*Am I French?*

Cultural Segregation Through Media & Terrorism in France

PROPOSAL

*Am I French?* is a documentary that is a personal journey towards finding the origins of the difficulties, such as social discrimination and subjection to bias my peers and I face on a regular basis in France. It has a strong respective importance, as it has affected my family in the past and continues to disturb a large percentage of the French population. Discrimination pursues its influences through stereotypical remarks and unfair perception by the government and police force, and will continue to disrupt different cultural groups in France. Mentalities evolve and redevelop due to cultural and social changes in one’s lifetime. Cultural and racial segregation is a subject that is not foreign to most people in each society in history, even in our current generation. There are opposing global ideologies when regarding foreign individuals, being either supportive or overlooked. Nevertheless, xenophobia is at its peak in numerous countries; especially in France.

In addition to general concepts about xenophobia, I will reiterate the importance of Charlie Hebdo’s attacks and the consequences it has had on the history of social and cultural evolution in France. The idea of it being a successful publication will be further explored and I will delve into the undeniable fact that French humor, and the use of satirical comedy and sarcasm may be a gateway into racism and social segregation. Therefore, due to the success of the magazine in France it begs the question, is the nature of French humor a principal contributor to cultural segregation in France?

Being a three culture child, with origins in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, I have the opportunity to hold a distinct view of matters regarding cultural separation. It is a unique viewpoint as segregation is an unfamiliar concept for me to accept. I am strongly tied to my cultural background in France as it is one that I am most accustomed to, in tandem with my Chinese heritage. Being Lebanese has never influenced my life and perspectives the way being French and Chinese have, which could be due to my lack of exposure or education of its culture. But this is in fact the way I act and feel about my background. This will hopefully allow me to have an objective view of diverging opinions during this documentary. There are very delicate subjects incorporated in *Am I French?* as I have directly witnessed and experienced this social discrimination in France. Furthermore, it is evident to me that Muslims and the local French are at an inequitable balance and that discrimination will not vanish. I am fascinated by the extreme positions and lack of empathy that have somehow evolved amongst the general society in France. In the past five years, I have seen at least three terrorist attacks in France alone starting with the Charlie Hebdo attack on January 7th 2015, which in my opinion sparked a worsening of xenophobia and discrimination in France.

Moreover, media has had a dominant role globally on most major events whether it be social, cultural or political in the past twenty years. Nowadays, media has this power to magnify the importance of some issues and completely disregard others. However, its impact is undoubtedly of paramount importance in all societies. Through the reputation of media and the superiority complex that individuals in developed countries have, is it possible that the media is a nation’s main virtue and vice?

Charlie Hebdo is a French publication that originated from a publication named Hara-Kiri Hebdo which launched in February 1969 and was banned in 19701. It was relaunched in 1970 as Charlie Hebdo, advocating for free speech and the use of satirical and honest comics, jokes and illustrations to discuss political and social issues. It is one of the most contentious publications in France due to its borderline racist comments and discriminatory nature. The attacks at Charlie Hebdo’s headquarters in Paris was one of the first major terrorist attacks in France by jihadists, and was a result of its inappropriate representation and commentaries about the prophet Mohammed in their magazine2. Media, in particular Charlie Hebdo, has contributed to this social segregation in France and has allowed for underground judgement and xenophobia to exist.

Throughout the video I will interview a group of French locals of different age groups and genders, describing their first-hand experience observing this changing mentality and segregation movement in France. I also want to interview a group of people with middle eastern descent that have lived or been to France, to inquire about their experience in France during this unilateral social separation. I aim to further understand and hear their current experiences in detail, in comparison to their recollections and memories of life in France beforehand. On one hand, I would like to express the social anarchy and unjust treatment due to these changing attitudes in France. On the other hand, an overall comprehension of the justifications made by French people and their point of view during these years of distress is also an important aspect I would like to incorporate in this documentary.

1: “History.” *Les Éditions EN*, charliehebdo.fr/en/history/.

2: “2015 Charlie Hebdo Attacks Fast Facts.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 22 Dec. 2016, [www.cnn.com/2015/01/21/europe/2015-paris-terror-attacks-fast-facts/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/21/europe/2015-paris-terror-attacks-fast-facts/index.html)

TREATMENT

The documentary will begin with a personal view of the situation in France and my recollections in France as a child in comparison to now. I will do this in an interview format and will transition to my next subject by ending the interview by talking about the terrorist attacks in France, in particular the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015. This will be followed by a variety of illustrations by Charlie Hebdo and discuss the magazine and its influence on society in France. Furthermore, the attacks will be briefly visually portrayed and the following events in France which sparked the national change of attitude in French society. This will bring about the topic of media in France and I will compare the different types of media covering the attacks in America and in France.

