial intervention, race, language, and religion—often thought of as the binding agents of nations—also cannot adequately explain the roots of modern nationality, though he notes that community interest and “natural frontiers,” do play a role.⁸ Instead, he proffers that a “glorious heritage” of “[suffering] together” is what forms a nation together in “great solidarity” which is independent from “racial or linguistic” limitations.⁹ “A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle,” which binds together individuals “in sane mind and warm heart” into one communal “moral consciousness.”¹⁰ Though this understanding of national communities offers the roots of how it is understood today, the practicalities of how diverse communities come together under one, agreed upon national identity is not discussed in Renan’s work.

In Renan one can see the roots of what Benedict Anderson later calls the “imagined community” of the nation. He argues that nations are “cultural artifacts,” which are an “imagined political community—and imagined as both limited and sovereign.”¹¹ They are imagined because even in the smallest nations “the members[...]will never know most of their fellow-members.”¹²

⁵ Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?”, text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882, in Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* Paris, Presses-Pocket, 1992.

⁶ Renan, “What is a Nation?”

⁷ Renan, “What is a Nation?”

⁸ Renan, “What is a Nation?”

⁹ Renan, “What is a Nation?”

¹⁰ Renan, “What is a Nation?”

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, England: Verso, 1991, 6.

¹² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

And they are imagined as a community because “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”¹³ Though unlike Renan, who did not particularly contribute nation-building credit to unity of language, Anderson suggests that the “birth of the imagined community of the nation” came directly from “the novel and the newspaper,” in eighteenth-century Europe.¹⁴ These acted as the “technical means for re-presenting the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation.”¹⁵ By linking the birth of the nation directly to the tools that allowed national sentiment to be developed on a widespread scale, Anderson also demonstrates how the ‘history of suffering’ which binds a nation can be re-remembered in a continuous cycle of re-producing the national imagined community. Essentially, shared history is what constitutes a nation, but shared language is how it is conceptualized.

Nationalism refers to an ideology where devotion to the state proves more important than other interests and is seen as a natural development from having a national identity. Inherent in this definition is the exclusion of other peoples or nations. This subjective feeling of both having national identity and experiencing nationalism occurs regardless of one’s legal citizenship status— despite the more traditional understanding of these concepts— and is responsible for the feelings of creating a cohesive whole of a nation. Anthony Smith notes that this identity is not simply an ideology, but rather a cultural phenomenon that extends to language, sentiments, and symbolism.¹⁶ Much of what is seen today as national identity has roots tracing back to pre-modern communities formed through ethnic identities, though modern understandings of national identity have come to include a decidedly political leaning. In his book *National*

¹³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

¹⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24-25.

¹⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.

¹⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, London, England: Penguin Books, 1991.

Identity, Smith discusses the formation of Western nations and the basis on which Western national identity is forged. He attributes these national communities to clear boundaries between states, the ties of the people to a specific area of historic land, and a centralized community of laws with a single political will. While national identity is fundamentally multi-dimensional, and acts as the roots for the state and its origins, it also acts as a powerful means of defining and locating the individual self in the world.¹⁷ According to Smith, national identity is the main source for cultural markers for boundary recognition—a way of understanding who is included in national sentiment and who is not. In his book *National Identity and the Idea of European Unity*, Smith discusses how the individual and the collective interact on the level of national identity. Collective identities, according to Smith, “tend to be pervasive and persistent[...]less subject to rapid changes and tend to be more intense and durable.”¹⁸ Though a nation is inherently connected through cultural community ties, Smith is careful to return to the nation as a political entity, one which “defines and legitimates politics” despite any plurality of character demonstrated within a national population.¹⁹ Here the need for a “heterogeneous population to unify in terms of culture and political community,”²⁰ is emphasized as one of the most important aspects of continued national progression.

With acknowledgement of the continued political and cultural debates that take place within a collective national identity, Stuart Hall notes that national identity is inherently a construct. The diversity of individuals and communities within a nation means that national identity itself requires continuous discourse and therefore becomes the site for ongoing political

¹⁷ Anthony D. Smith, “National Identity and the Idea of European Unity,” *International Affairs*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 68, no. 1, 1992, 55–76.

¹⁸ Smith, “National Identity and the Idea of European Unity,” 39.

¹⁹ Smith, “National Identity and the Idea of European Unity,” 62.

²⁰ Smith, “National Identity and the Idea of European Unity,” 62.

and ideological debates and struggles. Hall discusses national identity in terms of cultural identity, specifically noting that one cannot be defined without the other. In *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, and Nation*, Hall discusses how the key aspects of cultural difference—including language, history, values, beliefs, and customs—become the key sites of discourse in the construction and transformation of national identity. He refers to this process as “identification,” which highlights the ongoing and constant negotiation that is required when understanding the formation of the national ‘imagined community’.²¹ It is not defined specifically by tradition, rather there is a discursive dimension of identity that is constantly needing to be reviewed and renegotiated. However, Hall notes that “cultural identity is always specific and grounded through the marking of familiarity and difference.”²² The cultural identity that often dictates certain understandings of national identity acts as points of recognition for group discourses on history and memory. This, in turn, means that the collective past discussed by Renan and Anderson is once again placed as a necessary part of national identity formation both on the national and the individual scale.

The link between national identity and self-identity—which is mentioned throughout the discourse surrounding national identity formation— and its effect on national-determination and self-determination is discussed in Herbert Kelman’s *Negotiating National Identity and Self-Determination in Ethnic Conflicts* (1997). He notes that the social need of humans to belong is in fact a basic human need.²³ There are certain positives that arise when the state becomes the political expression of a group’s national identity, including the favorable changes that can come

²¹ Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, Edited by Kobena Mercer, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017, 127.

²² Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, 128.

²³ Herbert C. Kelman, “Negotiating National Identity and Self-Determination in Ethnic Conflicts: The Choice between Pluralism and Ethnic Cleansing.” *Negotiation Journal* 13, no. 4, 1997, 327.

materially and psychologically to a group that had experienced oppression in the past.²⁴ However, these efforts often come at the cost of systematically destroying other peoples in the pursuit of creating an ethnically and culturally homogenous region (to return to Renan—"unity is always brutally established"²⁵). So, while there is a basic human need to self-identify with a certain group in order to resolve social conflicts, there is a continued risk of falling to the side of extreme nationalism that is linked with cultural or ethnic identity.²⁶ Understanding national identity as a significant source of individual dignity and self-esteem offers insight into the importance of that sense of belonging to a specific group, and therefore the understanding of who does *not* belong to said group. This sense of collective whole, once again, is reflected through the presence of common points in people's lives, including national symbols, language, history, and national consciousness.

Generally, it is agreed that national identity as a collective understanding of shared history and experiences is a powerful force for national unity in the modern era. And while it is agreed that national identity is not formed *through* language or shared national symbols, these points of similarity then become the markers of a given national community. Though the fundamentals of this identity are agreed upon through a shared history, the practices of national identity, and its inherently exclusionary traits, can become political tools for shifting national debates and priorities, and can be harnessed by nationalist ideological groups.

French National Identity

In the way that national identity reflects commonality based on a shared past, discussions of French national identity formation often trace back to the French Revolution as the source of

²⁴ Kelman, "Negotiating National Identity and Self-Determination in Ethnic Conflicts," 332.

²⁵ Renan, "What is a Nation?"

²⁶ Kelman, "Negotiating National Identity and Self-Determination in Ethnic Conflicts," 332.

modern notions of French national identity and nationalism. David Bell discusses the shifts that occurred during this period in *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*. He describes the new understanding of collective understanding that arose during this period as the elites conceived of a new sort of political grouping: the nation. Here the practicality of nation-building can be seen as much more demanding than it is often discussed theoretically. In France, the understanding of “nation” grew from merely a national community to a spiritual one, reliant on shared values, shared laws, and shared cultural practices, including language.²⁷ This meant that the principal goal of the revolution became to create one single nation of France. This period also demonstrates a shift from national identity and national pride to the conscious political program of *nationalism*, one which aims at the construction of a nation where one did not previously exist.²⁸ In the post-Revolution period this meant the implementation of stricter school curriculum, the organization of civic festivals, and the implementation of national moral habits and customs.²⁹ In this universalist and purposeful building of French cultural norms and expectations one can see the roots of modern national sentiment in France. Many of these universalist themes are still present in debates about French nationalism today, and a clear link can be drawn from this period to these current debates. Here the theoretical understanding of national identity as a form of shared history and shared memories plays out in actionable policy that prioritizes the aspects of national identity that have been agreed upon by the political elites of the post-revolution period.

²⁷ David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001, 3.

²⁸ Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France*, 3.

²⁹ Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France*, 5.

Contemporarily, the echoes of this nation building play out in the significant theoretical tension between values of individualism and the full assimilation of all citizens who have made the political choice of being French. Eric Hobsbawm discusses the period following World War II and the loss of the French Empire, when there was a shift in national understanding from the era of “invention of tradition” to the history-as-nostalgia era of the 20th century.³⁰ This period focused on strengthening the formal body of symbols and monuments that commonly were understood to embody “France.” While the original founding of Western nations was done as political endeavors, they have since become, in many instances, reliant on purely socio-anthropological bindings.³¹ Even the national-building goals of the Enlightenment thinkers in France were executed with the understanding that anyone with the desire could become French, as long as they committed to embracing all aspects of French cultural-political life. In “Language Culture and National Identity,” Hobsbawm acknowledges that, historically, multiple identities have existed behind even a homogenous notion of national identity. Having several identities simultaneously was the expected result of multiculturalism within nations. Homogenization of language has its roots in a desire for individual participation in the state, rather than any specific cultural assimilation which aligns with national identity.³² However, in the post-colonial period, language became an important marker of national identity—in former colonies as a new language demonstrated a break from the colonial past and in former empires as homogeneity of language offered a sense of national pride as those states’ powers seemed to wane on the global stage.³³ It

³⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, et al., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

³¹ Hobsbawm, et al., *The Invention of Tradition*.

³² Eric Hobsbawm, “Language, Culture, and National Identity,” *Social Research* 63, no. 4 (1996): 1065–80.

³³ Hobsbawm, “Language, Culture, and National Identity.”

is in this post-colonial era that these shifts in markers of national identity become relevant to this analysis.

Tony Judt analyzes the impact of this post-colonial era and the period of unease that was ushered in after the nation was stripped of its imperial power in stark contrast to the confidence and security provided by a global empire.³⁴ It is during this time, as France emerged from WWII and began to reframe itself in the post-colonial era, that these symbols of French national unity became immensely important for the maintenance of faith in the French state. In turn this required a decoupling of colonialism from French identity and from French history, which can be particularly seen in the way that French intellectualism in the post-war period resisted any sort of specific political stance.³⁵ Rather it was understood that the focus of intellectualism on literature, philosophy, and art was in itself a political pursuit.³⁶ Judt notes that the presence of the colonies in French history texts was already fairly obfuscated, “in part because France was a Republic in which imperial domination had no natural place.”³⁷ This sentiment was continued by intellectuals both in the post-war period, and then in the postcolonial period, as the emphasis and desire to align the French with a history of progress and action meant that a participation in the collective understanding of “Frenchness” outweighed the influence of individual rights and private life. This tension is then reflected in the practicalities of France extracting itself from its colonies and how to place those who fell between the former colonizers and the former colonized.

³⁴ Tony Judt, “Lost Illusions,” Chapter, In *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, 278–324, New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2005.

³⁵ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, New York, NY: New York Univ. Press, 2011.

³⁶ Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*.

³⁷ Judt, “Lost Illusions,” Chapter, In *Postwar*, 282.

Twenty years after the decolonizing moment of 1962, when Algeria won its independence from France, another pivotal aspect of defining French identity came as a result of France declining in its role as the purveyor of modernity.³⁸ Instead, a sense of Americanization began to sweep Europe and the Western world. Within France, the reaction to resist this cultural globalization meant shifting the definition of French identity in order to resist the American cultural impact. Daniele Conversi discusses how the Far Right saw the solution as relying on purely ethno-national understandings of French, while the Left responded with an understanding of the French national as rigid, anti-pluralist, and reliant on the understanding of a “one and indivisible” French Republic.³⁹ Post-1960s there can be seen a steady decline in the impact of French cultural politics, and the subsequent overcompensating by both the Right and the Left led way to current identity-based politics. The understanding of globalization as a new imperial movement on French culture also serves to create a wariness of multiculturalism and is reflected in a concern with the destructive impact of neoliberal globalization. From this there was a move to uplift a new understanding of cultural identity, one which evolved towards a culture-blind, homogenous understanding of citizenship and national identity. An interesting tension arises surrounding the thought that culture was no longer considered relevant as long as political citizenship was agreed upon, however the idea of one homogenous ‘French culture’ was continuously fostered and defined.⁴⁰ These attempts at creating narratives of one single, deeply rooted understanding of French culture are challenged by the long history of multicultural and cross-cultural interactions within French society. In understanding the evolution of French

³⁸ Daniele Conversi, “Reconfiguring the French Nation: Public Debates on the Left and National Identity.” *Nations and Nationalism* 25, no. 3 (2019): 1087–96, 1088.

³⁹ Conversi, “Reconfiguring the French Nation, 1089.

