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## I am Not Charlie

Monsters of Our Own Creation

by JOHN WIGHT

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The huge march and rally in Paris that took place in the wake of the horrific events that took place in the French capital was a festival of nauseating hypocrisy.

Watching the leaders of governments which, between them, have been responsible for carnage and mayhem on a grand scale – the likes of Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, for example – leading a march against terrorism and extremism qualified not so much as the theatre of the absurd but as the theatre of the grotesque; impostors at an event that millions of people allowed themselves to hope would mark a step-change in a world scarred by war, barbarism, and injustice.

Sadly, they will be disappointed, as the circular relationship that exists between Western extremism and Islamic extremism will not be broken anytime soon. Indeed, if at all, it will be strengthened after the massacre in Paris, as the congenital condition of Western exceptionalism reasserts itself.

When Frantz Fanon wrote, “Violence is man re-creating himself,” he could have been describing the Kouachi brothers striding up and down the street outside the offices of Charlie Hebdo, assault

weapons in hand, prior to and after murdering the French-Algerian police officer lying on the pavement with the ease of men for whom all restraint had been abandoned.

The irony of men acting in the name of Islam callously taking the life of a fellow Muslim should not have come as a surprise, however. The vast majority of victims of Islamic extremism, after all, are Muslims, just as they comprise the vast majority of victims of Western extremism. The point is that at this point the Kouachis at that point appeared euphoric, filled with a sense of their own power and strength, having broken through the final barrier that exists between the agony of powerlessness and liberation from it. They had been transformed by the ‘deed’.

“What is good?” Nietzsche asks, before answering, “All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man.”

Behind them the brothers had left a scene of carnage. For us it was an act of sheer evil, for them justice and power. Within them had taken root a more powerful idea than the one they had been inculcated with growing up with in the heart of Europe. It willed them to seek meaning not in life but in death – that of others and their own.

When confronted by such total rejection of the moral foundations upon which our cultural, social, and human consciousness rests, we dismiss it automatically and unthinkingly, ascribing it to evil, madness, and insanity. Our coping mechanism dare not deviate for a second in this regard. But what if such deeds are acts of rebellion against the evil, madness, and insanity of the status quo, matching evil with evil, madness with madness, and insanity with insanity? What if that?

It is far too simplistic, if understandable, to dismiss such individuals as evil. It allows us to negate their humanity and anything we may recognise in ourselves. They aren’t human beings, such people, they are monsters, beyond the pale and therefore beyond any serious consideration. Ritual condemnation and calumny is all that society accepts when it comes to those who perpetrate such horrific acts.

Yes, the act of mass murder carried by the Kouachis and Amedy Coulibaly in Paris was monstrous. But was it any more monstrous than the carnage that has been unleashed over many years by men who claim to act in our name? Wasn’t the brutality and barbarism we witnessed on our TV screens, crashing into our collective consciousness, merely a microcosm of the brutality and barbarism that goes by the name Western civilisation? For just as the Enlightenment provided the basis for modern liberal democracy, producing huge advances in science, medicine, and philosophy, it also provided justification for centuries of slavery, colonialism, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and super exploitation.

Je suis Charlie (‘I am Charlie’) describes the delimitation of our solidarity with all victims of extremism and barbarism. It allows us to avoid confronting the ugly truth of our culpability in the fate of those victims. When Aime Cesaire warned that “a civilization which justifies colonization—and therefore force—is already a sick civilization, a civilization which is morally diseased, which irresistibly, progressing from one consequence to another, one denial to another, calls for its Hitler, I mean its punishment,” he was talking to us.

The Kouachis and Coulibaly were not products of radical Islam. They, like it, were the products of Western civilization. They were and are monsters of our own creation.