When travelling to Washington DC, I will meet some of my French and Lebanese family, who have lived in France and acquired a rich knowledge of its culture and social formalities. I will interview a range of members of my family discussing their personal experiences in France and how they have observed this wave of discrimination, fear and overall segregation in France over the past couple of years. Additionally, I would like to talk about the effects of media and Charlie Hebdo and how the terrorist attacks have changed their opinions on life and foreign cultures. In addition, I will discuss French humor and media and how this could be a contributor towards the segregation between the French and other societies or cultural groups in France. To signify the extensive effects of the attacks I look to use archival footage of France of protests and of the attacks to further emphasize on the influence it has had in French society.

Subsequently I will interview two people in New York that frequently visit France and have done so their entire lives and their opinions as non-locals in France viewing this change of mentality. Moreover, I will use the different interviews and combine them depending on their opinions about the topics raised during the interviews. The interviews will be linked aesthetically using similar lighting and background to create an easy flowing video. Archival and live footage of France will be included to show the diversity and multiplicity of this issue.

The influence of the dark nature of French humor is an idea will be discussed in my interviews through a single question, a joke and through Charlie Hebdo’s past illustration.

The video will consist of three major parts: The Charlie Hebdo attacks, interviews and the evaluation of French attitudes and outlooks. The video will last around five minutes including direct conversation through the interviews, music and voiceovers to combine all three aspects and the issues discussed in this short documentary.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Marie-Anne Valfort Associate Professor of Economics, Paris School of Economics , Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, et al. “The Cycle of Anti-Muslim Discrimination in France Is Likely to Worsen.” *The Conversation*, 16 Nov. 2017, theconversation.com/the-cycle-of-anti-muslim-discrimination-in-france-is-likely-to-worsen-36092.**

This article from this blog expresses and scrutinizes the divide between local French people and Muslims in France. It explains the history of this segregation in France and the basis of the fear rooted amongst French people. It explains the different factors that influence the discrimination in France including in the workplace and amongst women. It thoroughly discusses the future of this dangerous relationship between these two cultural groups in France and the facts explaining why the discriminatory behavior towards Muslims will not disperse in France.

**Zerofsky, Elisabeth. “The French Culture Wars Continue.” *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 19 June 2017,** [**www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-french-culture-wars-continue**](http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-french-culture-wars-continue)**.**

This article in the magazine the New Yorker scrutinizes and evaluates the culture divide between different populations and cultures within France. It describes the attitudes and unjust outlooks many local French people have towards foreign individuals and unfamiliar cultures. It explains how although there is a large discriminatory mindset in France, very few of these cultures are a real menace towards those in France although they are deemed and society’s rejects. It explains how social and governmental efforts must be combined to tackle these issues but it ends on an ominous note describing the improbability of an improvement.

**“2015 Charlie Hebdo Attacks Fast Facts.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 22 Dec. 2016,** [**www.cnn.com/2015/01/21/europe/2015-paris-terror-attacks-fast-facts/index.html**](http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/21/europe/2015-paris-terror-attacks-fast-facts/index.html)**.**

This article in CNN an online news report website explaining the facts about the Charlie Hebdo attacks on Wednesday January 7th 2015. It explains the chronological sequence of events of the attacks, the results of the attacks and gives history of the attackers and victims. It explains how the attackers came in a black Citroen killing 12 people and the other terrorist attacks in the following two days killing a total of 17 people. It explains how the controversial cartoons that they portrayed in their magazine about Mohammed was a major reason why they were targeted.

**Landed, S.L. Just. “The French Style.” *Just Landed*, 22 Feb. 2016,** [**www.justlanded.com/english/France/France-Guide/Culture/The-French-style**](http://www.justlanded.com/english/France/France-Guide/Culture/The-French-style)**.**

This article explains the nature of the French style and gives a detailed description of the opinions, mentalities, preferences, virtues and vices of French individuals and their attitudes.

**“History.” *Les Éditions EN*, charliehebdo.fr/en/history/.**

This website is the original Charlie Hebdo website including its history, articles, opinions about politics, mainly trump and other forms of illustrations and writing. It explains in detail the origins of the publication and the development of its content and team.