⁴⁰ Conversi, “Reconfiguring the French Nation, 1091.

national identity, this period reflects the strengthening of French identity as one of homogeneity, continuing the cycle of exclusion and once again offers an example of how national identity is utilized by various political groups to shape national discourse.

With the uplifting of national symbols as tools to strengthen the concept of French political nationalism, a new tension arose between the perceived value of national ideologies and the practical understanding of French identity. Eoin Daly discusses that, in light of universalist concepts of citizenship, there is tension and confusion as to the reach and object of the state.⁴¹ There is an understanding that commonly held political ideals of social contract should be endorsed and upheld regardless of private identity.⁴² However, as the national identity debate is increasingly used to problematize religious and cultural practices traditionally thought to be contained within the individual, private sphere, the boundaries between public and private life – and the symbols at the bedrock of understanding traditional French society – have begun to blur.

Myriam Hunter-Henin conceptualizes this debate within the context of the move towards a Burka ban in France. This shift in the public/private boundary has been pushed into the forefront of national conversation in the wake of the move to ban the Burka from public spaces. In this recent example, there can be seen a new manifestation of this tension in the form of multiculturalism. Where some view the ban as the “manifestation of French tradition,” it is clear to others that the move is more accurately a distortion of *laïcité* and an inflation of public policy.⁴³ *Laïcité* refers to the idea of constitutional secularism in France and is highly regarded as

⁴¹ Eoin Daly, “Political Liberalism and French National Identity in the Wake of the Face-Veiling Law.” *International Journal of Law in Context* 9, no. 3 (2013): 366–85.

⁴² Daly, “Political Liberalism and French National Identity in the Wake of the Face-Veiling Law.”

⁴³ Myriam Hunter-Henin, “Why the French Don't like the Burqa: Laïcité, National Identity and Religious Freedom,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2012.

yet another symbol of the most important aspects of French national sentiment. Understanding the long-rooted tension between these boundaries and the perceived threat of multiculturalism on the French cultural and political state offers insight into why the presence of the Muslim population in France in particular seems to foster such a significant sense of peril within French cultural understanding.

The “Other”

Implicit, though perhaps not explicitly stated, in the discourse surrounding national identity and national identity in France is the intrinsic creation of the “other,” or a juxtaposed outsider, that occurs when both nations and national identity is formed. Authors such as Renan and Anderson focus primarily on what it means to be in an imagined community, and Hall discusses the boundaries of national identity that push up against other groups, the exclusion present in all forms of identity formation reveals what is considered to be most important to a given identity. And, in fact, understanding how those outside of the national community are conceived in the national imagination offers an opportunity to analyze how understandings of national identity are prioritized.

The figure of the “Other” acts as a counterbalance to those considered to be “within” the identity group and strengthens and concretizes the values associated with that identity group. As every identity must mark its “similarity to and difference from something else [...]then every identity[...]must always have a symbolic ‘other’ which is what defines its constitutive outside.”⁴⁴ As identity formation itself is an ongoing process, the “symbolic violence”⁴⁵ that this figure undergoes is also continuous. In general, “Otherness” consists of seeming different from the

⁴⁴ Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, 128.

⁴⁵ Hall, *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, 129.

social and cultural identity of a person or a group. This nonconformity to the perceived status quo of the collective can lead to political and social disenfranchisement as well as institutionally backed marginalization. For a clear example of this in France, one can return to the Burka ban, which demonstrates the creation and maintenance of the concept of the “Other.” Even if wearing a headscarf was not seen as outside the norm prior to the ban, the institutional othering that it achieved worked to cement Muslim women as outside the ‘in’ group of French national identity.

The post-Revolution creation of the French nation provides the basis from which the “other” in France can be constituted and maintained. During the 18th and 19th centuries, this Othering became race-based, with non-white peoples getting Othered through scientific racism, including phenology, and Orientalism. Edward Said’s work *Orientalism* frames the creation of the “other” within the West’s tendency to justify imperialism through the need to modernize and civilize the inferior, static society of the East. He notes that the Orient as it is understood in Western societies was very much a creation of the Western imagination, although this creation has very real consequences on modern conceptions of the Western self and who is deemed acceptable in modern Western societies. The Orient has “helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience,”⁴⁶ and therefore is a very real component of European civilization and cultural understanding. By setting itself directly against the Orient, the West was able to define and maintain a certain set of cultural expectations that became integral to belonging to that culture. Said highlights that the Orient is an ongoing construction of the West, and therefore acts and an ongoing way for the West to construct itself. “[...T]he hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over

⁴⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. Oxford, England: Routledge, 1978, 1-2.

Oriental backwardness,”⁴⁷ demonstrates how othering can be continuously reinforced in the national imagination, and how one group’s national identity can be perceived as having a clear and understandable contrasting group. Defining the boundaries of culture up against those that are deemed as necessarily opposite to that culture allows for identity boundaries to be drawn between a collective notion of “us” and “them,” and has lasting impacts on French cultural formation even in a seemingly multicultural, post-colonial era.

This understanding of culture through an imperial lens highlights the fetishization of non-West cultures, as well as the transformation of all societies and peoples of the East as the “Oriental Other,” a direct contrast to the modern, civilized Western Self. Said breaks this fetishization down into three categories of cultural imperialism: homogenization, feminization, and essentialization. This Othering establishes the imbalance of power on which the imperialist mission of the West rests and justifies the actions of the so-called “civilized” on the imagined “savage”. Said argues that Orientalism is a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and though some decades have passed since *Orientalism* was written, little has been done to analyze the roots of French understanding of who constitutes the “other” in their cultural/national understanding.⁴⁸ In fact, Said argues that Orientalism should be studied as a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by colonial empires.⁴⁹ By understanding how Orientalism responds more to the culture of the West than to the cultures that supposedly defines it, Said highlights the role that individual actors can play in construction and maintenance of both national identity and the juxtaposed Other. This also demonstrates how ‘othering’ can in itself become a discursive tool for negotiating the

⁴⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

⁴⁸ Said, *Orientalism*.

⁴⁹ Said, *Orientalism*.

boundaries of national identity formation. This conception of Orientalism and the creation of the Other is relevant not only in the post-colonial period, but in contemporary reconstructions of the Self and Other both in Europe as a whole and in France.

Terror and National Identity

National identity in its most extreme form is often found at the root cause of many of the terror attacks that have been seen in the 21st century. In *Nationalism and Terror* Charles Townshend discusses how the framework for modern terrorist action is either ethnic or nationalist, though even the ethnic roots of terror acts often have traits mirroring those of extreme nationalism.⁵⁰ Acts of terror by stateless nations still reflect an extreme level of nationalism in their motivations, and therefore are more heavily reliant on faith in the “imagined communities”⁵¹ fostered by national identity than by the boundaries traditionally associated with state identity.⁵² Though the perpetrators of these acts are often motivated by national identity, a surge of national identity can be seen in the victims of the attacks as well. In post-terror moments, faith in a collective national identity and the perceived strength of both the nation and the identity increases in importance at the individual and societal levels.

Chris Hables Gray discusses this shift in nationalism in “The Second Cold War and Postmodern Terror” (2004). He, like Anderson, describes states as, above all, cultural artifacts produced by and through practices of signification.⁵³ The “emotional system” of nationalism then becomes a crucial binding agent of citizens to their state, and indicates a much larger, and

⁵⁰ Charles Townshend, “Nationalism and Terror,” Chapter, In *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, England: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011.

⁵¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁵² Townshend, “Nationalism and Terror.”

⁵³ Chris Hables Gray, “The Second Cold War and Postmodern Terror,” Chapter, In *Empire & Terror: Nationalism/Postnationalism in the New Millennium*, edited by Aretxaga Begoña, 217–36, Reno, NV: Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, 2005.

ongoing, process of identity-formation.⁵⁴ Identity has become, in the 21st century, a discursive choice made by an individual, which can therefore prompt several forms of nationalism to compete within one region. He posits that society has entered a Second Cold War, one which exists between the First World and the Third World and will rely on different forms of nationalism to those present in the 20th century.⁵⁵ While it is important to note the proximity between when this piece was written and the events of September 11th, Gray offers an interesting alternative to what was deemed the War on Terror, one which encapsulates the contrast between the formation of national identity and the effectiveness of new forms of nationalism that have begun to develop in an increasingly globalized world. Discussions of U.S. nationalism post-9/11 can offer insight into the long-term changes seen as a result of one moment of terror.

In terms of post-terror responses, Paul T. McCartney's "American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy from September 11 to the Iraq War" offers an example of how nationalism is often used as the first and strongest response to acts of terror and can act as a basis on which to study other post-terror moments. He argues that "enduring nationalist themes provided the basic structure in which Americans organized their comprehension of and reaction to the terrorist attacks."⁵⁶ This in turn offered a legitimizing power of nationalism to bolster the "official" understanding of the September 11 attacks.⁵⁷ The attacks offered a clarifying moment for collective American identity and how that identity was translated into foreign policy goals. "President George W. Bush was able to provide a context in which Americans could understand

⁵⁴ Chris Hables Gray, "The Second Cold War and Postmodern Terror."

⁵⁵ Chris Hables Gray, "The Second Cold War and Postmodern Terror."

⁵⁶ Paul T. McCartney, "American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy from September 11 to the Iraq War," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 3 (2004): 399–423, 400.

⁵⁷ McCartney, "American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy," 400.

and accept a set of foreign policy goals far broader and more ambiguous than a simple response to the immediate attacks would have suggested.”⁵⁸ This framing of attacks in the official policy narrative—and the way in which the post-9/11 era was ushered into American history as a defining moment in bolstering a sense of collective American spirit—offers a clear example of how acts of terror can be harnessed by the state to reinforce notions of national identity and support national policy goals. This response also demonstrates the power of ‘othering’ as a tool for both reforming national identity and employing national virtues towards specific goals. Bush’s “relentless characterization of [the perpetrators] as evil laid the groundwork in the American consciousness for his militaristic designs.”⁵⁹ The insistence of American virtue, values, and power, against the “evil” of the attackers allowed politicians to create a justification for any actions that were seemingly taken in retaliation for the attack. This acted as a clear validation of American exceptionalism and ushered the United States onto a new path of global interference and domination.

The post-9/11 response offers a clear example of how nationalism and national identity is both provoked by and harnessed in the wake of terror attacks. These post-terror moments are opportunities for those in power to step in and cement certain aspects of national identity against a clearly defined Other. The perceived strength of the state offers a sense of collective understanding for the population, and the terror act itself becomes a moment of shared history on which national identity is built. In turn this newly strengthened national sentiment can be harnessed by the state to justify various forms of policy, many of which can cement the institutionalization of marginalizing and excluding certain groups. An already-understood aspect

⁵⁸ McCartney, “American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy,” 400.

⁵⁹ McCartney, “American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy,” 400.

of national identity can then be strengthened against a certain group and utilized to justify the whims of the state. The rise of Islamophobia in the United States after 9/11 can also demonstrate how the sense of belonging fostered by nationalism is maneuvered by interest groups to create and maintain the Other or the Outsider.

In the wake of the 2015 terror attacks in France, new debates surrounding national identity and who belonged to this identity quickly developed. Ariane Bogain analyzes these impacts on the construction of French national identity and the use of nation-affirming strategies to restore the authority of the state. This discussion highlights the connections between state authority and national identity and analyzes how the figure of the terrorist Other was utilized to create a narrative of sameness in French identity. Terrorist violence “in its indiscriminate nature” leads to a panic that “fundamentally undermines the authority of the state and its social contract with its citizens.”⁶⁰ The *Charlie Hebdo* attack and the November 23 attacks then became a moment of reshaping national narratives in order to justify the continued presence of state authority. The use of “us and them” binaries become pivotal in this effort and can reinforce already-existing understandings of the national Self and foreign Other.⁶¹ The aftermath of terror is shaped into a fight for the identity and soul of a nation, and in France, as Bogain discusses, this rhetoric relied on the understanding of the French identity as “belonging to the same whole.”⁶² Who is included in this whole and who is then necessarily excluded becomes a site for policy changes that allows the state to re-enforce itself during this period of unease.⁶³ Post-terror moments then become an opportunity for the state to re-establish its power by concretely

⁶⁰ Ariane Bogain, “Terrorism and the Discursive Construction of National Identity in France,” *National Identities* 21, no. 3 (2018).

⁶¹ Bogain, “Terrorism and the Discursive Construction of National Identity in France.”

⁶² Bogain, “Terrorism and the Discursive Construction of National Identity in France.”

⁶³ Bogain, “Terrorism and the Discursive Construction of National Identity in France.”

defining these “us and them” boundaries. Since these attacks seemed to target the symbolic centers of French national identity, the panic following the attacks took on a decidedly more dire stance both in the eyes of the French public and in the eyes of the State.

The Role of the Media

Generally, it is important to note the long history of the press on the formation of national consciousness. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson describes the impact that print-as-commodity had on the ability of communities to form across regional boundaries. This, in conjunction with the promotion of a centralized language as previously discussed, offers a new understanding of the importance of mass media on the promotion and maintenance of national identity. The importance of mass readership on an understanding of a community cannot be overstated and frames the influence of mass media over national identity in a new light.

