

French Jews are being killed just because of who they are

IT HAS been, I think we are all agreed, a terrible week. As a Jew and as a journalist, I have been consumed by the news of the tragic shootings in Paris, first the 12 deaths at the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, that of a policewoman the next day, and then the killings of four innocent shoppers at the kosher supermarket in Vincennes.

And I have learned a lot.

Inevitably, there have been thousands of words written in response to these events, some wise, some stupid. There has been the usual outbreak of "whataboutery" as it is known, seeking to explain the actions of those who have turned to radical Islam. Inevitably, according to the "whatabouters", it's the West's fault. Quite respectable people have advanced this argument. Some are less respectable.

On the BBC's *The World This Weekend* on Sunday, a talking head – who turned out to be a British-born adjunct professor at New York University, Arun Kundnani – had the effrontery to say that if "we" were really interested in freedom of speech, then Netanyahu would not be on the demo in Paris. That would be the same "we" that thought it was acceptable to have the Saudi ambassador marching after his regime publicly lashed activist Raif Badawi; or have Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has attacked and oppressed journalists, also marching with world leaders. Glad we have cleared that up, then.

Last Friday, I read a heartfelt opinion piece from a woman who wanted the world to declare: "nous sommes tous Ilan Halimi", in reference to the young French Jew beaten up, gagged and

trussed and left to die by a murderous gang of similarly radicalised individuals. The writer almost got her wish when four more French Jews were killed in the aisles of the Hyper Cacher, while 70 years after the liberation of the camps, others cowered downstairs in the cold storage room, terrified of what was going on above their heads.

Well, I say she almost got her wish. Because one of the things I have learned this week is that many commentators have found it remarkably easy to parrot the mantra "Je suis Charlie" and to come out as a firm defender of free speech.

Much less easy has been how to deal with us, the Jewish problem.

Yoav Hattab, Philippe Braham, Yohan Cohen and François-Michel Saada were not targeted, held hostage and killed in the Vincennes supermarket because of some spurious debate about free speech and whether or not one should publish cartoons about the Prophet Mohammed. They were killed because they were Jews. Pure and simple. Dress it up any way you like, but they did not die in defence of an idea – they died because they were who they were.

This presents my profession, the media, with a difficulty: and, to be clear, it's a difficulty for politicians' too. For while the world is bending over backwards to insist that the killers did not represent mainstream Muslims – and I am sure that's true – there is no such compunction when it comes to blaming mainstream Jews for the alleged evils perpetrated by Israel. Just cast your minds back to last summer when the only "good" Jews were the ones who dissociated

themselves publicly from Israel.

In the past several days, I have heard media types trying – and, mostly, failing – to find an acceptable or legitimate way of tying together the two murderous attacks. One commentator settled for "an attack on the French way of life" but truly, few groups were as far apart in their aims and ideologies as the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo*, whose *raison d'être* was to be a thorn in the side of the establishment, and France's Jews, who just want to be left in peace to get on with their lives.

Elsewhere in the forest of commentary – yes, trees died for some of this to be published – there was inevitable gloom over the future of French Jewry, with some forecasting that the entire community was packing its collective bag.

There was a swift and robust response from one young Jewish woman, Claire Berlinski, in France. "I have not left. And I will not," she wrote. "and neither will my father. That is at least two of us. And I know many more... I am Jewish. I am in France. And I am not leaving – not because of a handful of terrorist swine."

Bravo, Claire. The madmen will indeed have won if the Jews pick up and leave wholesale.

And now, after this terrible week, when the Saudi ambassador and various other unsavoury types can go home and congratulate themselves on having expressed "solidarity" when it counted, the journalists and the Jews do indeed have one thing in common: How to live their lives in France, today, tomorrow, and the day after that.

For that, we don't all have to be Charlie. Just human.



Jenni Frazer

'The journalists and the Jews do indeed have one thing in common: How to live their lives in France'

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