Returning once again to the understanding of “nation” as an imagined political community which is inherently limited and sovereign, and which must be distinguished from other identities by the way in which they are imagined, highlights that mass media has always been at the very center of creating and nurturing these notions of national identity. Again, as Anderson states, “the birth of the imagined community of the nation can best be seen if we consider the basic structure of two forms of imagining which first flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper”.⁶⁴

The understood importance of the press in France dates back to the French Revolution.⁶⁵ Dating back to this period, there has been a complex relationship between the press and the French government as the use of satire and the ability to distribute pamphlets had a defining

⁶⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.

⁶⁵ Andrew Pettegree, *Invention of News*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015.

impact on garnering support for the newly proposed form of democratic government.⁶⁶ During WWII, the press was heavily censored in France during German occupation, though the underground press of the French Resistance was used to disseminate ideas and print counter propaganda in opposition to German control over French newspapers.⁶⁷ At the end of the war, French media was owned by the state and operated under strict supervision. During the post-colonial period, the media remained under heavy censorship by the state.⁶⁸

In “Government and in France During the Algerian War,” Martin Harrison describes the way in which the freedom of press became one of the first casualties during the Algerian War. In an effort to shape the image of Algerian reality that reached French citizens, the official accounts of the Algerian War differed greatly from what actually happened on the ground. In order to maintain this appearance and maintain support for the war domestically, the French government quickly began to “manage” the news that was coming out of Algeria.⁶⁹ To do this, the government relied heavily on seizures where offending materials were seized from the distributors before they could make it to the public. The justification for this often relied on the protection of state security, and according to French law, must be followed by a trial to determine whether the material actually posed such a threat.⁷⁰ In the wartime period, an extremely low percentage of prosecutions, much less completed trials, took place.⁷¹ According to Harrison, during the war newspapers and periodicals were seized on 256 occasions in France and

⁶⁶ Pettegree, *Invention of News*.

⁶⁷ Nathan Johnson, “The Fourth Estate: French Resistance to Nazi Occupation in the Press.” *The Johns Hopkins University Macksey Journal*, 29, 1 (2020).

⁶⁸ Johnson, “The Fourth Estate.”

⁶⁹ Martin Harrison, “Government and Press in France During the Algerian War,” *The American Political Science Review* 58, no. 2 (1964).

⁷⁰ Harrison, “Government and Press in France During the Algerian War.”

⁷¹ Harrison, “Government and Press in France During the Algerian War.”

586 more occasions in Algeria.⁷² These numbers clearly point to an understanding of the press as dangerous when acting against government wishes, and also point to a desire within the French state to have total control over public opinion and sentiment. These decisions seem to reinforce the understanding of the power of the French press within the nation, and the power the press can have over public sentiment.

Matthews and Cameron discuss how acts of terrorism on domestic soil “impact the media’s ability to challenge the anti-terror policies that follow immediately from them.”⁷³ In times of crisis, the role of the media can often easily shift from one of objective reporting and analysis to one of uncritical reporting. When societies face heightened threats, such as an attack on home-soil, a change can be seen in how the media record and report upon such events. Matthews and Cameron argue that these altered reporting practices provide an opportunity for political and social elites to voice their condemnation and support supposedly ‘anti-terror’ practices without challenge.⁷⁴ The media then takes on a subordinate role that defines the events and justifies the response in line with the understanding posed by the homogenous political elite. There are examples of the media questioning the official version of events and exploring new lines of questioning and critical reporting, though usually in these instances the conflict is happening primarily outside of national borders.⁷⁵ There is generally a need to contextualize press performances post-terror attacks, and note that independent, critical analysis of post-terror policies often increase as more time passes after an event. However, it is important to

⁷² Harrison, “Government and Press in France During the Algerian War.”

⁷³ Matthews and Cameron, “Press Performance Amid Threats of Terror.”

⁷⁴ Matthews and Cameron, “Press Performance amid Threats of Terror.”

⁷⁵ Matthews and Cameron, “Press Performance amid Threats of Terror.”

acknowledge the impact the reporting immediately post-attack can have on galvanizing public opinion for or against a post-terror response.

As recent decades have seen both an increase in the international reach of press publications and an increase in terror attacks, the impact of media responses immediately post terror have increased in importance in terms of understanding how terror affects national identity formation. Gerhards and Schäfer discuss the international press components that now arise from acts of terror, as the war on terror has transformed from an issue that is nationally bounded into a global phenomenon.⁷⁶ The authors note that acts of terror themselves must be understood as a communication strategy in which messages are sent in a spectacular way, and therefore the reaction of the mass media is at the very core of understanding the impact of terror on cultures and societies.⁷⁷ The way in which the acts are constructed in the media, and the specific ways in which the attacks are presented, play a large role in influencing individual and institutional responses, and legitimizing or delegitimizing political responses.

These constructions are described by Schäfer as “framing” these acts of terror in the media. How acts of terror are framed both through a domestic, cultural lens and a broader global lens mold the conversations and debates that follow these moments of violence, and in turn can dictate how they are remembered in the collective consciousness.⁷⁸ Though it is understood that terrorist attacks are inherently newsworthy, understanding how terror attacks are covered from

⁷⁶ Jürgen Gerhards and Mike Schäfer, “International Terrorism, Domestic Coverage? How Terrorist Attacks Are Presented in the News of CNN, Al Jazeera, the BBC, and ARD,” *International Communication Gazette* 76, no. 1 (2013).

⁷⁷ Gerhards and Schäfer, “International Terrorism, Domestic Coverage?”

⁷⁸ Todd Schaefer, “Framing the US Embassy Bombings and September 11 Attacks in African and US Newspapers,” Chapter, In *Framing Terrorism the News Media, the Government and the Public*, edited by Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marion Just, New York, NY: Routledge, 2003.

across the globe versus terror attacks at home can offer insight into the role that the mass media plays both in the immediate aftermath and in the longer national memory. Schäfer notes that while there are some local differences in how terrorist acts are covered, the fact that it is a terror attack inherently provides a significant number of similarities in how these events are covered by domestic and international sources.⁷⁹ In many cases, media coverage of terror attacks was used to justify already held understandings about both the local self and international other, even as the attacks seemed to foster a sense of international camaraderie.

Altheide analyzes how terror and politics of fear are inherently linked through the influence of mass media and reporting of terror events.⁸⁰ Fear is used to join terrorism with nonconformity, deviance, and crime, and therefore can be harnessed as a political tool to link certain political goals with fighting the seemingly lasting impact of terror on a local setting.⁸¹ In post-terror settings, fear is used through reporting to construct a public discourse that reflects the symbolic importance of maintaining order so that the risk of continued danger or threats is mitigated.⁸² This type of reporting poses fear and victimization as the opposite of lawfulness, and therefore suggests that laws are the only true way to prevent further fear. The government acts as the primary source of public information, which is then disseminated by the news media, and therefore can manipulate what is considered to be the most important conversations following acts of terror in the public eye. Defining and analyzing the prominent social discourse following terror attacks is the first step in dictating what is seen as the prominent public issues facing a

⁷⁹Schaefer, “Framing the US Embassy Bombings and September 11 Attacks.”

⁸⁰Schaefer, “Framing the US Embassy Bombings and September 11 Attacks.”

⁸¹ David Altheide, “Terrorism and the Politics of Fear,” *Cultural Studies*, 2006, 54–69.

⁸² Altheide, “Terrorism and the Politics of Fear.”

society at any given moment, and in turn can reveal what tensions and anxieties are at the root of national communal sentiment.

III. Methods Statement

This paper will use an analysis of the content of various newspaper publications from moments of national unrest in France to discuss how the figure of the French national and the figure of “other” are created over time, in order to then investigate how national identity is created and maintained. When looking at articles published during 1962 and in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* and November 13th attacks, I selected pieces that had an emphasis on both the actors and the victims of each event. By analyzing the tone of the articles, the frequency with which themes are repeated, and what is repeated across publications I am able to ascertain what values are deemed to be the most important in terms of national identity. This will also come through an analysis of the figure that is presented as a threat to these values, or the figure of the “other,” which will offer insight into the ways in which these figures are employed in national conversations and the role the media plays in stirring these sentiments of nationalistic community.

I will first analyze how the values associated with national identity shifted during the decolonizing period of 1962. I will examine how the figure of the French national is described and how the Algerians are described before, during, and after Algerian independence. This will provide a more concrete historical context to the creation of the ideal figure of French national identity, particularly during such a fundamental shift in the understanding of what it means to be French and where France stands on the global stage. This decolonizing moment offers an interesting set of tensions to analyze through media discussions—who was considered French, how French Algerians fit into this understanding, and how those in support of Algerian

independence were discussed and considered. The war, which took place from 1954 to 1962, in some ways forced a confrontation about the realities of the French colonial empire, as torture and other war crimes were the cornerstone of French military strategy in the region. The war caused a huge political shift in France and saw the end of the Fourth Republic. By 1962, France had lost a significant amount of credibility abroad, as the tactics used in attempting to maintain colonial power alienated many of its allies and sowed discontent within the metropole. 1962 provides invaluable historical context for understanding why the discourse surrounding national belonging played out in the wake of terror attacks. To provide historical analysis, *Le Monde* will also be used to look at the events of 1962. Conceptualizing the historical threads of many of the assumptions made about the identity figures today allows for an analysis of how these identities are maintained over time, and what aspects of French national identity are based in the beginning of the post-colonial era. This historical angle will demonstrate how these imaginings have shifted to match the tone of the era, and that many of the aspects of national identity that are seen as stagnant are in fact deeply mutable to suit the tone of the current political and social climate.

I will then analyze the media response in 2015, particularly in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack and the events of November 13. Here, again, articles were selected for their explicit descriptions of both the perpetrators and the victims of these attacks. In general, 2015 was a moment of increased tension within Europe, as the Syrian Civil War saw a flood of refugees seeking asylum across Europe, raising several concerns and debates regarding border control and immigration and refugee policies. Stoking these debates was the involvement of several Western countries, including France, in the Syrian conflict, with nations providing both monetary and economic support to opposition groups fighting the Islamic State-controlled Syrian government. The terror attacks then create moments of discussion surrounding what it means to be French and

what values are necessary above all else in order to be accepted as a French citizen. This period also coincided both with the strengthening of social media and mass media, but also with increased state mediatization over other aspects of social and cultural life. I will first analyze one article in depth to get a sense of what perspectives are being prioritized, how the figures of the French victims and the terrorist “others” are being described, and the tone of each of these descriptions. I will then look at other articles to draw out any repetition of language and tone in order to understand how these figures are being constructed through these stories. In 2015 it began to become clear how much of an impact that mass media can have over other sectors of society, and more specifically over public debates and forums.

Two primary publications will be used as sources for the response to the attacks: *Le Monde* and *France24*. *Le Monde* is a French weekly publication which has been in print since 1944, and due to its long legacy and supposedly impartial reporting it is considered the most trustworthy newspaper in France.⁸³ *France24* is a state-owned international news organization with an emphasis on international markets.⁸⁴ Together these two sources demonstrate how French national identity is discussed internally and how France hopes to be perceived on the international stage. To understand how these events were discussed internationally, the *New York Times* coverage will be used as a third point of reference, to draw out what points of discussions made domestically are being reproduced in the international imagination.

Through a discussion of the media response in the immediate wake of terror attacks and in the days following, a pattern emerges that begins to explain how the figure of the French National becomes interchangeable with French national identity and how the figure of the

⁸³Alice Antheaume, “France,” Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, June 23, 2021.

⁸⁴ France 24, “France 24 to Launch Its Spanish Channel in 2017,” *France 24*, February 25, 2016. <https://www.france24.com/en/france24-spanish-channel-2017>.

terrorist “Other” is created in contrast. Particularly in moments of violence, understanding what figure is developed as the target and victim helps create an understanding of the embodiment of “Frenchness.” The values and attributes associated with these figures become the understood target for the assailants within the general public, and this figure offers a moment of relatability and collective understanding for those who are considered to be “in” the French national understanding.

The figure of the terrorist “other” offers a similar insight into the formation and strengthening of national identity. This figure not only offers the state a figure to latch on to in the pursuit of justice, but also creates a parallel moment of shared understanding for the public. Having a clear understanding of who is outside of the national collective strengthens the resolve of those within, especially after moments of violence. The attributes associated with this character, and the moments focused on by the media, highlight what aspects of shared national understanding are considered to be the most important for maintaining the bonds of collective understanding and the sentiment of the national community.

These two figures are essentially imagined in the same sense that nations are imagined communities. This does not mean that these figures do not hold power; in fact, as seen in previous moments of violence—such as in the United States post 9/11— the creation of these imagined figures can give the state enormous security potential for consolidating and exercising power in ways that can be deemed justified by the public. Creating the imagined other as a sort of boogeyman that could be located anywhere or strike at any time allows the state to maintain a sense of urgency in any response it deems necessary. And in turn the issues that are the most pressing for the nation at any given time can then get pushed to the forefront of national conversations, and sway public opinion that would have otherwise stayed stagnant.

IV. Findings

A. 1962

How can the roots of these identities be understood, and in what ways does history reveal how truly imagined these identities are? Analyzing the impact of 1962 and the decolonizing moment in France offers the chance to trace the threads of contemporary concerns and anxieties back to the period of French decolonization to understand how the national identity constructions seen today are rooted in the national identity imaginings of the past. While current discussions of French national identity frequently call upon the French Revolution as the most defining moment in the French imagination, which will be seen later when the events of 2015 are discussed, the loss of Algeria in 1962 and the subsequent decline of France as a colonial and global power caused a huge shift in French notions of national identity, national community, and belonging.

The referendum for Algerian independence took place in March of 1962, though independence was not formally acknowledged until the Evian Accords were signed on July 1st. By looking at events from the beginning, middle, and end of 1962, and in turn how moments and perpetrators of violence were discussed and reported on, a pattern unfolds of how the metropole began to redefine itself and come to terms with the loss of French Algeria.

In the months leading up to the referendum, the reports out of Algiers have a clear tone of war-time journalism, with the numbers and deaths reported plainly and without ornamentation. January 1, 1962: six Muslims and several Europeans were reported dead from incidents across the city.⁸⁵ Also on January 1, new military action was announced that demonstrated a significant step towards a ceasefire, which was met by “an almost general feeling of disappointment by

⁸⁵*Le Monde*, “Six Musulmans Tues À Alger.” *Le Monde*, January 1, 1962, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/01/01/six-musulmans-tues-a-alger_2279139_1819218.html.

Europeans, and notable satisfactions among Muslims.”⁸⁶ This in turn heightened fears both in Algeria and in France that a total withdrawal from Algeria would be imminent, causing a growth in feelings of fear and resentment by Europeans in Algeria. Already in the months leading up to Algerian independence there seems to be a tone of reported disenfranchisement, as French citizens living in Algeria took the news of a ceasefire as an abandonment by their government. January 2 saw an article once again highlighting the deaths and injuries from the day before.⁸⁷ The article lends itself to painting a picture of almost indiscriminate violence across Algeria, both by the pro-independence FLN (*Front de libération nationale*) and by the anti-independence OAS (*Organisation Armée Secrète*).⁸⁸

On January 5, 1962, an article titled “The powerless authorities to stem in the major cities of Algeria the surge of passions and violence,” described the “particularly heinous murder.” committed by Muslims of a pregnant European woman.⁸⁹ In the article, concerns are raised about the ability of the authorities to protect communities in Algeria, especially when these acts work to incite revenge and racial hatred within the French, which in turn exacerbates an already tense situation. It is noted that in the wake of moments of violence by the FLN, the OAS follows with the creation of underground organizations and the conditioning of the French in Algeria to add

⁸⁶*Le Monde*, “Alger : Le " Dégagement " Militaire Accroît L'inquiétude Des Européens,” *Le Monde*, January 1, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/01/01/alger-le-degagement-militaire-accroit-l-inquietude-des-europeens_2279617_1819218.html.

⁸⁷*Le Monde*, “Le Terrorisme Algérien En Métropole,” *Le Monde*, January 1, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/01/02/le-terrorisme-algerien-en-metropole_2353571_1819218.html.

⁸⁸*Le Monde*, “Le Terrorisme Algérien En Métropole.”

⁸⁹*Le Monde*, “Les Autorités Impuissantes à Endiguer Dans Les Grandes Villes D'Algerie Le Déferlement Des Passions Et Des Violences,” *Le Monde*, January 4, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/01/05/les-autorites-impuissantes-a-endiguer-dans-les-grandes-villes-d-algerie-le-deferlement-des-passions-et-des-violences_3134831_1819218.html.

fuel to the outrage invoked by the original violence. Here a pattern of conflicting attitudes can be seen, particularly regarding what the ideal solution should be in response to terrorist acts. In “Nearly Fifty Dead in Algeria in less than forty-eight hours,” published on January 16, this tension is once again highlighted. The OAS carried out a strategy of blind and collective terrorism to which the FLN responds in kind, and as the list of innocent victims in each community grows as the chance at a peaceful coexistence shrinks.⁹⁰

In France, this mounting tension manifested in several ways—in one instance refugees from Algeria —“a mother and her three young children” —were refused lodging and made to sleep in a car.⁹¹ Though there was an official comment made by the municipal councilor to provide shelter in the future in order to aid in their transition into Paris, he noted that—of course—this was not a case of “racial discrimination,” but rather one of an understandable fear of possible violence from the Algerians.⁹² This provides a clear example of the notions of national community that were being reinforced, and the boundaries of who was considered “in” the French national collective. Despite the fact that, at this time, Algeria was still considered to be a part of France, and therefore those fleeing the violence to France would, to all appearances, have chosen to remain as citizens of France, the seeds of doubt about who is safe to associate with and what a true French citizen looks like had already been planted.

⁹⁰*Le Monde*, “Près De Cinquante Morts En Algérie En Moins De Quarante-Huit Heures,” *Le Monde*, January 15, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/01/16/pres-de-cinquante-morts-en-algerie-en-moins-de-quarante-huit-heures_2354200_1819218.html.

⁹¹*Le Monde*, “Des Réfugiés Venant D'algérie Ne Peuvent Se Loger Dans Certains Hôtels, Affirme Un Conseiller Municipal,” *Le Monde*, January 24, 1962.

https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/01/25/des-refugies-venant-d-algerie-ne-peuvent-se-loger-dans-certains-hotels-affirme-un-conseiller-municipal_2353063_1819218.html.

⁹²*Le Monde*, “Des Réfugiés Venant D'algérie Ne Peuvent Se Loger Dans Certains Hôtels.”

On the eve of Algerian Independence, discussions began about how the perpetrators of war crimes during the conflict would be treated in the post-war period. In “The Forgotten of the Algerian War” published June 2, the intricacies of the amnesty deal are laid out. The Evian Accords proclaimed an amnesty for all Algerians, whether they fought with the FLN or not, and for all French soldiers and police officers who may have committed “atrocities” such as torture.⁹³ The article goes on to discuss the many individuals who were jailed during wartime for refusing to participate in said activities, who are now considered to be the “forgotten” of the war.⁹⁴ This debate embodies the conflict at the end of the war—how France and its citizens would come to terms with the events of the war itself which in many ways shattered not only the public understanding of French power but the individuals’ faith in the foundations of French national identity. “The torturers, who have committed abominable war crimes condemned by national and international law are completely exonerated, and young people who refused torture, who denounced it, who refused to serve in an inhuman and unjust war when so many other men were cowards, remain sanctioned.”⁹⁵ The growing understanding that this was an “absurd war” only strengthened cries for those who refused to participate to return to their roles as citizens and to be allowed to go free.⁹⁶ Now, those who were originally acting as the defenders of the French Empire and the identity implications that went along with being a global power, were being pushed aside in the national imagination as those who were responsible for a seemingly unending conflict in Algeria. This demonstrates how monumental this moment actually was in the national

⁹³*Le Monde*, “Les " Oubliés " De La Guerre D'Algérie,” *Le Monde*, June 1, 1962.
https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/06/02/les-oublies-de-la-guerre-d-algerie_2366254_1819218.html.

⁹⁴*Le Monde*, “Les " Oubliés " De La Guerre D'Algérie.”

⁹⁵*Le Monde*, “Les " Oubliés " De La Guerre D'Algérie.”

⁹⁶*Le Monde*, “Les " Oubliés " De La Guerre D'Algérie.”

consciousness, and how large of a shift was being undertaken in terms of national identity formation.

On July 4, Algerian Independence was announced, and Algeria would become an independent state cooperating with France.⁹⁷ And on July 5, the FLN called for a ban on racist and colonialist French newspapers in Algeria. This marked a clear and decisive shift in the order of cultural hierarchy, with the FLN stating that the continued presence of such newspapers undermined Algerian sovereignty and independence.⁹⁸ The following day, *Le Monde* posted an article including a letter from an OAS leader calling for the immediate return of the French citizens who had left Algeria.⁹⁹ Supposedly under the guise of helping Algeria to rebuild and transform into a strong independent nation, and to reassure that the harmony found in the ceasefire continues on into the future. He urges that people listen to him in the “fraternal spirit of cooperation,” because he believes in the “courage and good citizenship,” of French nationals.

On July 7, a group of Muslims entered the cathedral of Algiers, though, it was noted, not to loot it. Instead, the group wandered about the church admiring the art, and when pressed for an explanation they declared that “the cathedral was an old mosque and that it would be normal for

⁹⁷*Le Monde*, “Le Peuple Algérien S'est Prononcé Pour L'indépendance De L'ALGÉRIE Coopérant Avec La France ”. *Le Monde*, July 3, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/07/04/le-peuple-algerien-s-est-prononce-pour-l-independance-de-l-algerie-cooperant-avec-la-france_2374327_1819218.html.

⁹⁸*Le Monde*, “L'Agence F.l.n. Demande L'interdiction En Algérie Des ‘Journaux Racistes Et Colonialistes’.” *Le Monde*, July 4, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/07/05/l-agence-f-l-n-demande-l-interdiction-en-algerie-des-journaux-racistes-et-colonialistes_2374360_1819218.html.

⁹⁹*Le Monde*, “Pierre Laggaillarde Demande Aux Français Qui Ont Quitté L'ALGÉRIE De ‘Rentrer Le Plus Rapidement Possible’,” *Le Monde*, July 5, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/07/06/pierre-laggaillarde-demande-aux-francais-qui-ont-quitte-l-algerie-de-rentre-le-plus-rapidement-possible_2375030_1819218.html.

it to be returned to them.”¹⁰⁰ With Algerian independence came the upheaval of many of the social structures that the French had deemed unyielding in its colonial power.

Where the events reported on before the end of the war were succinctly described and focused on the main aspects of each event, following independence the incidents reported began to take on a much more telling tone. In an article from July 21 titled “A Drunk Algerian Kills a Young Delivery Driver with a Knife,” there seems to be a clear shift in how Muslims are discussed in French media. Before there was a semblance of separation between the actions of the FLN and Muslims who were the victims of wartime violence. The article describes how the Algerian, “forty-one years old, without a profession,”¹⁰¹ was drunk and throwing insults. The delivery driver, twenty-three years old, had recently returned from Algeria where he completed his military service. When he attempted to silence his insults, the Algerian took out a penknife and delivered a mortal wound.¹⁰² This created an interesting, and telling image, of how the French imagination perceived both the French and Algerians after the war. Even though many admitted to the wrongdoing and violence that took place at the hands of French soldiers and policemen, it is still quickly noted that the young man had served in the defense of his country. The image of the unemployed, drunken, stumbling Algerian killing the young, employed veteran is certainly a striking one, and speaks to the patterns of identity formation that began to take place in the post-colonial era. In this moment, one can see that the “othering” of the former

¹⁰⁰*Le Monde*, “Des Groupes De Musulmans Ont Pénéré Vendredi Matin Dans La Cathédrale D'alger,” *Le Monde*, July 6, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/07/07/des-groupes-de-musulmans-ont-penetre-vendredi-matin-dans-la-cathedrale-d-alger_2374203_1819218.html.

¹⁰¹*Le Monde*, “Rixe Rue D'Avron (20e) Un Algérien Ivre Tue D'un Coup De Canif Un Jeune Chauffeur-Livreur.” *Le Monde*, July 20, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/07/21/rixerue-d-avron-20e-un-algerien-ivre-tue-d-un-coup-de-canif-un-jeune-chauffeur-livreur_3135732_1819218.html.

¹⁰²*Le Monde*, “Rixe Rue D'Avron (20e) Un Algérien...”.

colonized had begun, further cementing that there is a solid boundary between those who are considered French and those who are Algerian.

Tied up with this shifting conversation of identity is a shifting conversation of nationality. On July 24, 1962, *Le Monde* covered the new nationality ordinances that were taking place in regards to French Algerians. French citizens with common law status would retain their French nationality “regardless of their situation with regard to Algerian nationality.”¹⁰³ Here is a clear example of how national identity can have actual policy impacts that are imposed on a population—in this case shifting the legal definition of being French. And any citizen born in Algeria with Algerian citizenship who had children in France could gain French citizenship for themselves and their children, if they commit to remaining within France.¹⁰⁴ But despite these ordinances, there remained tension and aggression towards Muslims in Paris, with one report from July 28th describing an instance of an Algerian man getting brutally beaten in Paris by a French civilian posing as a police officer. In a letter sent to *Le Monde*, Father Depierre of the Paris Mission condemned the “blind and racist repression” which seems to act as a “plague [which] infects the heart of men,” and which is “very difficult to uproot.”¹⁰⁵ This emphasizes the anxiety of the decolonizing moment in general, as well as the uncertainty surrounding the recognition of those belonging to the French national community and the requirements for being seen by the general public as French.

¹⁰³*Le Monde*, “Les Français D'Algérie Conservent Leur Nationalité Même S'ils Deviennent Algériens,” *Le Monde*, July 23, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/07/24/les-francais-d-algerie-conservent-leur-nationalite-meme-s-ils-deviennent-algeriens_2375176_1819218.html.

¹⁰⁴*Le Monde*, “Les Français D'Algérie Conservent Leur Nationalité

¹⁰⁵*Le Monde*, “Un Cas De Brutalités Commises à Paris Sur Un Algérien,” *Le Monde*, July 27, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/07/28/un-cas-de-brutalites-commises-a-paris-sur-un-algerien_2373934_1819218.html.

This sentiment remained at the forefront of the national conversation by the end of 1962, when a congress of repatriates called for amnesty for all crimes related to the events in Algeria. Here there is yet another layer of fracture in notions of national identity and belonging, specifically in reference to those who lived and fought in Algeria and who returned home, unclear of their place in French society. These individuals, particularly those who were raised French in colonial Algeria, spoke of an experienced disconnect upon their return to France. A former deputy of Algiers stated, “Like you we are French people who have lost everything, like you it was on the benches of the communal school that we learned to love our mother country, France.”¹⁰⁶ He went on to say “we are no longer Algerian citizens because we did not want it, [but] we are not yet French!”¹⁰⁷ The reality of post-colonial France and all the conflicting identities that were attempting to mesh back into one offers a clear view into the ongoing formation of national identity. On one hand there are those in the metropole, those who see themselves as the purest form of French, untainted by association with those in the colonies. On the other there are those who returned from having fought for, what they perceived as, the maintenance of the French empire and French standing in the global community. And yet there is a clear disconnect between the two, though both are striving for the ideal of French nationalism.

This defining moment for French national identity exposes the idea that the “other” is an ever-changing figure that embodies national uncertainties at any given moment. In 1962, the “other” was not only an Orientalist figure of the former colonized, but also the returning Frenchman who at one point embodied what it meant to be French on the global stage. As

¹⁰⁶ *Le Monde*. “Le Congrès Des Rapatriés Souhaite Une Amnistie Pour Tous Les Délits En Rapport Avec Les Événements D’algérie,” *Le Monde*, December 3, 1962. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1962/12/04/le-congres-des-rapatries-souhaite-une-amnistie-pour-tous-les-delits-en-rapport-avec-les-evenements-d-algerie_2364746_1819218.html.

¹⁰⁷ *Le Monde*. “Le Congrès Des Rapatriés Souhaite Une Amnistie...”.

France's power shifted so too did notions of national belonging, and national identity itself became a tool with which to redefine the understood ideals of "Frenchness" within the French community.

B. Charlie Hebdo

On the morning of January 7, 2015, two French-Muslim brothers— Chérif and Saïd Kouachi, who were born in Paris and had ties to extremist organizations both in France and in Yemen¹⁰⁸— armed with guns entered the office of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in central Paris and opened fire. They killed 17 people, 11 of whom were journalists who worked for the paper.¹⁰⁹ The brothers had been seen training in Yemen in 2011, prompting the authorities to monitor them until the spring of 2014.¹¹⁰ In the wake of the attack, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula took credit, ostensibly in the name of avenging the Prophet Mohammed, whom *Charlie Hebdo* had published several satirical cartoons of over a period of years.¹¹¹ The attack prompted an outpouring of support both in France and in the international community, particularly in the rest of Europe and the United States. It also prompted a series of discussions surrounding the limits of free speech, secularism, and blasphemy.

Reaction in France- France 24

Immediately following the attack, its symbolic performance as a strike against the satirical humor at the heart of French culture was made abundantly clear by President Francois Hollande, who commented that this violence was against all of France and against the very ideal

¹⁰⁸Barnes, "US Shared Intelligence with French about Paris Brothers' Yemen Trip".

¹⁰⁹"Charlie Hebdo Attack: Three Days of Terror," BBC News, BBC, January 14, 2015.

¹¹⁰Barnes, "US Shared Intelligence with French about Paris Brothers' Yemen Trip".

¹¹¹ Doreen Carvajal and Suzanne Daley, "Proud to Offend, Charlie Hebdo Carries Torch of Political Provocation," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2015.

of freedom of expression.¹¹² On January 7, 2015, *France24* reported on the statements made by other heads of state in the subsequent hours, such as British Prime Minister David Cameron declaring that the UK stood with France “in the fight against terror and defending the freedom of the press.”¹¹³ The head of the European Council said, “It is a brutal attack against our fundamental values and against the freedom of expression, a pillar of our democracy.”¹¹⁴ The article goes on to describe the event itself, noting that once they left the office building, one of the gunmen “calmly [fired] on a police officer...shooting him in the head while he writhed on the ground.”¹¹⁵ Cries “could be heard among the gunshots” from the attackers of “Allahu Akbar!” (“God is great”) and “we have avenged the prophet.”¹¹⁶

The final section of the article discusses “A history of threats against Charlie Hebdo,” including the threats received as a result of caricatures drawn of the Prophet Mohammed and the 2011 firebombing of the magazine’s offices. However, it is noted, the magazine continued to publish controversial cartoons “despite being taken to court by French Muslim groups charged with ‘inciting racial hatred’, which is against the law in France.”¹¹⁷ The final paragraph of the report notes that the front page of the magazine the week of the shooting featured the author Michael Houellebecq, whose controversial book “imagined a France in the near future that is ruled by the Islamic government.”¹¹⁸ The book was “widely touted as tapping into growing unease among non-Muslim French about immigration and the rise of Islam’s influence in

¹¹²*France 24*, “French, World Leaders Condemn Attack at Charlie Hebdo,” *France 24*, January 7, 2015. <https://www.france24.com/en/20150107-charlie-hebdo-paris-attack-journalist-terror->

¹¹³*France 24*, “French, World Leaders Condemn Attack at Charlie Hebdo.”

¹¹⁴*France 24*, “French, World Leaders Condemn Attack at Charlie Hebdo.”

¹¹⁵*France 24*, “French, World Leaders Condemn Attack at Charlie Hebdo.”

¹¹⁶*France 24*, “French, World Leaders Condemn Attack at Charlie Hebdo.”

¹¹⁷*France 24*, “French, World Leaders Condemn Attack at Charlie Hebdo.”

¹¹⁸*France 24*, “French, World Leaders Condemn Attack at Charlie Hebdo.”

society.”¹¹⁹ This article sets a tone that is seen in many of the other pieces: one commenting on the bravery of the cartoonists for continuing to exercise their free speech despite the threats. Though before the attack France might have acknowledged that the magazine would toe-the-line of the limits of secular humor, that aftermath saw the work of the magazine painted as a truly heroic act defending the values of the Republic despite all odds.

In another article published on January 7, the manhunt in the aftermath of the attack is described. In a section dubbed “Day of Terror in Paris,” the article states how “the masked, black-clad men with assault rifles stormed the offices near Paris’ Bastille monument in the midday attack on Charlie Hebdo, which had long drawn condemnation...for its depictions of Islam, although it also satirized other religions and political figures.”¹²⁰ The attack is clearly situated not only at the center of national French ideals, but at the center of French national history as the Revolution is invoked and the attack is placed both at the metaphorical and physical heart of Paris. This article further emphasizes that the gunmen shouted “Allahu Akbar!” although this time it is noted that they used “fluent, unaccented French,” seemingly drawing on the fear that these terrorists were homegrown, and adding another layer to the levels of distrust developing amongst the “non-Muslim French” mentioned in the previous article.¹²¹ Once again, the scene of one of the gunmen “calmly shooting a wounded police officer in the head as he writhed on the ground” is present, though this time it is contrasted by the eyewitness to this— a man “who watched in fear from his home across the street.”¹²² This man refused to allow himself

¹¹⁹ *France 24*, “French, World Leaders Condemn Attack at Charlie Hebdo.”

¹²⁰ *France 24*, “Manhunt after Deadly Charlie Hebdo Terrorist Attack,” *France 24*, January 8, 2015. <https://www.france24.com/en/20150107-live-blog-gun-shots-french-paris-charlie-hebdo-satirical-magazine>.

¹²¹ *France 24*, “Manhunt after Deadly Charlie Hebdo Terrorist Attack.”

¹²² *France 24*, “Manhunt after Deadly Charlie Hebdo Terrorist Attack.”

to be named “because he feared for his safety.”¹²³ The image of the ruthless attacker is emphasized, and the contrast between “calmly” and “writhing” creates a sense of helplessness and victimhood surrounding the French officer. This, along with the fearful eyewitness, adds to the tone of a militaristic invasion, executed seamlessly and without hesitation by the attackers. Both of these descriptions not only comment on the event itself, but they also demonstrate the overall tone of how the attack was portrayed in the media.

The piece goes on to discuss possible ties to al Qaeda in Yemen and mentions the death of economist Bernard Maris in the shooting, “who was a contributor to the newspaper and was heard regularly on French radio.”¹²⁴ The point is driven home that this has disrupted the order of French life, and that seemingly banal moments of regularity and routine have been destroyed. In a passing paragraph the report comments on how this event seems to confirm fears in Europe that “jihadists trained in warfare abroad would stage attacks at home,” but that France was uniting behind Hollande’s rallying cry: “Vive La France!”¹²⁵

“Charlie Hebdo, the fearless weekly that lampoons sacred cows,” yet another article released on January 7, 2015, describes the magazine itself as the “scion of a revered tradition in French journalism that goes back to the eve of the French Revolution, when satirical publications played a decisive role in undermining the prestige and dignity of the French monarchy.”¹²⁶ The perceived gilded history of France is invoked, and the article goes on to laud the heroic status of the cartoonists. The magazine was “repeatedly threatened for publishing caricatures of the

¹²³ *France 24*, “Manhunt after Deadly Charlie Hebdo Terrorist Attack.”

¹²⁴ *France 24*, “Manhunt after Deadly Charlie Hebdo Terrorist Attack.”

¹²⁵ *France 24*, “Manhunt after Deadly Charlie Hebdo Terrorist Attack.”

¹²⁶ Benjamin Dodman, “Charlie Hebdo, the Fearless Weekly That Lampoons Sacred Cows,” *France 24*, January 8, 2015. <https://www.france24.com/en/20150107-charlie-hebdo-satirical-weekly-islamists-prophet-cartoons-deadly-attack>.

Prophet Mohammed in the name of free speech and France's cherished secular laws."¹²⁷ This article notes that Prime Minister Manuel Valls commented that the attack had "struck at the heart of the Republic" and France's leading Muslim organization, the French Council of the Muslim Faith, condemned a "barbaric act against democracy and freedom of the press."¹²⁸ One member of a watchdog against racism and anti-Semitism is quoted as saying "There is a fear that Islam will once more be designated as the origin of this monstrosity."¹²⁹ So while there is space given to the voice of the Muslim population, the fears that are stoked within the article do not seem to be quieted by the denunciation precisely because these voices are not given mainstream attention. It is noted that Islam as a whole could wrongly be blamed, but little is done to dissuade that result, and the mere discussion of it is relegated to a few lines at the end of the article.

In "Paris Attack Fells Veterans of Cherished Satirical Press," the slain cartoonists are lauded as the last pillars of a "revered tradition that goes back to the French Revolution": satire.¹³⁰ Published the night of the massacre, the piece highlights the careers of some of the victims. The chief editor, Stephane Charbonnier, is quoted as saying "the only thing that threatens the press is self-censorship" and his "unapologetic" mocking of all religions comes as a result of his desire to "...die standing rather than live on...his knees."¹³¹

The description of the rest of the victims also work to strengthen the image of the ideal French national, as they are all lauded as heroes of prototypical French values. Cartoonist Jean Cabutis noted to have "served in the French military during the Algerian war for independence in

¹²⁷ Dodman, "Charlie Hebdo, the Fearless Weekly That Lampoons Sacred Cows,"

¹²⁸ *France 24*, "Paris Attack Fells Veterans of Cherished Satirical Press," *France 24*, January 8, 2015. <https://www.france24.com/en/20150107-paris-attack-veterans-satirical-press-charlie-hebdo-cabu-charb-wolinski-tignous>.

¹²⁹ *France 24*, "Paris Attack Fells Veterans of Cherished Satirical Press."

¹³⁰ *France 24*, "Paris Attack Fells Veterans of Cherished Satirical Press."

¹³¹ *France 24*, "Paris Attack Fells Veterans of Cherished Satirical Press."

the late 1950s and remained a staunch pacifist ever since.”¹³² Cartoonist Georges Wolinski was born in (French) Tunisia and awarded the Legion of Honor in 2005. Cartoonist Bernard Verlhac, a member of Cartoonists for Peace, was known for his staunchly left-wing and anti-capitalist views, and once said “I would love to think that every time I make a drawing it prevents a kidnapping, a murder, or removes a landmine.”¹³³ Again, describing these victims gives concrete value to the specific attributes that are assigned to French national identity.

These short biographies demonstrate the symbolic role that *Charlie Hebdo* played in the national imagination. The cartoonists, despite any past criticism leveled towards them by the French public, were swiftly raised to an almost saint-like status among the news media, canonized in the defense of French national values and the pursuit of Enlightenment ideals. And as they are idealized, a depiction of the terrorist other can begin to come into focus, a figure that is fundamentally and necessarily opposed to these values that are the perceived mainstay of French national identity.

Le Monde

On January 9, 2015, *Le Monde* published the article “You are going to pay for insulting the Prophet,” a timeline of the attack that left 12 people dead in the office of satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo.¹³⁴ “Almost all of them were there, like every Wednesday, gathered around cakes and croissants, over the large oval table...it had been a ritual since the birth of Charlie Hebdo decades ago.”¹³⁵ From the opening line of this piece, *Charlie Hebdo* is associated with

¹³² *France 24*, “Paris Attack Fells Veterans of Cherished Satirical Press.”

¹³³ *France 24*, “Paris Attack Fells Veterans of Cherished Satirical Press.”

¹³⁴ Soren Seelow, “Attentat à "Charlie Hebdo": "Vous Allez Payer Car Vous Avez Insulté Le Prophète ”.” *Le Monde*, January 8, 2015, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/01/08/vous-allez-payer-car-vous-avez-insulte-le-prophete_4551820_3224.html.

¹³⁵ Seelow, “Attentat à "Charlie Hebdo.”

everything quintessentially, fundamentally French. The article goes on to remind the reader that the satire of the magazine was all-reaching—no religion or politician was left unscathed. This point is highlighted with descriptions of Marine le Pen—head of the far-right National Front—as “a turd soiling a French flag,” and others depicting “a cartoon of the Pope denouncing sex abuse of children in the Church; President Sarkozy with a painful grin.”¹³⁶ The meeting would normally end “when it’s time to go grab a bite at Petites Canailles, a nearby neighborhood cafe of the 11th arrondissement,” but on this Wednesday “two masked men entered the room, silencing the joyful hubbub.”¹³⁷ The cartoonists are once again brought down to earth, and placed securely within the center of France. The message from the article emphasizes that this violence happened to common French citizens, in the heart of Paris, and therefore could have happened anywhere to anyone. Yes, the cartoonists embody national values, but so do all those who are considered French—this attack was an attack on the whole national community.

Le Monde notes that the first responders said the injuries looked like “war wounds” and the head of the organization Reporters Without Borders called the day “the darkest in the history of the French press.”¹³⁸ In the description of the event itself, it is noted that the “two killers calmly go back into their car, showing no sign of panic, acting very professional.”¹³⁹ Again the picture painted of the gunmen has an air of militaristic control, of calm detachment, creating further contrast between them and the helpless cartoonists.

In a statement from the circle of Press Mediators published January 10, 2015, by *Le Monde*, the ideological attack against France is laid out clearly and succinctly. “*Charlie Hebdo* is

¹³⁶ Seelow, “Attentat à "Charlie Hebdo." ”

¹³⁷ Seelow, “Attentat à "Charlie Hebdo." ”

¹³⁸ Seelow, “Attentat à "Charlie Hebdo." ”

¹³⁹ Seelow, “Attentat à "Charlie Hebdo." ”

a symbol. It is freedom and democracy that the assassins tried to destroy. *Charlie Hebdo* must survive to pursue its mission, the quest and defense of freedom of expression.”¹⁴⁰ This notion is reinforced again and again in the days following the attack, and the contrasting images of the figures begin to get planted firmly in the imagination of both the French public and the West at large.

On January 15, 2015, *Le Monde* published “*Charlie Hebdo: bande à part*” which recounted the history of the victims of the shooting as “schoolboys and rebellious... the last vestige of a bygone era.”¹⁴¹ Like the *France24* article, this piece lifts the cartoonists almost to the level of martyr for the ideals of the French Republic. Again, the Revolution is turned to: “They were the distant heirs of those anarchists of the end of the 19th century, who turned the newly invented rotary presses, and proclaimed on the front page—’If God exists, he must be abolished’.”¹⁴² The figure of the Frenchman—a rebellious schoolboy dismantling the annals of power and fighting for the universal ideals of the Enlightenment, the ideals that are good for all of mankind—is clearly and concretely created in the domestic response to the attack. French national identity is tied unquestionably to a specific set of values exercised in a specific way: freedom of speech and freedom of expression applied to a general satirical irreverence. This in turn is tied back to the ideals fought for in the shared history of the Revolution, a triumph of the rights of man which still dictates how the French see themselves today.

International Response

¹⁴⁰ *Le Monde*, “Communiqué Du Cercle Des Médiateurs De Presse: Charlie Hebdo Est Un Symbole,” *Le Monde*, January 10, 2015, https://www.lemonde.fr/le-monde/article/2015/01/10/communique-du-cercle-des-mediateurs-de-presse-charlie-hebdo-est-un-symbole_5996274_4586753.html.

¹⁴¹ Judith Perrignon, “Charlie Hebdo”: Bande à Part,” *Le Monde*, January 15, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/m-actu/article/2015/01/15/bande-a-part_4556968_4497186.html.

¹⁴² Perrignon, “Charlie Hebdo”: Bande à Part.”

The international response to the attack was as telling as the response from within France, and many of the articles published in the following period by Western countries mirrored many of the same sentiments as *Le Monde* and *France 24*. The New York Times published several articles on January 7, 2015, which highlight many of the same tensions seen in the articles above. “Terrorist Strikes *Charlie Hebdo* Newspaper in Paris, leaving 12 dead,” discusses the details of the attack. The shooters attacked *Charlie Hebdo* and escaped, “traumatizing the city and sending shockwaves through Europe and beyond.”¹⁴³ Once again it is noted that the brothers were born in Paris, “raising the prospect that homegrown Muslim extremists were responsible.”¹⁴⁴ The attack is described as threatening to “deepen the distrust of France’s large Muslim population,” as well as “crystallize the culture clash between religious extremism and the West’s devotion to free expression.”¹⁴⁵ Here, like in several of the previous articles, the Muslim population at large is not necessarily recognized as separate from those responsible for these acts of violence. Instead, the two are one after the other in the same paragraph, demonstrating the perceived lack of distinction between the homegrown French Muslim terrorists and the Muslims that are French. This is once again reinforced with the detail that the attackers “spoke fluent French” as they yelled: “We have avenged the Prophet Muhammed, We have killed Charlie Hebdo!”¹⁴⁶

In the article, “‘Dangerous Moment’ for Europe, as Fear and Resentment Grow,” the blurred line between the jihadists and the rest of Europe’s Muslim population is discussed. The

¹⁴³ Dan Bilefsky, and Maïa De La Baume, “Terrorists Strike Charlie Hebdo Newspaper in Paris, Leaving 12 Dead,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2015.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/08/world/europe/charlie-hebdo-paris-shooting.html>.

¹⁴⁴ Bilefsky and De La Baume, “Terrorists Strike Charlie Hebdo Newspaper in Paris, Leaving 12 Dead.”

¹⁴⁵ Bilefsky and De La Baume, “Terrorists Strike Charlie Hebdo Newspaper in Paris, Leaving 12 Dead.”

¹⁴⁶ Bilefsky and De La Baume, “Terrorists Strike Charlie Hebdo Newspaper in Paris, Leaving 12 Dead.”

opening line of the piece— “The sophisticated, military-style strike Wednesday on a French newspaper known for satirizing Islam staggered a continent already seething with anti-immigrant sentiments in some quarters, feeding far right nationalist parties like France’s National Front”— highlights the tone that is present in many Western publications when describing the attack.¹⁴⁷ This tone does not necessarily condemn the association between all immigrants or all Muslims with extremists, but rather portrays an air of so-called objective understanding. The conflicting reports on who to fear—whether it be French Muslims raised in France or Muslim immigrants— demonstrates who in fact is considered “Other,” and who is excluded when discussing threats to “our” Republic.

The piece goes on to quote a Frenchman spoken to at the scene of one of the attacks. Surrounded by imagery of a “traumatized” Paris, he states, “we are told Islam is for God, for peace...But when you see this other Islam, with the jihadists, I don’t see peace, I see hatred. So people can’t tell which is the real Islam.”¹⁴⁸ The article then quotes a professor of postcolonial studies who notes “Politically, the official left in France has been in denial of the conflict between France and the Arab world...But the French in general sense it.”¹⁴⁹ The traumatized Frenchman, stating a belief held by many in the growing anti-immigrant atmosphere of Europe, followed by a professor confirming that divide once again places French Muslims outside the field of “French,” sets a clear limit around those who are considered to be within the bounds of the imagined national French community. Situating these quotes together and invoking an

¹⁴⁷ Steven Erlanger and Katrin Bennhold, “‘Dangerous Moment’ for Europe, as Fear and Resentment Grow,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/08/world/europe/paris-attack-reflects-a-dangerous-moment-for-europe.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Erlanger and Bennhold, “‘Dangerous Moment’ for Europe, as Fear and Resentment Grow.”

¹⁴⁹ Erlanger and Bennhold, “‘Dangerous Moment’ for Europe, as Fear and Resentment Grow.”

academic understanding of the “Arab world” implies that one can be considered French, or one can be considered Muslim, but not both. There is also a level of legitimacy provided to this othering through the framing of these concerns within academia, once again creating a sense that these concerns are backed up by impartial truths.

“Proud to Offend, Charlie Hebdo Carries Torch of Political Provocation,” published January 7, 2015, in the *New York Times*, discusses the magazine’s long history of satire against political and religious figures. The roots of satire in the French Revolution are drawn upon—*Charlie Hebdo* was “carrying on a venerable European tradition dating to the days of the French Revolution, when satire was used to pillory Marie Antoinette, and later to challenge politicians, the police, bankers and religions of all kinds.”¹⁵⁰ *Charlie Hebdo* was merely acting as a pillar of one of the tenants of French national identity, of Enlightenment thinking. The West confirmed what was being shouted in France, that the attack was of symbolic importance to the maintenance of what it means to be French, and who, so to speak, is *in* on the joke.

“No subject is off limits...,” the piece says, “It is a brand of humor the French and other Europeans are attached to, but it has prompted fury among both Muslim extremists and less radical Muslims who see the degeneration of their religion as provocation, not food for thought.”¹⁵¹ This line, essentially, demonstrates the root of this discussion of national identity. To not revel in being offended is to not be French. The debate surrounding the use of caricature of a minority group is the same debate surrounding the aftermath of a terror attack. Here, in the eyes of the West, there is a clear, infallible connection between any criticism of the magazine

¹⁵⁰ Doreen Carvajal and Suzanne Daley, “Proud to Offend, Charlie Hebdo Carries Torch of Political Provocation,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/08/world/europe/charlie-hebdo-broke-taboos-defying-threats-and-violence.html>.

¹⁵¹ Carvajal and Daley, “Proud to Offend, Charlie Hebdo Carries Torch of Political Provocation.”

and the attack on it. “The debate about caricatures overlapped others in France about freedom of speech and religion.”¹⁵² There is no separation, in any of the articles discussed, between a debate about the boundaries of free speech and religion and a terror attack which claimed the lives of 12 people.

C. November 13 Attacks

On the evening of November 13, 2015, a series of coordinated terror strikes took place across Paris. A team of gunmen launched several attacks on popular night spots in the 10th and 11th arrondissement, including a popular bar, Le Carillon, and a Cambodian restaurant, Le Petit Cambodge. The gunmen continued attacking from an SUV as the deadliest attack of the night took place at the Bataclan, a historic theater, where the American band Eagles of Death Metal were playing to a sold-out crowd. In total, at least 130 people were killed and more than 350 people were injured.¹⁵³

While the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* was described to be one on French ideals, the November 13 attacks were instead written to demonstrate that an attack on Paris was an attack on the West as a whole. Much of the coverage focused on the international aspects of the violence, from the victims to the sites of the attack, to the response from the international community.

France24

“Timeline of the attacks across the French capital” published on November 14, 2015, lays out a step-by-step breakdown of the events that transpired. The attack started at 9:20 p.m., and by 11:50 p.m., US President Barack Obama was condemning the attacks as “an ‘attack on all of

¹⁵² Carvajal and Daley, “Proud to Offend, Charlie Hebdo Carries Torch of Political Provocation.”

¹⁵³ Adam Nossiter and Rick Gladstone, “Paris Attacks Kill More than 100, Police Say; Border Controls Tightened,” *The New York Times*, November 13, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/14/world/europe/paris-shooting-attacks.html>.

humanity.”¹⁵⁴ This is the sentiment that is repeated again and again throughout many of the articles, that the attack was on the West, was on humanity, therefore situating anyone outside of the broader Western community as inhuman, as Other. French President Francois Hollande is quoted as saying he “vows to lead a ‘merciless’ fight against terrorists.”¹⁵⁵

In “Paris attacks: What we know so far,” the international aspect of the attack is discussed, both on the side of the victims and the attackers. “The slaughter appeared to involve a multinational team with links to the Middle East, Belgium,[...]Germany, as well as French nationals.”¹⁵⁶ It is quickly noted that “ominously,” one or two of the assailants passed through Greece “alongside masses of desperate Syrian refugees fleeing violence in their homeland.”¹⁵⁷ Very quickly the sentiment of the reports seems to confirm the worst fears of the far-right: allowing refugees through the borders is practically opening the door for terrorists. However, the one attacker immediately identified was a “Frenchman of Algerian origins from the Paris suburbs.” A short line at the end of the section comments that six of his relatives had already been detained for questioning. Here, there is a clear line drawn, both by the media and by the state, between the insecurities surrounding national identity and national security risks, allowing the state to step beyond its usual boundaries of power.

Many of the articles published in the immediate aftermath focus on the venues and victims of the attack, and because the sites chosen exemplified the youth social scene in Paris,

¹⁵⁴ *France24*, “Timeline of the Attacks across the French Capital,” *France 24*, November 14, 2015. <https://www.france24.com/en/20151114-paris-attacks-timeline-events-terrorism-islamic-state-group-france>

¹⁵⁵ *France24*, “Timeline of the Attacks across the French Capital.”

¹⁵⁶ *France 24*, “Paris Attacks: What We Know so Far,” *France 24*, November 15, 2015. <https://www.france24.com/en/20151115-paris-attacks-bataclan-what-we-know-attacker-victims-arrests-belgium>.

¹⁵⁷ *France 24*, “Paris Attacks: What We Know so Far.”

the tone of the articles focuses on the attack as one on the future of France. “Venues popular with young Parisians targeted in terror attacks” comments on how both Le Carillon bar and Le Petit Cambodge restaurant were popular with “hip young Parisians...the beer is inexpensive, the terraces sociable, and the welcome is warm and unpretentious.”¹⁵⁸ All of “the lively atmosphere was shattered by Kalashnikov rifles,”¹⁵⁹ and the point is driven home that this was a common Friday night scene, reinforcing the fear that this could have happened anywhere and it could have happened to anyone.

When discussing the victims, the global impact of these events is emphasized, which works to situate Paris in the center of Western civilization. The subheading of one article reads “Friday night’s attacks in Paris targeted concertgoers watching an American rock band as well as people eating and drinking in a part of the French capital popular with tourists, expats, and locals, making their impact truly global.” The article goes on to highlight several of the victims, including a British citizen who worked for the Eagles of Death Metal, an American student, two Spanish citizens and an Italian-born doctoral student. Towards the end, the French nationals who were killed are mentioned, and the attacks are tied back to those that took place in January.

In a separate article, the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls is quoted, stating “These are not anonymous victims. They are lives, young people, who were targeted while they spent a quiet evening in a café or at a concert.” Once again, the disruption of normalcy, of a quintessential French social setting, is conjured, concretely tying the figure of these victims to the idea of common French community practices. This article then discusses the death of the

¹⁵⁸ Sarah Leduc, “Venues Popular with Young Parisians Targeted in Terror Attacks,” *France 24*, November 15, 2015, <https://www.france24.com/en/20151115-paris-attacks-le-petit-cambodge-carillon-memorial-france-terrorism-young>.

¹⁵⁹ Leduc, “Venues Popular with Young Parisians Targeted in Terror Attacks,”

director of modernization of the French department of Calvados, Cédric Mauduit, noting that anyone who knew him “could appreciate both his skills and humanity.”¹⁶⁰ Here, like in the *Charlie Hebdo* coverage, there is a repeated emphasis on the violent disruption of the common, everyday life of the “Frenchman.”

The impact of the attacks on the Western world as a whole is also foregrounded in the reports on the international response to the November events. The US ambassador, when speaking to France24, strongly stated that terrorism of this kind does not stop at borders and reminds France of a strong foundation of French/American solidarity. “This is not just an attack on Paris, on the people that live in Paris, but it is truly an attack on humanity...it can happen anywhere.”¹⁶¹

Le Monde

The statements discussing both the international implications and the international response focus on one key thread of truth: to attack Paris is to attack the might of Western civilization. Paris is therefore positioned not only at the center of Western values as seen in the response to the Charlie Hebdo attacks, but as the physical center of the Western metropole. “That night, the city too, they killed it,” headlines one article describing the response in the city in the immediate aftermath of the attack. Under the headline, a striking picture of Notre Dame Cathedral, lit up against the dark sky, with police in full tactical gear gathered in the foreground. The tone of the article is one of shattered innocence– the “small joyful groups” leaving the

¹⁶⁰*France 24*, “A Look at Some of the French Victims of the Paris Attacks,” *France 24*, November 16, 2015. <https://www.france24.com/en/20151115-look-french-victims-paris-attacks-terrorism>.

¹⁶¹*France24*. “‘Terrorism Does Not Stop at Borders’, US Ambassador Tells France 24,” *France 24*, November 15, 2015. <https://www.france24.com/en/20151115-interview-usa-ambassador-jane-hartley-france-paris-attacks-terrorism-france>.

cinema are told by a waiter to turn their phones back on to confront their world now at war.¹⁶² Groups of people gathered in cafes and outside hospitals, reportedly wondering aloud whether this will be their new reality, asking the Syrian cook in one restaurant if this is really what war looks like, pressing him with questions “like he’s an expert.”¹⁶³

The attack on Western civilization is also clearly emphasized through the description of the attackers and, when they came forward to claim credit, the Islamic State. Hollande promised that “all security devices” of the French state would be deployed and they would be “ruthless towards the barbarians.”¹⁶⁴ One of the terrorists killed was a Frenchman known for common law offenses, and was tagged for possible radicalization by French authorities, though he had never been directly tied to a criminal organization. The article points out that a Syrian passport had been found in the vicinity of one of the suicide bombers, though no formal link had been established with its owner, and the owner had not been known to French intelligence services.¹⁶⁵ One of the vehicles allegedly used by the attackers was rented by a Frenchman in Belgium, and the police in Brussels had arrested three men who were possibly connected with the attack, though again they were unknown by French intelligence. The Prime Minister is quoted once again, stating that France was “at war” against the Daesh, and this war would take place in France and in Syria. “Without commenting on the advisability or the possibility of an intervention by the French army on the ground, he repeated on several occasions his desire to

¹⁶² Florence Aubenas, “Cette Nuit, La Ville Aussi, Ils L'ont Tuée,” *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2015/11/14/cette-nuit-la-ville-aussi-ils-l-ont-tuee_4809829_4809495.html.

¹⁶³ Florence Aubenas, “Cette Nuit, La Ville Aussi, Ils L'ont Tuée,”

¹⁶⁴ *Le Monde*, “Attaques De Paris : Ce Que L'on Sait Des Auteurs Des Attentats,” *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2015/11/14/ce-que-l-on-sait-des-auteurs-des-attentats-des-paris_4810183_4809495.html.

¹⁶⁵ *Le Monde*, “Attaques De Paris : Ce Que L'on Sait Des Auteurs Des Attentats.”

‘respond blow for blow to destroy Daesh.’¹⁶⁶ The state of emergency was extended, suspending certain personal freedoms past the normal twelve days due to these “exceptional circumstances,” and when asked about the possibility of locking up all individuals who have been flagged for possible radicalization, he stated that he was “‘ready to examine all the solutions that are realistic and in accordance with the law, with our values, and which are effective.’”¹⁶⁷ He then called for the unity of all the French. The figure of the terrorist here reflects the rapidly shifting fears of the nation as the aftermath of the attack unfolds, and while it is noted that some of the attackers identified were French, it is unquestionably understood what *type* of French citizen would be radicalized by the Islamic state. This demonstrates the power of othering at work: after the understanding of French national identity that began to develop post-*Charlie Hebdo*, there is no longer a need to explicitly acknowledge that these individuals are French Muslims or of Algerian descent—it will be immediately understood by the public what these men look like and what community they belong to. And, while there is some acknowledgement of the impact of these events on individual rights, if you are *truly* French you will submit to these infringements for the good of the nation.

The morning of November 14 saw a quick release of the international response by *Le Monde*, noting that President Obama quoted the French state motto—*Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*—to “remind us that they are ‘not only French values but values we all share’.”¹⁶⁸ Once again the universal implications of these events are returned to. The President of the European Council stated “France is on the front line in the fight against terrorism. But she is not alone. The

¹⁶⁶ *Le Monde*, “Attaques De Paris : Ce Que L'on Sait Des Auteurs Des Attentats.”

¹⁶⁷ *Le Monde*, “Attaques De Paris : Ce Que L'on Sait Des Auteurs Des Attentats.”

¹⁶⁸ *Le Monde*, “Pour Obama, Les Attaques De Paris Frappent "Toute L'humanité,” *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/11/14/apres-les-attaques-a-paris-des-manifestations-de-solidarite-a-travers-la-planete_4809538_3224.html.

fight is the fight of all Europeans, and of all peoples of the free world.”¹⁶⁹ The ‘barbarism’ of the terrorists is up against the unity of the free world. The article goes on to quote several other leaders in their condemnation against the attacks, demonstrating a wave of solidarity both with France and with the measures taken in France to find the attackers and retaliate for the attacks.

In another article published on the morning of November 14, President Hollande is quoted, stating “In the face of terror, France must be strong, it must be large and the state authorities’ firm,” reinforcing the notion that strengthening government control is the only solution to mitigate this moment of terror. This sentiment is repeated, that the terrorist will be met with “a united France, a united France and a France which will not be impressed, even if today she expresses an infinite emotion with regard to this drama and this tragedy which is an abomination because it is barbarism.”¹⁷⁰ In a piece published later that morning, the measures that Hollande took in response to the attack are outlined. Police and military reinforcements were brought in to the capital to expedite the neutralization of the terrorists, the state of emergency would be extended—providing for any searches of private homes or businesses that were deemed necessary— and the border would remain under tight control, in order to “make sure that no one will be able to come in to commit any act whatsoever.”¹⁷¹ At the end of his speech, Hollande asks all of France to keep confidence in the security forces and their ability to preserve the nation

¹⁶⁹ *Le Monde*, “Pour Obama, Les Attaques De Paris Frappent "Toute L'humanité.”

¹⁷⁰ *Le Monde*. “Vidéo. [Doublon Matinale] François Hollande, “Nous Allons Mener Le Combat, Il Sera Impitoyable.” *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/video/2015/11/14/francois-hollande-nous-allons-mener-le-combat-il-sera-impitoyable_4809575_4809495.html.

¹⁷¹ *Le Monde*, “François Hollande “C'est Une Épreuve Terrible Qui, Une Nouvelle Fois, Nous Assaille.”. *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2015/11/14/francois-hollande-c-est-une-epreuve-terrible-qui-une-nouvelle-fois-nous-assaille_4809722_4809495.html.

from terror attacks. While “there is indeed something to be afraid of,” there needs to be faith in the ability of the state.¹⁷²

The emphasis on border control, even though the only terrorist successfully and concretely identified by this point was a man born and raised in France, demonstrates the pattern developing in the aftermath of the attacks—that the attacks will be used by the French government to capitalize upon already-growing fears of border insecurity and terrorists coming into the country among a throng of refugees.

At 11:37 a.m. on November 14, *Le Monde* published the article “France, this country that jihadists love to hate,” which discusses why Paris had become such an attractive target for terror attacks, specifically for the Islamic State (IS). “But more deeply, because France, for multiple factors which relate to its sociology, its values and its past and present relationship in the Middle East, constitutes a dream target, almost exemplary, for the jihadist organization.”¹⁷³ The article goes on to note that the most apparent reason is the involvement in the US-led anti-ISIS coalition, which saw France contribute to the 280 strikes that took place in Iraq in one year.¹⁷⁴ And, while France is the “most exposed in Europe” to this confrontation, it is also the most favorable to Syrian opposition to ISIS, which allegedly is what the attackers stated during the attack at the Bataclan—that this was justified by “‘what France is doing in Syria’.”¹⁷⁵ The impact of the Sykes-Picot map on these affairs is not overlooked. The map was the result of a secret

¹⁷² *Le Monde*, “François Hollande ‘C'est Une Épreuve Terrible Qui, Une Nouvelle Fois, Nous Assaille.’”

¹⁷³ Benjamin Barthe and Nathalie Guibert, “La France, Ce Pays Que Les Djihadistes Aiment Haïr,” *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2015/11/14/la-france-ce-pays-que-les-djihadistes-aiment-hair_4809896_4809495.html.

¹⁷⁴ ¹⁷⁴ Barthe and Guibert, “La France, Ce Pays Que Les Djihadistes Aiment Haïr.”

¹⁷⁵ Barthe and Guibert, “La France, Ce Pays Que Les Djihadistes Aiment Haïr.”

agreement signed in 1916 between Paris and London, which divided up the Ottoman Empire in the form of states with arbitrarily drawn borders, and which divided up the region into spheres of French and British influence.¹⁷⁶ In possibly the most telling quote from the article, the tension is explained through the ‘former’ colonial interests in the region.

“As a former colonial power, defender of the integrity of Lebanon, a state created, again, by [France’s] care, in support of the Christian minorities of the Levant,¹⁷⁷ and an ally of the State of Israel, France is this country which the jihadists love to hate almost as much as the United States. Added to this is a set of values, foremost among which is secularism, which clashes head-on with the credo of extremists.”¹⁷⁸

The impact of the French colonial legacy, here, is presented not only as if it were confined to history, but as merely a strategy to protect the Christians of the Middle East. While it is noted that the borders drawn at the end of World War I were arbitrary, the framing of the agreement is treated as if it were made to benefit the whole of the region, rather than the imperial economic interests of France and the United Kingdom. And tying in French values as the true source of anger towards France offers a comfortable alternative to confronting the reality of France’s colonial legacy: the hatred of France by jihadists is a direct result of a clash of values (universal vs. barbaric), rather than any historical influence of the French colonial empire. Said’s concept of “Orientalism” is present here, with the root cause of this violence being ascribed to an imagined fundamental difference between the West and the Orient, rather than any concrete historical reality. The “presence within its population of a large Muslim community” also constitutes the “ultimate magnet for the jihadists,” once again continuing the pattern of association seen

¹⁷⁶ Barthe and Guibert, “La France, Ce Pays Que Les Djihadistes Aiment Haïr.”

¹⁷⁷ The Levant is a historical geographical term referring to the Middle East.

¹⁷⁸ Barthe and Guibert, “La France, Ce Pays Que Les Djihadistes Aiment Haïr.”

throughout many of the articles that the next attack could come from anywhere within the Muslim population in France.¹⁷⁹

The swift assignment of blame continued in yet another statement by Hollande, reposted by *Le Monde* at 1:00 p.m. on November 14th. The attack on France as a free country was an “act of war prepared, planned, from outside, with outside complicity that the investigation will establish.”¹⁸⁰ This statement was made before any formal claim had been made for orchestrating the attacks. This, along with the comments made in other articles about the Muslim community at large, speaks to the web of blame that was being weaved not only by the media but by the French state itself. By emphasizing that the threat was both from inside and outside, that the attackers both crossed the border and were homegrown, seeds of uncertainty were nurtured and allowed the French State to step in as the only stabilizing force that was able to make sense of the violence.

In the afternoon of November 14, *Le Monde* posted an interview with a professor of political science, Gilles Kepel, who is at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris and who specializes in Islam and the Arab world. In seeking to give an academic angle to the events of the previous evening and provide a broader context to the attacks in Paris. He cites quotes from French citizens who had gone to Syria to join the Islamic State, and the goal of indiscriminate terror that has the end result of setting “fire and blood to Europe, which is perceived as the soft underbelly of the West.”¹⁸¹ He gives the opinion that “national unity is the only adequate

¹⁷⁹ Barthe and Guibert, “La France, Ce Pays Que Les Djihadistes Aiment Haïr.”

¹⁸⁰ *Le Monde*, “Attaques à Paris : La France "Sera Impitoyable " Contre L'ei, Dit Hollande,” *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015.

¹⁸¹ Nicolas Truong, “L'etat Islamique Cherche à Déclencher Une Guerre Civile,” *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/11/14/gilles-kepel-l-etat-islamique-cherche-a-declencher-la-guerre-civile-en-france_4809962_3232.html.

political response, precisely because the terrorists seek to shake up the Republic.”¹⁸² Publishing this article amongst those covering the President’s call for unity provides another level of institutional validation to the state response, and reinforces the notion that the only thing that can offer any sense of stability among turmoil is turning to the state. Though he does note towards the end of the interview that the colonial story is far from over, and a willingness by the political elite to overlook the lasting implications of colonialism both in France and in former colonies can be directly tied to the violence seen in both the January and the November 2015 attacks.¹⁸³

One article discusses the media response itself in comparison to the response following the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. It is noted that the “major French media, all established in Paris,” had been totally mobilized in the wake of the November 13 attacks, which did not cause as much controversy as those in January. The attacks took place where many of the journalists interviewed lived and worked, and many of them experienced the attacks as both “victims and witnesses.”¹⁸⁴ With the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, journalists seemed to have been lauded as the embodiment of the very values that had been targeted. But the night of November 13, their statements acted to bolster the understanding that to attack Paris was indeed to attack these values. Here, Paris becomes increasingly posed as a target not only of strategic importance as a capitol, but as the physical embodiment and demonstration of French national identity as well as French national values.

The evening of November 14th, *Le Monde* published the opinion of Marie Le Pen, President of the National Front, the far-right political party of France. She called for the

¹⁸² Truong, “L’etat Islamique Cherche à Déclencher Une Guerre Civile.”

¹⁸³ Truong, “L’etat Islamique Cherche à Déclencher Une Guerre Civile.”

¹⁸⁴ Alexandre Piquard, “A Charlie, " Pensait Avoir Touché Le Fond, Mais Non....” *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/actualite-medias/article/2015/11/14/a-charlie-on-pensait-avoir-touche-le-fond-mais-non_4810140_3236.html.

permanent closure of the borders, the forfeiture of nationalist for dual nationals participating in “Islamist movements,” and the closure of mosques with suspected ties to radicals.¹⁸⁵ “France and the French are no longer safe,” she stated, “emergency measures are needed.”¹⁸⁶ What was once written off by the majority of the country suddenly became in the realm of possibility, with one National Front leader noting that while it was “too late to be listened to,” this might just offer an opportunity for Le Pen to rise to power.¹⁸⁷ This offers an interesting moment of comparison between the rhetoric spouted by the far right and the language used both by the state and the media in the wake of both the attacks in January and in November. While the forfeiture of nationality for all Muslims was not being advocated for, there is a clear pattern of justifying searches and arrests with anyone with suspected connections to the radicals, there is also no voice given to the majority of the large Muslim population living in France as French nationals.

International Response

The response from international newspapers, particularly those in the United States, adopted a much different tone than the one associated with the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre. While a not insignificant level of attention is given to the victims of the attacks, a large portion of coverage by the *New York Times* discussed the broader security and control implications of the events. In “Paris Attacks Kill More than 100, Police Say Border Controls Tightened,” discusses the immediate response to the attacks by the French government that focused on a sharp increase in border security and heightened police powers.¹⁸⁸ The article notes that these events only

¹⁸⁵ Olivier Faye, “Marine Le Pen ‘La France N'est plus En Sécurité,’” *Le Monde*, November 14, 2015. https://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2015/11/14/marine-le-pen-la-france-n-est-plus-en-securite_4810055_4809495.html.

¹⁸⁶ Faye, “Marine Le Pen ‘La France N'est plus En Sécurité.’”

¹⁸⁷ Nossiter and Gladstone, “Paris Attacks Kill More than 100...”

¹⁸⁸ Nossiter and Gladstone, “Paris Attacks Kill More than 100...”

heightened the fears that grew as a result of the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, which traumatized France and other European countries and elevated fears among the population about religious extremism and radical jihadists returning from the Middle East.¹⁸⁹ The U.S Secretary General is quoted, stating that the attack was one on “our shared values,” and reminding the French public once again about the United States’ role as an ally.¹⁹⁰ But while the attacks affected the shared values of the West, the targets themselves were chosen to maximum exposure and maximum violence. It is noted that there is a lack of apparent rationale for the sires, but that the acts of terror succeeded in causing the maximum amount of fear and panic within France.

On November 15, the *NYT* shifted the focus of its reporting from the specifics of the attacks to the broader implications that they had both in France and the West in general. The discussions in the wake of the attack seem to justify the sentiment that was shared domestically in France—that this moment was a deciding one for not only France but the West as a whole. In “Paris Attacks Shift Europe’s Migrant Focus to Security,” the impact that this new tension will have on the refugees is analyzed. The *Times* notes that “fears that Islamic terrorists might infiltrate the migrant flow have deepened across the continent, and talk has shifted to security over compassion.”¹⁹¹ This was due in part to the previously mentioned Syrian passport that had been found near one of the suicide bombers. There was a general consensus that “Paris [changed] everything,” and that as a result the reception towards the “largely poor and Muslim migrants” would continue to grow cold.¹⁹² Across Europe, citizens began to voice fears about the

¹⁸⁹Nossiter and Gladstone, “Paris Attacks Kill More than 100...”.

¹⁹⁰Nossiter and Gladstone, “Paris Attacks Kill More than 100...”.

¹⁹¹Rick Lyman and Alison Smale, “Paris Attacks Shift Europe's Migrant Focus to Security,” *The New York Times*, November 15, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/16/world/europe/paris-attacks-shift-europes-migrant-focus-to-security.html?searchResultPosition=14>.

¹⁹²Lyman and Smale, “Paris Attacks Shift Europe's Migrant Focus to Security.”

possibility of terrorists coming in with the refugees, however, the article itself focuses on the impact that these sentiments will have on the refugees themselves. The president of the European Commission commented that the refugees are in fact fleeing from the same groups that perpetrated the attacks.¹⁹³ A volunteer who works with the refugees noted that this sort of violence easily gives way the spread of fear and hatred of refugees.¹⁹⁴ “The attacks created a sense of solidarity among Europeans at the expense of the solidarity with the migrants.”¹⁹⁵ These tensions are only exacerbated for Europeans that are Muslim, as again their experiences in the aftermath of these events is glossed over.

The *New York Times* also focused on the implications of the ease with which the perpetrators of the attacks were able to travel between Europe and the Islamic State in Syria. Despite several of the attackers either having their passports confiscated or being flagged as possible security risks, many of them traveled to Syria on multiple occasions in the years leading up to the attack.¹⁹⁶ This created several moments of tension within Europe, as the strength of every country where the attackers passed through became the target for criticism levied at their border control strategies and their intelligence services. The Paris attacks were “precisely the nightmare scenario security officials had been warning about,” which then raised even more questions surrounding the limits of their resources and surveillance powers.¹⁹⁷ With the powerful Islamic State propaganda machine drawing people to Syria and complaints from security personnel that concerns about personal freedoms had begun to limit their ability to listen in on

¹⁹³Lyman and Smale, “Paris Attacks Shift Europe's Migrant Focus to Security.”

¹⁹⁴Lyman and Smale, “Paris Attacks Shift Europe's Migrant Focus to Security.”

¹⁹⁵Lyman and Smale, “Paris Attacks Shift Europe's Migrant Focus to Security.”

¹⁹⁶Katrin Bennhold, “Paris Attacks Highlight Jihadists' Easy Path between Europe and Isis Territory,” *The New York Times*, November 18, 2015.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/world/europe/paris-attacks-islamic-state-jihadis.html>.

¹⁹⁷Bennhold, “Paris Attacks Highlight Jihadists' Easy Path...”.

potential suspects, the future of both physical and personal security are brought into question.¹⁹⁸

The perceived targeting of the West as a whole shifts the international discussion from merely the internal identity of France to the broader identities of Europe and the West, which in turn acts to reinforce certain notions of who is considered a part of those communities. An interesting conundrum is presented: one in which the need to open borders to other European countries in order to protect Europe at large could indeed become the very reason why these actors were able to stage such an elaborate plot in the heart of Paris.

V. Conclusion

Analyzing how national identity is debated and constantly fluctuating in the national conversation allows us as a society to understand not only how these imaginings are constructed and reinforced, but how they can be harnessed to build the power and influence of the state. The long history of tension between French and Muslim communities has clear roots that connect back not only to 1962 and the decolonizing moment, but to the whole history of French colonial influence in the Middle East and Africa. Despite the notion that Algeria was at the heart of the French empire, Algerians and Muslim-Algerians were never considered to be within the makeup of French national identity. Even those who fought with and for France were eventually excluded when they returned to the homeland, their experiences with and ties to Algeria hindered rather than helped their assimilation and acceptance back into the centralized French culture. That those tensions arose simultaneously with broader anxieties about France as a global power seems to have intrinsically linked and associated Muslims with the perceived undoing of French national

¹⁹⁸Bennhold, "Paris Attacks Highlight Jihadists' Easy Path...".

culture and community. This link was reinforced in the subsequent years, and still offers a scapegoat for any outside threats to the French populace, as seen in 2015.

In 2015, the imagined figures of the French and the Other come clearly into focus, and the Other easily becomes the embodiment of all other French anxieties. The real-life reality of the terrorists, and their histories, transform into a mutable canvas on which other fears can be projected. This terrorist figure is homegrown, raised in the Paris suburbs, in the Muslim communities close to home. This figure is also an immigrant, a refugee who passed through a network of European countries and slipped under the nose of several intelligence agencies. This figure is a calm militant who was specially trained, this figure could be anyone, this figure could be anywhere.

And in this creation of the Other there is also the creation of the French. With an emphasis on France's more positive historical moments, the figure of the French is a staunch defender of universal rights, of Enlightenment values. He is brave and courageous and does not back down in the face of violence. Through the eyes of the media this figure loses some of its mutability, and as the characteristics of the brave French are repeated and enhanced both on the national stage and internationally, this once imagined figure begins to have some very concrete power in the form of increased government security and protection. The community that is most clearly left out in these instances is the large Muslim population of France. While the moderate press would never go so far as to say that the common Muslim in France was a threat in the same manner, that point is also rarely disproven. With the talk of radical Islam infiltrating the country, average Muslim citizens are caught in the crosshairs of conflicting imagined figures, which eventually can lead to more concretely institutionalized exclusion and an increase in racialized violence.

In these instances, France's national identity essentially works two-fold: to cement both the boundaries of Frenchness and the imagined boundaries of Western civilization. Because of its history in the so-called "Orient"—real-world Middle East and North Africa which have seen the brutal aftermath of colonization and the effects of contemporary intervention—Paris becomes a global theater on which the anxieties of the West at large play out in terror attacks and the subsequent responses to these terror attacks. The creation of French national identity in these instances, and the use of the terrorist figure to limit and push against the boundaries of French identity not only works to reinforce French notions of the Orient, but the assumptions made by the whole of the "civilized West."

France's positionality, both in terms of its colonial past and present physical reality of the European nation with the one of the highest Muslim populations in Western Europe,¹⁹⁹ means that it becomes a battleground for the universalist, secular, Western notion of national identity to go head-to-head with extremist Islamic resentment of the West, and the large French-Muslim population becomes the victim of sweeping generalizations as a result. Understanding how French national identity, and the necessary opposites that are created, demonstrates the very real ways that colonial power structures still play out both in France and in the actions of the West as a whole. The anxieties of the post-colonial era are still at the front of France's (and broader European's) national consciousness, and by articulating how these anxieties are utilized in the aftermath of moments of violence offers an opportunity to understand what is real and what is imagined.

¹⁹⁹ Conrad Hackett, "5 Facts about the Muslim Population in Europe," Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, March 2, 2022.

Categorizing the role that the media plays in developing and reinforcing these narratives can in turn help mitigate the strength that these figures will have in national conversations going forward. Understanding what aspects of national identity are constructed for the specific exclusion of other groups not only can lessen the chances of extreme nationalism from taking root but is in fact necessary as the world becomes increasingly globalized and borders become increasingly permeable.

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